

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIVER SPEY TO ABERNETHY.

THE River Spey holds the third place among Scottish rivers. It rises about 16 miles south from Fort-Augustus, has a run of about 96 miles, and drains not less than 1300 square miles of country.

The Spey, and its tributaries above Kingussie, were but little affected by the flood of the 3d and 4th of August. The western boundary of the fall of rain seems to have been about the line of the River Calder, which enters the Spey from the left bank, a little to the westward of the village. The deluge was tremendous, accompanied by a violent north-east wind, and frequent flashes of lightning, without thunder. The barometer sank very little, but this was attributed to the direction of the wind.

About Belleville, and on the Invereshie estate, the meadows *were covered to the extent of 5 miles long by 1 mile broad*, and both the land and embankments of those belonging to Mr. Macpherson Grant, on the right, were much destroyed. The proprietor's damage is estimated at £500. Mr. Macpherson of Belleville's losses are to the extent of £820, though they chiefly result from the action of a small rivulet. Having filled its channel with stones and gravel, it burst over its banks, spread devastation around, rushed into the square of offices, and carried

away the end of a strong stone and lime house. The beautiful Loch Inch, 3 miles long by 1 mile broad, was raised between 7 and 8 feet, an astonishing accumulation for so wide an expanse of water.

The River Feshie, a tributary from the right bank, immediately below Invereshie, was subjected to the full influence of the deluge. It swept vast stones and heavy trees along with it, roaring tremendously. Mr. Macpherson Grant's losses on this river, chiefly in wood, have been very considerable. Those of Mr. Mackintosh of Mackintosh are calculated at £480, though he possesses but a small portion of one side of the glen. John Grant, the saw-miller's house, at Feshieside, on this property, was surrounded by 4 feet of water, about eight o'clock in the morning of the 4th. The people on the top of a neighbouring hill fortunately observed the critical situation of the family; and some men, in defiance of the tremendous rush of the water, then 200 yards in breadth, gallantly entered, as Highlanders are wont to do in trying circumstances, shoulder to shoulder, and rescued the inmates of the house one by one, from a peril proved to be sufficiently imminent, by the sudden disappearance of a large portion of the saw-mill. But, great as was the danger in this case, the lonely and deserted situation of Donald Macpherson, shepherd in Glenfeshie, with his wife, and six little children, was still more frightful, and required all the firmness and resolute presence of mind characterizing the hardy mountaineer. His house stood on an eminence, at a considerable distance from the river. Believing, therefore, that whatever might come, he and his would be in perfect safety, he retired with his family to bed at the usual hour, on the evening of the 3d. At midnight he was roused by the more than ordinary thunder of the river, and, getting up to see the cause, he plunged up to the middle in water. Not a moment was to be lost. He sprang into his little dwelling, lifted, one after the other, his children from their beds, and carried them almost naked, half asleep, and but half conscious of their danger, to the top of a hill. There, amidst the wild contention of the elements, and the utter darkness of the night, the family remained shivering, and in suspense, till day-break, partially illuminating the wildness of the scenery of the narrow glen around them, informed them that the flood had made them prisoners in the spot where they were, the Feshie filling the whole space below, and cataracts falling from the rocks on all sides. Nor did they escape from their cliff of penance till the evening of the following day.

The crops in Glenfeshie were annihilated. The romantic old bridge at Invereshie is of two arches, of 34 and 12 feet span.

The larger of these is 22 feet above the river in its ordinary state, *yet the flood was 3 feet above the keystone*, which would make its height here above the ordinary level about 25 feet. The force pressing on this bridge must have been immense ; and, if we had not already contemplated the case of the Ferness Bridge, we should consider the escape of that of Feshie to be a miracle. Masses of the micaceous rock below the bridge, of several tons weight, were rent away, carried down, and buried under heaps of gravel at the lower end of the pool, 50 or 60 yards from the spot whence they were taken.

The Feshie carried off a strong stone bulwark a little farther down—overflowed and destroyed the whole low ground of Dalnavert—excavated a new channel for itself—and left an island between it and the Spey of at least 200 acres. The loss of crop and stock by the farmers hereabouts is quite enormous, and the ruin to the land very great.

The burn of Dalraddy, which runs into Loch Alvie, on the left bank, did much mischief. A rather whimsical result followed the flood at the farm of Dalraddy. The tenant's wife, Mrs. Cumming, on going out, after the flood had subsided on Tuesday afternoon, found, at the back of the house, and all lying in a heap, a handsome dish of trout, a pike, a hare, a partridge, and a turkey, with a dish of potatoes, and a dish of turnips, all brought down by the burn, and deposited there for the good of the house, except the turkey, which, alas! was one of her own favourite flock. The poor hare had been surprised on a piece of ground, insulated by the flood, and had been seen alive the previous evening, exhibiting signs of consternation and alarm, and the stream rising yet higher during the night, swept over the spot, and consummated its destruction.

