

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RIVER SPEY, FROM LOWER CRAIGELLACHIE, TO THE PASS
OF SOURDEN, INCLUDING THE PLAIN OF ROTHES.

WE now enter on the once beautiful Plain of Rothes, presenting, since the flood, a scene of utter devastation. The first farm on

the left is that of Dandaleith, a stretch of level land, which had been rendered, by the skill and capital of Mr. Macinnes, the boast of Speyside. And well it might be called so, for land in higher cultivation, or more perfectly fenced, was nowhere to be met with. But the flood burst over it from Lower Craigellachie, the Spey being forced to the left by the Fiddoch, and converted it into a desert, that seemed as if it had never been tilled by man. At least 26 acres of very fine land were carried entirely away, and not less than 50 more were covered with sand and gravel to the depth of about 3 feet; immense river channels were cut in various places, the fences were levelled, and the whole crop was destroyed. The ground was strewed over when I saw it, with enormous trees, amongst others, one immense oak from Ballindalloch, weighing, with its root, not less than 3 or 4 tons. (Plate LI.) Besides all this, the whole corn-stacks of crop 1828, five excepted, were carried off like a fleet of ships. Great part of a thriving distillery was also thrown down. A cow-herd boy, who slept there, being asked if he lost anything, "Aye," replied he, "I lost twa sarks, an' ane o' them was clean too." As I walked over the farm, I was suddenly arrested by observing a longitudinal cairn of small stones, about the dimensions of a man's body. This was a frail and melancholy monument, placed there by the friends of poor Cruickshanks, to mark the spot where they had found his body. Mr. Macinnes estimates his damage, as tenant, at £2000.*

Opposite to Dandaleith is the Heathery Isle, among the trees of which there were found spinning-wheels, chairs, tables, beds, chests of drawers, and all manner of cottage furniture and farming utensils, from the cradle to the cart; and, among other things, as already noticed, the beuch and saws of the saw-mill of Pitcroy.

The Valley of the Spey may be said to be about a mile wide at Rothés. The river there keeps entirely over towards the right bank, and the large and populous village is built along the base of the high ground bounding the valley on the left. Two burns descend from glens opening directly on the village, cross it, and find their way to the river through the intervening plain, which was entirely occupied by the potato grounds, and patches of corn, rented by the villagers. The village consists of one long street, running N.E. and S.W. along the base of the hill, and of another crossing it diagonally. One burn has its course in the

* He has already commenced trenching down the sand and gravel, which he wisely considers the best plan, as the surface of the field is thereby raised just so much higher above the river than it was before. The expense is great.

line of this last mentioned cross street, and the other passes by the N.E. end of the long thoroughfare. By five o'clock in the afternoon of the 3d, these rose tremendously ; that at the end of the town swept away its bridge ; and the upper and under divisions of the cross street, and the north-eastern end of the main thoroughfare, were instantly converted into rivers, the water bursting open the doors, and rushing into the houses. A large proportion of the inhabitants of these three streets were now in the utmost danger, and those who were themselves in safety flew to succour their friends and neighbours who were in peril. Then were the stout and active of both sexes seen wading in, at the risk of being carried away by the stream, and dragging the young, the aged, and the infirm, some of whom had not for years been from under a roof, out at their windows or doors, as they best could, and carrying them, some on their backs, some in their arms, through the deep and powerful currents. Peats in black masses, firewood, poultry, and pigs, were seen tumbling along ; and every now and then the young fellows were dashing in and hauling out huge hogs by the hind legs, or plunging to the middle after some other live or dead object. Fortunate it was that all this confusion occurred during the light of day, and that the whole of the people were placed in safety before night-fall ; but, as the burns increased, and the bridge in the centre of the village gave way, darkness brought with it a night of dreadful suspense. There was a partial subsidence here as elsewhere ; but, after twelve o'clock next day, the flood again rose, and to a still greater height, and either totally demolished, or partially destroyed, fifteen dwelling-houses, of as good and substantial masonry as could possibly be built.

A remarkable corroboration of what I have stated in the preliminary chapter, that our floods of modern days must be greatly augmented by the increase of drainage of all kinds, is furnished by these burns of Rothies. Mr. Brown of Dunkinty, factor for Lord Seafield, tells me that, after some extensive draining operations had been executed at the head of the burn of Rothies, the tenant of the mills applied for an additional mill-dam, because the drains had the effect of running off the water so quickly that the mills ceased to be supplied with the same regularity as formerly.

