CHAPTER I.

THE RIVER NAIRN, FROM THE HILLS TO BELOW GEDDES.

THE River Nairn, running through a straight line of country, of somewhat more than thirty miles in extent, but of much longer course in its sinuosities, drains off the waters from a small part of the Monadh-leadh group. The scenery of its upper district is of a bold, high-land character, its valley being of considerable width, chiefly cultivated and smiling, and bounded by birch-fringed hills, grandly massed, and everywhere exhibiting singularly picturesque outlines.

The rain in this upper country began on Sunday evening, the 2d, and continued, with little or no intermission, till Tuesday the 4th. The Nairn, and the other streams of the valley, rushed from the mountains, filled with gravel and stones, and committed great havoc on many farms, especially on that of Mains of Aberarder, where seven hands were able to reap, in one day, all that remained of a crop for which £150 of rent was payable. The fulling-mill of Faillie was the sport of both floods. The first carried a huge, heavy mass of machinery down to Cantray, nine miles below, whence it was, with much labour, brought back to its high-land home; but it was hardly well established there, when the flood of the 27th bore it away on a second expedition, and landed it at Kilravock, after a voyage of eleven miles.

Colonel Mackintosh of Farr suffered considerably from the Fernack, a large tributary of the Nairn. Some years ago he cut a straight channel for the river, for above a mile in length; and it may be useful to those exposed to such devastations, to know that he succeeded in securing the banks of it, by felling alder trees, and applying them with the bole part towards the bank, and the branches protruding obliquely in the direction of the stream, layer over layer, the whole being secured by placing very large stones above them. Every rise of the water deposits sand along this work, till a sodded bank is naturally formed, so smooth and solid as perfectly to resist the current. No part of this yielded before the recent floods, and all the damage Colonel Mackintosh received from them was occasioned by a breach

made by the river at a point considerably above the entrance to the new cut.

Two bridges were carried away on the Parliamentary line of road; one at Dunmaglass, and the other, of two arches, over the burn of Aultrouagh, that joins the Nairn from the right. The cause of failure of this last bridge was want of size and accuracy of fitting of the stones, where strength to resist the force of the torrent was most requisite.

The road from Farr to Craggy leads along the base of some alluvial hills, about 100 feet high, very extensive, and very curious. They lie above the primitive rocks, here showing themselves in red granitic masses, rising at intervals through the level plain where the river flows. These hills are evidently the remains of a vast alluvial plain, cut away through the course of ages by the Nairn and its tributaries. The plain itself was probably the result of the deposits of a great lake that covered this upper country of Strathnairn, until gradually drained off by the natural excavation of the ravine of Daviot.

The burn of Craggy comes in from the right. The little inn of that name, standing very picturesquely, and apparently beyond all danger, on the top of a green alluvial bank, amidst irregularly dropped birches, and surrounded by birch-covered knolls, formed, with its bridge below it, a very beautiful scene. But the flood of the 27th carried away the bridge, cut the bank into a high, perpendicular precipice, and was only prevented from undermining and bringing down the inn by the accidental fall of a tree, with a quantity of soil attached to its roots, which turned the force of the torrent, proving the beneficial effects of this description of guard when applied in the proper place.

The mill of Clava, on the right bank, was destroyed by the first flood, and was rebuilt and repaired exactly in time to be again demolished by the flood of the 27th. The plain of Clava may be almost denominated the Scottish Stonehenge, being covered with Druidical circles of great magnitude. The largest of these, like several of the others, consists of one external circle of stones, with a smaller concentric circle within it, enclosing, and in some degree supporting, a great cairn. This was lately opened,* and a curious circular apartment was discovered, measuring 12 feet in diameter, the wall converging to the centre in a rude dome (Plate I.), about 12 feet high, the foundation being formed of fourteen large stones, surmounted by courses of uncemented masonry, each stone placed immediately over that

* By direction, and under the superintendence, of Mrs. Campbell, at present resident at Kilravock Castle.