The Manse of Alvie is beautifully situated on a swelling knoll, almost surrounded by the peaceful lake of that name. On Tuesday morning, Loch Alvie rose to an unprecedented height, covering one-half of the minister's garden. The whole road leading to the church was inundated to a depth that made it impossible for a horse or carriage to pass ; and Mr. Macdonald, and the clergymen who had assisted him at his Sacrament, were confined prisoners at the manse till the flood subsided on Wednesday forenoon.

The Duke of Gordon's delightful retreat, Kinrara, fortunately escaped with little injury. But at the Doune of Rothiemurchus the whole flat part of the lawn was inundated, and the house stood on an island. The fine farm there suffered considerably, and the damage to the property is valued above £600. The scenery hereabouts is well known to be of the grandest character.

I speak not of the minutiae of Nature, of her cabinet pictures. I speak of her as reigning over wide valleys, mighty pine forests, rocky hills, and giant mountains. To have beheld such a region, whilst it was the theatre of the elemental war of the beginning of August last, must have been to look on something that poets have dreamed of, rather than historians recorded. The weather here, up to the evening of Saturday the 1st, was temperate and natural, but a north-easterly wind then sprang up, bringing a thick haze with it. On the morning of the 2d, the air became very cold, and the wind increased in strength; threatening clouds began to collect; and, before night, the sky presented one unbroken vault of pitchy black. The rain commenced that night, and did not cease till three o'clock P.M. of the 4th. Nothing could equal the sublimity of the scene on Tuesday morning. The clouds ever and anon seemed to be gathering all their stores to pour upon the hills, as a last effort; and yet they never forsook their post, notwithstanding their incessant discharge, and the struggles of the hurricane against them. An entire river poured itself over the rugged and precipitous brow of the hill of Upper Craigellachie,* converting its furrowed front into one vast and diversified waterfall. Every object around was veiled in a sort of half obscurity, save when occasional glimpses of the lofty Cairngorum burst forth amidst the fury of the tempest, and he reared his proud head, as if in mockery, above it.

The Druie, entering from the right bank, swept away a house at Upper Dell, and the inhabitants were nearly lost in their ineffectual attempts to save their furniture. The river broke away from its channel, and, running in a parallel, at the distance of 200 yards, it bore down every object, natural or artificial, that presented itself, and surrounded the house of the Dell of Rothiemurchus with an immense body of water, though its site was 500 yards from its bed. The family were thrown into the greatest consternation, and Mr. Mackintosh, who was in bad health, was carried out in a cart, with the greatest difficulty and danger, and was set down, on dry ground, at a distance of 400 yards from his house. The whole place was cut up and ruined; and the sawmills, which were much damaged, escaped utter destruction only by the breaking of the embankment higher up.

The garden of the inn at Aviemore was flooded as high as the upper wall. Mr. Mackenzie, the innkeeper, lost two oxen and several sheep. One sheep was seen to cross the Spey to the

* There are two crags of this name, Upper and Lower Craigellachie, marking the western and eastern limits of the Grant country. The watchword of the clan is, "*Stand Fast, Craigellachie.*"

south side, on the 4th, and, on the 5th, it was again feeding about the house on the north bank. Several others were found alive on the tops of the trees at the foot of the garden, having scrambled into them when they were bent down by the pressure of the water. Lachlan Grant, the tenant of Dellifaber, below Aviemore, had a large copper kettle carried off. He immediately got on a rude kind of raft, with the gallant intention of giving chase to it. But he was soon glad to abandon the enterprise, and, if he had not been a very powerful man, he would have been lost in the current. The great damage on this part of the Spey is in the agricultural produce destroyed.

One of the most extraordinary circumstances attending the flood took place in Loch-na-mhoon, a little lake near Avielochan, about two and a-half miles to the eastward of Aviemore—a mile from the Druidical circle on the plain—and within sight of the great road. It lies in a hollow, and has a fir wood beyond it to the south. The loch is about ninety yards long from north to south, and about fifty yards across. The centre of it was filled with a swampy island, which was now and then seen to rise and fall a little with the surface of the loch. During the flood, one of the cross drains of the road sent a stream directly down a hollow, and rushed into the loch with so great a force, that it actually undermined and tore up the island; and the surface of the water being thus raised fifteen or twenty feet, and the wind blowing furiously from the north-east, the huge mass was floated and drifted to the southern shore, and stranded on the steep bank, where it now lies like a great carpet, the upper half of it reclining on the slope of the bank, and the lower half resting on the more level ground close to the water's edge. The island is composed chiefly of Eriophori, Junci, and other aquatic plants, with strongly matted roots, to a depth of about 18 inches, and having 18 inches of soil attached to them, making the whole thickness of the solid part of it about 3 feet. In form it approaches the circular, and it is 30 yards in diameter. One of the most curious facts regarding this strange phenomenon is, that it is perforated by one large hole, 5 or 6 yards square, and two of a smaller size, which exactly correspond in magnitude, form, and position, to the three hillocks of earth adhering to the bottom of the loch, and appearing above water, which are, in reality, nothing more than three of the roots of the wrecked island. (Plate XLI.)