It was a truly fortunate circumstance that Mr. Brown happened to be at Rothies during the inundation. Soon after sunrise on the morning of the 4th, the Spey was at its extreme height, and flooded the greater part of the wide plain. Mr. Brown then became alarmed for the safety of some of the inhabitants of the farms above the village. He left the inn, and, on

reaching a point on the turnpike road, opposite to the farm house immediately below that of Dandaleith, tenanted by Widow Riach, he was shocked to see the water five feet up on the walls, though many hundred yards removed from the ordinary channel of the river, and the stream that swept along between the buildings and the bank where the road ran, was of itself at least four times as large as the Spey in its ordinary state. Other currents rushing through the smoother water from the main run of the river, set right against the houses, and forced violently through between the gable of the dwelling-house and the offices, so that it was evident that the upper end of the former must soon fall. But what was Mr. Brown's horror, when he perceived a woman looking out at a small window, in that very gable, waving a handkerchief, as if imploring for speedy aid. There was no retreat from that end of the house, for that was the only part of it that had an upper room. In an agony of apprehension, Mr. Brown hurried off to the village of Rothes, to make inquiry about a boat, which he knew was in possession of some one in the town, and, after being teased by a thousand delays and disappointments, he at length found it in a shed, buried under an immense heap of peats. It was soon got out, however, and there was something peculiarly good in the feeling of that bystander, who said, "Don't take it up to the spot to raise hopes by its appearance, until you are certain that you have hands who will man it, and realize them." "I will go!"—"And I," cried two lads of the name of Riach, though, I believe, not connected with her of the same name whom they were thus volunteering to risk their lives to rescue. Not a moment more was lost; the boat was instantly carted, carried to the place, and launched off the turnpike road. The flood was still going on increasing; for, as they were in the act of lowering the boat into the water, a cart was observed to float away from Mrs. Riach's farm-yard; and, before the men had seated themselves at the oars, the corn stacks from Dandaleith passed down the stream quite entire. The boat put off, and a nervous and agitating spectacle it was; for the current ran so strong and rough, that they were carried several hundred yards down before they could shoot into the less violent water, where, after a long pull up, they passed round by the front or farther side of the buildings, and were altogether hid by them for a time from the anxious eyes of those on shore. There, as they afterwards learned, the two men made fast the boat to some part of the dwelling-house (Plate LII.), and the water covering it nearly to the eaves, they were enabled to get upon the roof, whence they shouted down the chimney to the inmates. It is unnecessary to say how thankfully they obeyed the summons,

The women were first taken out, with great difficulty, from a small window, and, after a hazardous passage, were safely landed amidst the congratulations of all those who witnessed this trying scene. The boat then returned for the men, and for two of Mrs. Riach's grand-children, and disappeared, as formerly, behind the intervening buildings. While the spectators were anxiously looking for its re-appearance, the upper gable of the house, which had been so long undermined by the press of currents combined against it, gave way all at once, and carried half the building along with it. "Oh! my brother!—My brother is gone!" cried a young man in a voice of agony, alluding to one of the lads who had taken an oar. Half uttered ejaculations burst from the shuddering crowd of spectators—the poor widow was paralyzed, and Mr. Brown was overwhelmed by the horror of the scene. A tremendous splash of water mingled with the cloud of dust that arose from the crumbling ruin. It cleared away—and, to the unspeakable joy of all the beholders, the little boat was disclosed to view, through the gap in the building, with the remainder of the family seated in it; and, as it made for the land, it actually floated directly over the fallen and submerged materials of that house, which they had occupied but a few seconds before. There was a shout of joy, and an offering up of short, yet sincere, thanks to God, by those on shore, for so signal an interference of His providence; and the whole of the rescued, consisting of eight grown persons, and two children, were soon happily united, beyond the reach of danger, after having remained in that awful situation for nine hours during the night. Mrs. Riach's mental sufferings were infinitely the most severe, for, having been urged to remove the previous evening, her attachment to her home led her to refuse, in the belief that it was out of all possibility the flood could come so many hundred yards beyond where the Spey had ever been seen or heard of. She therefore felt that she had been the cause of the peril in which her grand-children, and some of her friends, who had kindly come to lend her assistance, were so unfortunately placed. She had her Bible in her hand, apparently the only wreck of property she had saved; but in that she had found consolation. Her soul had been already well attuned to affliction. In this her widowed state, she had recently lost her son—and now nearly her all was gone; for, when I visited her farm, not a vestige of new or of old crop was left. The house had indeed been built up, but the offices were still in ruins, a great ravine was dug out between them and the dwelling-house, the surface of the farm was reduced to one waste of devastation—yet, with all this, pure religion had produced its effect, and the pale, mild countenance of the widow, lighted by

