

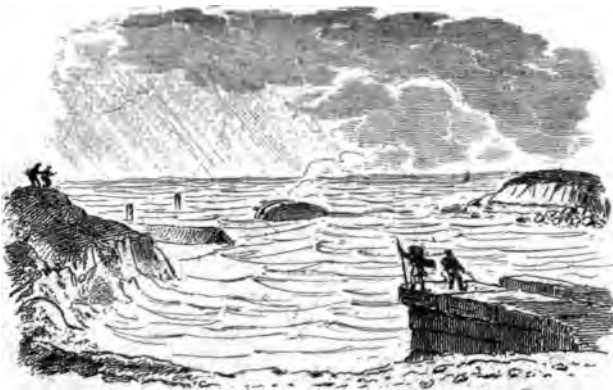
## CHAPTER II.

### THE RIVER NAIRN, FROM BROADLEY TO THE SEA.

AFTER quitting the extensive arable plain noticed at the conclusion of the last chapter, the Nairn runs for about three-quarters of a mile through a comparatively narrow pass, whence it expands into a second plain, a little below the farm of Broadley. At Firhall, on the left, the offices were most substantially built on the summit of a bank, about thirty feet high, and at the distance of about thirty horizontal yards from the edge of the river. The flood attacked the base of this bank, and cut it entirely back, until it undermined the buildings, and carried away the thrashing-mill, and the gable of a lofty barn. (Plate IV.) It also swept off great part of a very thriving plantation of well-grown timber trees from below the offices. Mr. Mackintosh of Firhall's damage is estimated at £400. That of Mr. Robertson of Househill, on the right bank, is very considerable, but it has not been ascertained. At Mr. Cant's, Mills of Millfield, on the left bank, the flood made a breach to the right, rushed down a new course at a lower level, and so left the mills entirely without water, to restore which cost above £50.

A little way below the mills, the washing-green of the Burgh of Nairn presents a very mutilated and deplorable appearance, about two acres of it having been carried away, and a mere fragment left. The inundation between Househill and Nairn was not much less than a mile in length, by half a-mile in breadth; but the force of the water was not great, and the damage done to the grain was chiefly in destroying its quality, by chilling its roots, and arresting the process of filling. At a point on the left bank of the river, above the bridge, called the Constabulary, a large tree, rooted in the crevices of the sandstone, was torn down by the flood of the 27th. Some fragments of the rock were dislodged by its fall; and so great was the violence of the stream, that one of them, 14 feet long by 3 feet wide, and 1 foot thick, was carried above 200 yards down the river, and some of the others to a still greater distance.

On the evening of Saturday the 1st of August, the Rev. James Grant, minister of Nairn, observed a dark cloud hovering



over the sea in a straight line between Cromarty and Findhorn. It soon assumed the shape of a huge black column, with its base resting on the surface of the waters, and its top apparently reaching the clouds. It remained for a considerable time, during which he particularly remarked its circumgyrations to be very distinct. It then became lighter and bluer in colour, until it gradually disappeared. This ascending waterspout was also seen by Dr. Smith and others. The morning of the 3d was ushered in by heavy rain at Nairn, and in the afternoon the gale from the north became tremendous, and the loitering fishermen cast many an eye towards the Firth, where the lowering sky seemed as if stooping to mingle its waters with those of the sea, and where both were so lashed up together by the furious blast, that it became difficult to tell the precise boundary between them. About six o'clock in the evening, a sail was descried off the sand-hills to the north-east of Nairn. She seemed to struggle forth from the dark mantle of mist obscuring the horizon in that direction. It was a schooner-rigged vessel, and she came staggering along before the wind as if in sore distress, with her mainsail torn and flying before her. To the weather-beaten men of the sea, who anxiously watched her motions from the pier, she at first seemed as if endeavouring to make the harbour of Nairn, or run aground on the back shore, as the only remaining chance of safety; but as she neared, it became obvious to every experienced eye that, whatever were the wishes of those on board, they were utterly unable to carry them into effect, from her water-logged and unmanageable condition. Terrific as was the storm, yet there were hearts there tender as those of women for the miseries of others, and firm as the toughest oak, when danger was to be grappled with, who would have sprung to brave the tempest in any cause of humanity. But to launch a boat in such a sea was impossible. Nor could their well-meant succour have availed, even if they could have passed beyond the overwhelming surf that broke upon the shore. Opposite to Nairn there is generally a strong current setting from the east towards Delnics, and Whitenesshead, to the westward. Already had the fated vessel been driven into this current, and notwithstanding the furious northern blast, she was hurried rapidly on, like the floating carcass of some drowned creature devoid of voluntary action; and after being carried for a time as if towards Cromarty, she was seen to sink almost instantaneously, leaving only a few feet of one of her masts above water, as a frail and transient monument, to mark the spot where the last despairing shriek of the crew had been stifled by the waves. A subdued exclamation of horror burst from those

who witnessed the spectacle. Each felt that such might one day be his own fate, and with compressed lips, contracted brows, and moistened eyes, they slowly separated to return to their homes.