PLATE I

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PL. II.

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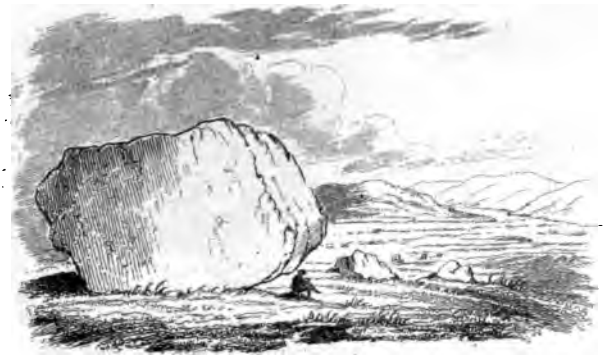

PL. III.

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below it, and not over the division between two, as is commonly the case in mason work. A passage leads inwards from the south, eighteen feet long, two feet wide, and having eight large foundation stones on either side. This cell distinguishes the cairn dedicated to religious purposes from that which was monumental or sepulchral. The largest of the standing stones of the exterior circle measures about 9½ feet high, by 1 foot thick, and 4 feet broad.

A mile farther down the valley, and on the same side, we found a huge cubical boulder of conglomerate, resting on the gneiss, but within thirty horizontal yards of the out-crop of a stratum of what may be supposed its native rock. It stands in an ancient river-bed, about 100 feet above the present channel of the Nairn. It is about 24 feet square by 14 feet high, and, allowing it a specific gravity equal to 2½ that of water, its weight may be estimated at about 560 tons. It is called *Clach-mhor-a'-chruaidh-ghorston*, or the Great Stone of the rough ground. (Plate II.)

The damage done on the estate of Cantray is estimated at £1200, exclusive of the destruction of crops, which was very great. About fifteen acres of valuable land have been entirely swept away. Both floods filled the garden belonging to the mansion-house; and after undermining the eastern wall, the water made its escape by throwing down many roods of the masonry, leaving the beds covered with deposits of sand. The houses of the miller and gardener were inundated and ruined.

The greater part of the low grounds of Holm, together with the offices and mills, were flooded. The horses and cattle were extricated from their stalls, where the water was three feet deep, while the rats and moles were swimming about among the buildings. The damage done to the crops was very considerable. The flower-garden, being close to the river's bank, was saved by very great exertion; but the shrubbery, extending nearly a mile along the margin of the stream, was very much injured. A little above the private bridge of approach, a breach was made quite through the screen of trees and shrubs; and the handsome arch of fifty-five feet span, having been shaken by the first flood, was entirely carried away by that of the 27th. (Plate III.) The expansion of the water here was greatly more than 100 yards. It rose high on a dry-stone wall dividing the Holm and Kilravock estates; and it had no sooner touched its foundation, than the sods on the top of it became as it were alive with mice, all forcing their way out, to escape as fast as they could from the inundation that threatened their citadel.

It is a singular fact that, as the salmon fishing on the Find-

horn was utterly ruined for the season by the flood, so that on the Nairn was proportionably improved. This, as regards Holm, may have partly arisen from the demolition of certain obstacles below. But the chief cause undoubtedly was that the fish, being scared from the Findhorn by the dirty and troubled state in which its waters so long remained, sought their way into the Nairn, which sooner cleared itself. The salmon-angling at Holm is seldom very successful; but after the flood, and before the end of the season, Colonel Rose, the proprietor, killed between seventy and eighty fish with the rod.