a celestial smile, met me at her unpretending threshold, wearing the expression of Christian resignation and gratitude, for the merciful salvation which had been vouchsafed her. There was no lisp of complaint—every word she uttered was expressive of the deep sense she entertained of the goodness of that God, who is ever the widow's friend, who had so wonderfully preserved herself and those whom she held most dear. One sight of that woman's face, after having seen and heard the sum-total of her afflictions, was worth a volume of sermons. It is pleasing to think that her lot is cast on an estate where the hearts of both the manager and his constituent are too much fraught with the finer feelings of humanity not to show the tenderest mercy towards "the shorn ewe."

From Dandaleith to the Pass of Sourden, where the Rothes Plain terminates, 70 or 80 acres of very fine land, on the left bank of the Spey, were either carried off entirely, or so laid over with sand and gravel, as to render it extremely doubtful whether they can ever be reclaimed. Of these nearly 40 acres were rented in small patches by the poor villagers of Rothes. While the loss of the land falls heavy on the proprietor, the utter destruction of the crops creates incalculable misery to these unfortunate people. There are no less than 107 cases of destitute families produced by the flood in this parish. Mr. Brown visited the village two days after the flood. At the first glance he threw along the street as he entered it, he was led to believe there was a fair in the town. But he soon saw that the crowd, and the occupation of the people, and the display of goods, arose from a much more melancholy cause. Some were actively engaged in moving out the mud and gravel that had filled their houses 5 feet deep, and choked up the entrances; and the furniture that had not been absolutely lost, and beds, bedding, chairs, tables, and all such articles, were ranged along the streets, to allow the water they had imbibed to evaporate by exposure to the air. Among other things so exposed were the goods belonging to the shop-keepers; but the utter loss in tea and sugar was very considerable. The most afflicting spectacle of all was that of the people assembling, in the solemn garb of woe, to convey the remains of poor Charles Cruickshanks, from the Church of Rothes, where they had been lodged, to the place of interment at Knockando.

On the Arndilly property, lying along the right bank, the river carried off a bulwark of great length and strength, opposite the house, ran through the fine haugh below the garden, converting it into a perfect waste, and carried off a beautiful belt of wood, and many clumps of trees; and, a little lower down,

another haugh, and the plantations adjoining it, shared the same fate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RIVER SPEY, FROM THE PASS OF SOURDEN TO THE BRIDGE OF FOCHABERS.

AT the Rock of Sourden, where the width from the site of the old Castle of Aikenwalls, on the right bank, to the hill on the left of the Pass, *is 237 feet, the river was 20 feet 10 inches above its ordinary level*, and 15 inches above the mark made to record the rise of the Spey in the much-talked-of flood of September, 1768. This is a great difference over so extensive a space. But I am disposed to think that the real difference was much greater than this. It is probable that, in 60 years, a very considerable change may have taken place in the depth and capacity of the river's bed, especially in a narrow pass of this kind, where there must be a great rush at all times when the river is full. Besides, it is not easy accurately to measure inches in a tumultuous body of rolling water. But however large the flood of 1768 might be, it is probable that its duration was comparatively short, otherwise we should have had more ample records of the mischief produced by it.

Immediately below the Pass of Sourden, Lord Seafield's saw-mill of Dundurcus was carried off, and sailed down the river like a great ship. The whole works about it disappeared; nay their very site was eradicated, and the ground left not only as if no such thing had ever been there, but so that nothing of the kind could ever be placed there again. The island of Dundurcus, too, of 13 acres, was completely obliterated. The tremendous damage done here is much to be attributed to the concentration of the force of the flood at the Pass. At Boat of Brig, where the haughs were much flooded, the river was 17 feet above the ordinary level at nine o'clock in the morning of the 4th. By mid-day it was down to 12 feet, at which height it remained till six o'clock in the evening, when it rapidly subsided.