Towards the afternoon of the 3d, the Nairn was much swollen, and it continued to increase till the forenoon of next day, when its height surpassed anything ever witnessed before. The aggregate breadth of the three arches of the bridge of the Nairn is 120 feet, and, immediately below it, the rise was nine feet above the ordinary level. Numerous bulwark frames and many large trees were seen hurrying down to the sea, and the force and fury of the stream were alarming. The harbour, a work of recent construction, was formed by cutting a new course for the river straight from the bridge to the sea, in a line where it must have flowed at one period, until it was gradually forced eastward, into the diagonal direction it lately followed, by depositions of sand drifted by the winds from the country to the westward. The new embouchure was regularly shaped into a harbour, and faced with stone piers. These were much undermined by the flood of the 3d and 4th, though not actually thrown down to any great extent, and the channel was found to be infinitely too narrow for the fearful column of water that strained through it. Immediately below the bridge, on the left bank, were two stone bulwarks, eleven feet high, and very strong, erected to defend the ground on which the lower part of the town stands. The flood made a breach through one of these, levelling and scattering its materials, and, attacking the right bank at the same time, it cut away a considerable portion of the flat ground called The Maggot.

Such were the injuries done to the burgh of Nairn by the first flood; and whilst its good burghers were musing over them, they were astonished to behold the return of the Duke of Gordon coach, which had left them only two hours before, on its way to Aberdeen; and learning that the cause was the fall of the bridge of Findhorn, they thanked their stars that they had so little to complain of.

But their turn was yet to come. The 27th was also a day of tempest and incessant rain, though by no means so stormy as the 3d. But owing to the deluge that fell higher up the country, the river rose more rapidly, and six inches higher than it then did. About three o'clock in the afternoon, the brig "Mariner," of Sunderland, of eighty-three tons, was broken from her moorings at the pier, by the weight of the stream, when she heeled round, and striking the stone-work, her sternpost

and rudder were stove in, and she partially filled with water. In the evening the piers, especially those on the right bank, began to give way. Being founded in the sand, the lower courses of the stones were dislodged, and ledge after ledge dropped successively into the stream.

The dawn of day discovered a very ruinous state of matters at Nairn. The river, though still very high, had now begun to subside. Besides the ruin of one arch of thirty feet span, the whole fabric of the bridge was much shaken, and the repairs are calculated at £500. The wretched nature of its foundations had been exhibited for some time, by the stream deepening the channel, in consequence of the new cut for the harbour below ; and if great exertions had not been used to repair the damage it sustained by the first flood, it must have been entirely swept away on this second occasion. The stone embankments a little further down, appear to have done it harm by impeding the escape of the water, and creating an accumulated pressure on the piers. These impediments are now, fortunately, pretty well demolished and removed by the action of the stream. The harbour presented a truly lamentable sight. The whole of the piers of its eastern side were gone, as well as much of the artificial bank behind them : and, on the western side, a gap was opened in the solid masonry at the lower end of the wharf, and the whole pier beyond carried quite away seaward, except a heap of fallen stones at the further extremity, and the exposed ground behind was cut abruptly out into a bay, practically illustrating the impropriety of attempting to impose too great confinement on any such stream as the Nairn, or to build along its banks without a proper foundation. I am informed that those employed to erect the piers, being strangers to the river they had to deal with, having only seen it when low, proposed to make the channel considerably narrower than the breadth at which they afterwards finished it, and laughed at the idea of its being necessary to face it up with masonry as far as the bridge. But an old blind fisherman of Nairn, on hearing of the proposed dimensions of the harbour, predicted the very result that has now taken place. The wharf, being founded on rock, stands as secure as if nothing had happened. Where such a foundation is not to be had, the best facing for the piers of the Nairn, or any similar harbour, would be huge posts and framing beams, covered in front with strong wood-work, substantially fitted and secured, and strengthened behind with triangular bearers or counterforts, backed by heavy stones or other weighty materials. I have great doubts of the wisdom of bringing the river through the harbour at all. The object, of

course, was to clear it out; but might it not be likely to deposit more at one time than it carries away at others? Then the risk to which the craft are exposed by every small rise of the river is a serious objection. It appears to me that the scouring of the harbour might have been better provided for by a sluice, through which a regulated quantity of water might have been at any time allowed to pass from the river. The brig "Mariner," furnished a sad illustration of these remarks. Being filled with water, and partially sunk, she toppled over, and her mooring-posts giving way, she drifted down to the mouth of the harbour, where I saw her lying a total wreck. Nothing could be more cheerless and depressing than the view of the harbour (Plate V.), looking seaward, with its defences entirely gone, and every successive surge washing down fresh portions of the raw banks; the hull of the wrecked vessel lying in the throat of the channel; and at every stroke of the tide, spouting up the water into the air, through some hole in her timbers. One very remarkable feature in the surrounding scene, was a fishing-hut, about twelve feet long, standing on a beach in the middle of the river, constructed of four posts, with bearers stretched between them at top and bottom, and covered, roof and all, without side planks. While the bridge, the pier, the vessel, nay the very rocks, were yielding to the furious force of the deluge, this ark stood unmoved in the midst of the waters of both floods, uninjured (Plate VI.), except that it was swayed a little from the perpendicular. No building of stone and lime could have stood in the same place. Its preservation, therefore, is worthy of record, as a valuable fact, to prove how much mere posts and planks will resist in such a situation. It stands as a useful instructor to the burghers of Nairn, for the restoration of their harbour, the damage done to which is calculated at £2500.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE RIVER FINDHORN, FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO DULSIE BRIDGE.

THE River Findhorn rises from a wide morass, covering the flat summit of a mountain in the midst of the Monadh-leadh group, and runs through a direct line of country of not less than sixty miles, its sinuosities being about thirty more. Perhaps no river of the same size in Great Britain possesses so exquisite, so continued, and yet so varied, a range of scenery as it does, from within a few miles of its source till it approaches the sea-port to