The stretch of valley, occupied by the residences of Cantray, Holm, and Kilravock, has something peculiarly smiling in its aspect; but its appearance, when converted into a moving lake, was very appalling. The old castle of Kilravock, rearing its weather-beaten front and grey tower above its rocky and wooded bank, looked like the wizard enchanter by whose spell the metamorphosis had been wrought. The view from its bartizan must have been extremely grand. Long as it has stood the emblem of the ancient family of Rose, to which it has immemorially belonged, I doubt whether it ever saw so wide a deluge. I grieve to say that the injury done to the property attached to it is very great. At one point, immediately below the beautiful garden, the river cut up the ground terribly, and varied considerably from its former channel; and a little way farther down it carried above two acres of a thriving wood of deciduous trees, of thirty years' growth, entirely away.

The bridge of Kilravock is one of the old military school of architecture, with a very steep ascent from the low right to the high left bank. Though it suffered some scars, it resisted the flood like a veteran warrior, as all these bridges do when not modernized. Some of them standing in positions where both banks are low, are formed with steep ascents from either end towards the centre. In both these cases the bridges are quite secure in floods, from the superabundant water being allowed to escape over the low end or ends. But let the approach or approaches to the bridges be modernized, by raising the wing-walls, and banking up the roadway, as has unfortunately been done in some instances, and the result must be destruction; for the flood-water being compelled to pass through an arch, which the builders never intended should contain it, the bridge or its approaches must give way before its pressure.

John Pryse, one of Lord Cawdor's labourers, was sent in the forenoon of the 27th with a cart, drawn by a very active mare, to carry to Inverness the baggage of Lord Henry Thynne and

Sir Rowland Hill, who had been on a sporting visit at Cawdor Castle. On his return, Pryse reached the inn of Clephanton, a quarter of a mile north of the bridge of Kilravock, about eight o'clock in the evening, and was there told by the landlady that the river was so much out over the level ground to the south of the bridge, as to render it madness to attempt to cross. But, having afterwards held a consultation with the hostler, it was determined that there could be no harm in going down to look at the river. Pryse was quite willing to believe there was no danger, for he was completely soaked with the heavy rain, and therefore felt extremely desirous to get home. They passed the bridge without interruption; but, on reaching the lower end of it, they found the road covered with water, though, from its muddy state and the darkness of the night, it was impossible to tell either the depth or the extent of the angry flood that rolled before them. But Pryse said he knew the direction of the road, which was somewhat elevated above the corn-land on either side of it; and, trusting to that knowledge, he was determined to attempt the adventure. The hostler waited at the end of the bridge to watch how he might succeed. Pryse boldly entered the water, but the cart had not gone many yards when it, and mare, and man, disappeared at once from the terrified eyes of the hostler, who, without waiting for further information, ran back in horror to the inn, screaming for help.

When the landlord and others got down to the bridge, they were in some degree relieved by hearing the cries of Pryse, which at least assured them that he was still alive, and on some place of temporary safety. A hoarse and short conversation, maintained with him among the roar of the elements, informed them that he was sitting in his cart, which had been providentially arrested at some distance below the bridge, that the water was up to his middle, and that he had extricated his mare from the shafts by cutting away the harness. He implored them for help, as he every moment dreaded that the force of the water would sweep away the cart into the main stream, where his destruction must be certain and immediate. Unremitting were the exertions made by those on the bridge to save him by means of ropes, and by attempts to reach him by means of wading; but the darkness of the night, and the depth and fury of the torrent, rendered all their efforts unavailable, until three o'clock in the morning, when the river had so far subsided that he was rescued without much difficulty, after having been seven hours in the water. It was then discovered that the whole of the level half-moon *haugh* of Culbeg, of twenty-five acres in extent, had been flooded; and, when the water ebbed away,

it appeared that the mare had been interrupted in her passage along the road by some great trees stranded there, and that, in trying to get round them, she had turned off into the corn field, and was carried down by the deep and strong current, till stopped by a flow-bank about four feet high. Had they gone a yard or two farther, they must have been inevitably swept through a breach in the bank, directly into the main current of the river. The mare, after being released, swam away, till she fortunately grounded on a hillock, where she had the wisdom and patience to remain stationary till her master was relieved.