On the right bank of the river, the beautiful loch of Pit-youlish, in the district of Kincardine, lying to the east of that pretty wooded hill in Rothiemurchus, called the Calart, rose above 5 feet, and the small rill that issues from it into the

Spey, strange to say, ran from the Spey into the loch, flooding the road, and standing in some places 10 feet deep. It was in the pass close to the loch that Shaw *Cor-fhi-a-cailach*, or Bucktooth, waylaid and murdered the last of the Cumins of Rothiemurchus. Tradition reports that Shaw placed an old woman on the top of the Calart, apparently engaged in *rocking the tow*, or rolling the flax on the distaff, but really for the purpose of giving him notice on which side of the loch the Cumin party would advance. The watchword for the north was, "*Tha na gobhar 's'a Chalart*," "The goats are in the Calart;" and for the south, "*Tha na gobhur 's'a chàl*," "The goats are in the kail." The graves of these Cumins are still pointed out, in a hollow on the north side of the Calart, called *Lag-na'n-Cuimineach*. It is unnecessary to mention that the Shaws fell into immediate possession of Rothiemurchus, and continued to hold it till they, in their turn, were expelled by the Grants of Muckrach, in Strathspey. Young Dallas of Cantray married the widow of Shaw of Rothiemurchus, and took up his abode there with her. As young Shaw, the widow's son by her former marriage, grew up, he began to regard Dallas with a jealous eye, avoiding his society, and spending his time in hunting and fishing. Returning one day from the pursuit of the deer, and passing by the smithy, then, as now, the great place of resort in every district, a favourite dog, that had entered it, was driven out yelping, from a kick bestowed by some one within. Fired by the supposed insult, young Shaw hastily entered the smithy, and discovering, on inquiry, that his stepfather was the aggressor, he waylaid Dallas as he came home that night, and murdered him. Returning to Rothiemurchus, he rushed into his mother's presence, his hands red with the blood of her husband, and told her what he had done. To avoid his immediate fury, she so commanded her feelings as to appear to be little moved by the intelligence, but, early next morning, she gathered together all the title-deeds of the estate, and other papers of importance, and fled to Castle Grant, where she delivered over the property to the laird. Unwilling to bring trouble on himself by this affair, he surrendered the rights to his son, Peter of Muckrach, a brave but turbulent man, who soon took means to secure possession of the gift. There is still a large stone, forming the lintel of a door at the Dell, said to have been brought from Muckrach, when the Grants moved from thence. It bears the Rothiemurchus arms, and the motto is, "*In God is al my traist*," with the initials P. G. engraven on it, and the date 1598.

At Cullachie of Gartenmore, a hamlet of sod houses, standing about a quarter of a mile from the Spey, on the right bank, my

attention was arrested by the vast extent of the flood-mark. The cottages stand on a green hillock, rising out of the cultivated plain, some 6 or 8 feet above its level. The flat stretches from the Spey in their rear, and sweeps towards the moor in front of them. The Abernethy Road runs across the edge of this sweep of the flat. I was struck by the failure of one of its conduit bridges, and seeing the remains of river-wreck on the edge of the moor, and being incredulous that the inundation could have spread so far, I turned aside to the house of Widow Cameron, who gave me the history of her disasters. "Ou, Sir," said she, "ye see, Spey was just in one sea a' the way frae Tullochgorum yonder, on the tither side o' the strath, to thay muiry hillocks out by there, ayont the King's road fornent us; and, or e'er we kent whaur we waur, the water was a' in aboot huz, and up 4 or 5 feet in our houses, an' it destroyed a' our meal, an' floated aff oor peat-stacks—see till some o' the peats lyin' oot on yon hillock-side yonder, twa hunder yairds frae whaur we're stannin'. I was feared oot o' my judgment for my bairns, and sae I but to be oot o' this wi' them." "And how did you escape?" demanded I, with the greatest anxiety. "Ou, troth, just upon a brander," replied Mrs. Cameron. "A brander!" exclaimed I with astonishment, arising from ignorance that the word was applied to anything than a Scotch gridiron, and thinking that the riding to the moon on a broom, or the sailing in a sieve to Norway, were nothing to this; "A brander! what do you mean by a brander?" "Ou, just a bit float," replied the widow; "a bit raft I made o' thay bit palins an' bits o' moss-fir that waur lyin' aboot. "What! and your children too?" exclaimed I. "Ou, what else!" replied she, amused at my surprise; "what could I hae done wi' them else? nae horse could hae come near huz. It was deep aneuch to droon twa horses." "And how did you feather yourself over?" inquired I. "Troth, sir, I hae *nae feathers*," replied Mrs. Cameron very simply; "I'm no a dewk to soom. But, ye see, I sat on my hunkers on the middle o' the brander, wi' my bairns a' aboot me, in a knot; and the wund, that was blawin' strong aneuch frae the north, just teuk us safe oot to the land." "And how did your neighbours get out?" asked I. "Ou, fat way wad they get oot, but a'thegither upon branders," replied Mrs. Cameron. Let the reader fancy to himself this fleet of branders, with their crews of women and children, floating gallantly *vent en poupe*, towards the land, and he will have before his mind's eye a scene fully as remarkable as any which this eventful flood produced.