The Burn of Mulben, tributary to the Spey, on the right bank, at Boat of Brig, is generally almost dry in the summer season, but, in the afternoon of the 3d, it rose 20 feet, damaged the plantations of Auchluncart, the glebe lands, and Lord Seafield's property. Opposite to Auchluncart, it undermined a bank, and water having accumulated in the under strata, an extent of ground, containing 800 square yards of surface, composed of

hard compact gravel, and crossed by a smaller burn, slipped, and subsided in one mass, more than a foot, carrying with it two houses, 200 yards of a dry stone wall, 200 yards of the turnpike road, and a bridge, all unbroken! The Burn of Mulben also destroyed a bridge on the turnpike road worth £250, and materially injured many others. Lord Seafield's wood-manager at Boat of Brig says that "it came down, as it were, in a bank of water, destroying everything but the rock in its progress." It carried off the dam of the saw-mill here, choked up the mill-run, demolished a 50 feet wooden bridge, cut away an acre of land, and floated off several hundred pounds worth of timber from the depot.

The wood-manager says that the Spey "began to appear in earnest," between seven and eight o'clock on Monday evening the 3d. In three hours it rose 10 feet, on a surface of not less than 500 yards wide. The manager's neat cottage of Delfur, newly finished, and its garden and shrubberies, laid out with great taste, stood at the foot of a wooded bank, at about a furlong from the Spey, having a fine haugh, with belts of wood stretching between it and the river. The flood first attacked the offices, where the horses were taken from the stable swimming; and, by the time they were safe, two cows, in an adjacent cow-house, could not be got out, from the increased strength and violence of the stream, and, as a last resource, they were drawn into a porch at the kitchen door, where they remained, with the water almost over their backs, until the forenoon of the 4th, when a cut was made in a steep precipice, up which the poor, half-drowned animals were drawn by ropes. The manager's family were expelled from the house at eleven o'clock at night. When daylight appeared on the 4th, the barn, the cart-shed, with four carts, the stable, with all its harness, the cow-house, the poultry-house, with all its inmates, the washing-house, with copper-boiler and tubs, were gone, as if they had never existed, together with a whole year's provision of fuel. About nine o'clock the kitchen gable was broken down, and all the kitchen furniture swept away. The water was 3 feet 2 inches deep in the house, destroying everything it contained, especially books, which were rendered completely useless; and considerably above £100 of damage was done in this way. To sum up all, the beautiful haugh, containing 10 acres of fine land under crop, was destroyed for ever.

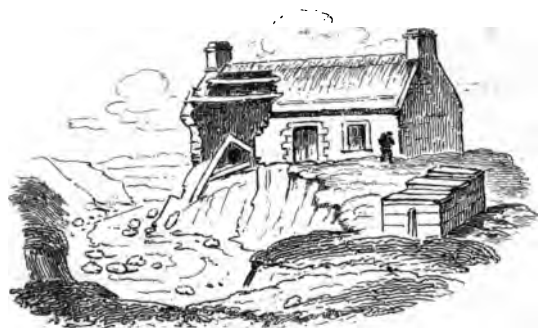
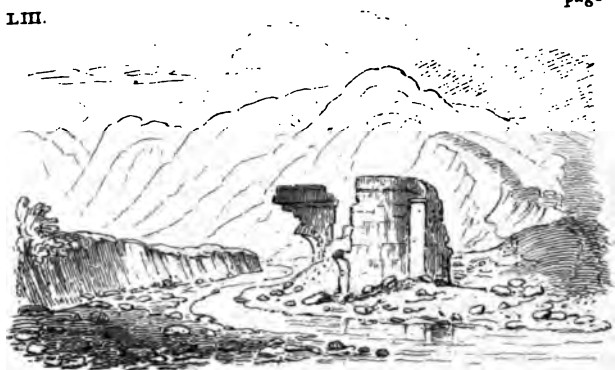
The Spey, by cutting 365 feet laterally from its old channel, uncovered a stone-work, running across its course, 3 feet below the surface of the field, exactly similar in direction, formation, and size, to those used at present in what is called "Cairn-fish-

ing," in the River Spey, and evidently intended for that purpose. This is a parallel case to that of the iron-mill of the River Nethy, and, from the facts we know regarding that, it is reasonable to conclude that salmon may have been taken here by this apparatus, at no very ancient period. This terminates Lord Seafield's Rothes property, where his damage is given in at £8000, which, with the £20,000 for Strathspey, already mentioned, and the injury done by the Lossie near Elgin, and the burns at Cullen, &c., will bring up his total to above £30,000. The loss suffered by the tenantry is immense, the whole crop within reach of the river being ruined. There were three cases of families rendered destitute by this calamity in Boharm parish.