The Haugh of Culbeg had the whole of its crop completely annihilated. An elevated bank bounds the half-moon on its straight side, and also marks the boundary between the estates of Kilravock and Cawdor at this point, having been probably declared so at the time the river ran along its base. Some generations ago, the proprietor of Kilravock besought him of Cawdor to permit his tenant's house of Culbeg to be built on the top of the bank. The boon was refused, and its refusal had nearly proved fatal to the present worthy farmer, James Mackintosh, and his family, who narrowly escaped destruction on the late occasion. I visited this poor man, now above seventy-three years of age, and who, to add to his other misfortunes, is deaf, a circumstance that rendered our conversation loud and long. He took me into his house, a few yards from the foot of the bank I have mentioned. It still exhibited wreck and desolation. The very smell of it was like that of a house newly disinterred, after being buried for a century. The old man, drenched and woe-begone, looked down from the bank on the utter ruin of his farm, with the expectation of seeing his house and all that it contained borne away by the billows. For two days were he and his family kept out of their dwelling. At length, circumstances permitted them to return to it; and, thanking God for their personal safety, they set themselves to put matters about the premises in order.

They were beginning to recover a little from their panic, when the yet more terrible flood of the evening of the 27th visited their habitation, and filled the rooms to the height of five feet, as I ascertained from the stain it had left on the plaster. Being more quickly alarmed on this occasion, their flight was more precipitate. "But," said Mr. Mackintosh to me, as we stood on his damp and disconsolate floor, "I minded me o' something I wad ha'e done ill wanting; and so I wade back again, and crap in at that window there, and after grapin' aboot and gettin' a haud o' what I was seekin', I was gawin' to

creep oot again, when I bethought me o' my specks." "Specks!" roared I into his ear, "how could you risk your life for a pair of spectacles?" "Trouth, Sir," replied he, seriously, "I couldna ha' read my Bible without them, and, mair nor that, they were silver specks, and they were specks sent me hame in a praisant frae my son, the Yepiscopal meenister in Canada." This was unanswerable, and I was glad to learn that the result of his boldness was the salvation of his "specks," as well as of the purse or pocket-book, into which I presume to interpret what he called "the thing he wad ha'e done ill wantin'." Not a particle of corn was spared to him, and even the straw was so completely ruined, that he was compelled to sell off his live stock and to give up the farm. As he told me himself, "he was three days on the hill looking over this disagreeable affair;" yet I heard no murmur of complaint escape him, and all his talk was of thanks to God for the preservation of himself and his family.

Immediately below Culbeg, the river made a breach through the farm of Little Budzeate, following the line of an ancient course, and entirely abandoning that where it recently ran. I learned from the farmer who witnessed this operation that, after the stream began to run in the new line, it commenced cutting at the point where it fell over the bank to rejoin the river, and so it continued to work backwards gradually, but expeditiously. This is invariably the process in all similar cases.

The farm of Rosefield, on the right bank, contains about fifty arable acres, of which above one-third have been carried away entirely, or destroyed, beyond all hope of redemption, by deposits of gravel and stones. The crops and grass were utterly ruined—a number of expensive works annihilated—the lime heaps for manure swept away, together with the whole corn of last year—the lower storey of the house was flooded, and the whole farm, now in a state of chaos, lies at the mercy of every partial rise of the river. The farm of Milton of Kildrummie, on the left bank, also suffered severely; the mill was damaged, its run destroyed, and the dwelling-house and out-houses rendered uninhabitable. The crop ruined on the estate of Kilravock cannot be estimated at less than £500, and the actual damage done to the property has been calculated by the factor at £2400. Lord Cawdor's loss of soil, and other injury done to his estate, along this part of the Nairn, may be set down at not less than £2000; and that of Mr. Mackintosh of Geddes is given in at £1200. The inundation here spread far over the rich plain on the right bank, flooding some of the farm houses that were 400 or 500 yards from the usual margin of the river, and ruining the crops to an extent that defies calculation.