On Mr. Wharton Duff's estate of Orton, the Burn of Garbity, coming from the left, swept away the western approach to its bridge, with the ground it stood on, and also the arch, leaving nothing but a whimsical and picturesque fragment of the eastern abutment. (Plate LIII.) It carried off 6 acres of land, and £200 worth of crop from the farm. The whole plain below Orton, of a mile broad, was covered by the flood, which was running 6 feet deep within 30 yards of the house, and 4½ feet deep in the garden, destroying fruits, flowers, and vegetables.* The farm of Mains of Orton had 106 acres of crop under water, and the tenant's loss is estimated at £800. So great has been the destruction of ground there, that, in a new arrangement with the tenant, Mr. Wharton Duff has been obliged to deduct from 50 to 60 acres from the actual extent. The whole landlord's damage on the Orton estate is given in at £3100.

A widow lady, mother-in-law to Mr. Cameron of Mains of Orton, had her house, near Mr. Wharton Duff's garden, surrounded by ten o'clock in the evening of the 3d. The water rushed into it, and might have drowned a servant girl, and her little charge, a daughter of Mr. Cameron's, had not the old lady roused them from the bed, into which it was rapidly advancing. They fled up stairs to the garret, where they remained, screaming for help, till three o'clock in the morning of the 4th. Mrs. Cameron's anxiety for her mother and her child, during that dreadful night, may be imagined. But Mr. Cameron, assisted by the Orton gardener, at the risk of the lives of both, pushed to their aid in Mr. Wharton Duff's boat, and succeeded in

* The accuracy of a salmon-fisher's eye, as regards the rise and fall of the river, is remarkably exemplified in an anecdote told me by Mr. Brown of Dunkinty. Having expressed his fears for the safety of Garbity, when talking to a Rothes fisherman, during the flood, at a point some miles above, "Garbity is the safest farm in a' Spey, Sir," replied the man, "but I'll warrant she's aboon four fit up in Mr. Wharton Duff's garden."



rescuing them, by pulling them through the garret window, the house door being entirely under water.

Below Orton, the Duke of Gordon's small tenants of the Ellie were clustered together in a little hamlet, or, as a boy emphatically called it, "*a bourrach o' hooses.*" Some of these dwellings were not more than 6 feet above the level of the Spey, and between these and the houses on the higher grounds there is an old river course. The flood made its way into this on the evening of the 3d, and whilst some escaped at the risk of their lives, it unexpectedly cut off all chance of retreat from others. About seven o'clock, the water began to spread over the fields, and to approach the houses. That of a poor and very industrious man, called John Geddes, built on a somewhat elevated spot, had entirely escaped in the floods of 1768 and 1799, when the neighbouring cottages were inundated to a considerable depth.* Alarmed by the rapid growth of the river, the people of the other cottages crowded as night fell towards that belonging to Geddes, firmly believing that they should be perfectly safe in it. There nine men and women, and four children, sat shivering over the fire in their wet garments. The faggots were heaped high, and, as John Geddes himself says, "We soon begud to grow braw an' hearty, whan John Forsyth an' me gaed oot to big up the stable door, an' saw the water growin' terrible! 'Ye're a very merry, Sirs,' said I, as I gaed in, 'but ye'll no be lang sae. Ye had better stir your stumps an' put things oot o' the gate, an' look till your ain safety.' The words were hardly oot o' my mouth, whan in cam' the river on us. We lifted the meal-kist, pat the wife an' her bit weane and the bairnies into the bed, an' the rest got up on kists and tables. We pat the fire on the girdle, hang the girdle on the crook in the lumm, an' stuck the lamp up on the wa'. But the water soon drooned oot the fire, and rose into the bed. I then pat twa chairs i' the bed, an' the wife sat upon them wi' the little anes in her lap, but the water soon got up to them there. Syne I cut the ceilin' aboon the bed—pat a door atween the twa chair backs—laid a caff-bed on the door—set the wife an' little anes aboon that—and then gaed up mysel' to the couple-baulk, an' held the door firm wi' my feet, an' had an axe ready to cut the hoose roof in case o' need. The rest o' the fouk stowed themsel's awa' frae the water as weel as they could, on chairs on the tap o' tables an' kists. We waur lang in this way, an' I cheered them the best I could, an' tell't them the hours every noo an' than by my watch, that I

* What follows sufficiently proves how much the flood of the 3d and 4th of August last was greater than those of 1768 or 1799.

hang up on the couple-leg i' my sight. But the water raise and raise, till about twa o'clock, whan it drooned oot the lamp, an' left us a' i' the dark thegither. There was a groan, an' a cry that there was naething for us noo but death. 'Trust in Providence,' says I till them, 'trust in Providence, neebours. But dinna think that ye can be saved unless ye mak' use o' the raison an' the faculties that God has bestowed on ye. I'll cut the roof the moment I see that naething else will do.' But, in trowth, it was an' aw'some night, what wi' the roar an' ragin' o' the water, the howlin' o' the wind, an' the blatterin' o' the rain without, an' the cries an' prayers o' the terrified fook, an' the greetin' o' the bairns within, an' a' thing dark, an' we, as a body might say, hangin' atween the twa warlds, ilka moment expectin' the hoose to gie way bodily, an' the very tables an' chairs the fook waur stan'in' on shakin' an' floatin' anaith them. Auld Jean Stronach, fourscore years o' age, sat the hale night, amid a' the jostlin', wi' a clockin' hen an' a wheen chuckens in her apron. Some ane said till her that she might hae ither things in her mind. than a hen an' chuckens, when she was on the brink o' yeternity. 'Poor things,' quo' Jean, 'I couldna think o' lettin' them be drooned.' Aweel! when we waur a' in the height o' despondency, Maggy Christie heard tongues thereoot, an' wi' very joy, she jumpit doon frae the kist she was stan'in' on, but, I trow, she gat sic a gliff o' the water, that she gied a roar, an' lap upon the hearth, gruppit at the crook to save hersel', an' wi' that she climbed up the lumm, an' pat her head oot at the tap, wi' her face as black as a suttyman's. 'Oh! Jamie Mill, Jamie Mill,' cried she, 'ye're the blythest sight that ever I saw!' 'Keep us a'! is that you Maggy?' quo' Jamie Mill, 'weel, I've seen blyther sights than you are at this precious moment, but, black though ye be, I maun hae ye oot o' that.' An' sae he crap up the roof an' pu'ed her oot o' the lumm into the boat. Whan they cam' round to the door, the hoose was sae deep wi' water that there was barely space to thrust out heads atween the stream an' the door-lintel, so that I was forced to dip the bit bairnies i' the water afore I could get them oot. That did gang to my very heart! Poor Jean Stronach lost five o' her chuckens, as they were draggin' her oot through the water into the boat, an' we waur a' sae benumbed wi' cauld an' weet, that, I'm sure, she an' the bairnies wad hae died had we been muckle langer there." The boat was so full, that, to prevent its sinking, some of the men were compelled to creep on the house top, and to wait there till it could return.

In the house whence one family had escaped the previous evening, there was a young man, who, having come in the after-

noon, tired and tipsy, after eighteen hours' hard labour in fishing, threw off his wet clothes, shirt and all, and went to bed, and, laughing at the danger that alarmed the rest, he refused to move. Early in the night he was awakened by the water creeping into his bed. Starting up in a fright, he made for the door, but the moment he opened it a torrent burst in upon him, breast high, and he was glad to climb into a small garret, where he sat shivering, until he was pulled out, by great exertions, through a very small window in the roof, like a periwinkle from its shell, to the great laceration of his flesh, and was conveyed by the boat, benumbed and bleeding, to a neighbouring house.

The Ellie presented a miserable scene after the waters had subsided, the houses, furniture, and crops being ruined, buried, or swept off. Among the cattle carried away and drowned, was poor John Geddes's cow; "but the thrawsome brute," as he said himself, "was drooned by her ain obstinacy, for she wad gang nae gaet but what she liket."

Below the Ellie, the Haugh of Dipple, containing nearly 500 acres, was inundated, the crop destroyed, and the soil scarified in some places, and irrecoverably ruined, by deposits of sand and gravel in others. At Beathill, the people were in a similar state with those at the Ellie. At Greens a boat was rowed up to the parlour window, when the water was 3 feet deep in the house, and the boat-rope was actually tied to the grate in the chimney, until the rowers had loosed the drowning cattle from their stalls. The calves and pigs were carried up to a corn loft, whence they looked down with astonishment and dismay on the flood below. An immense number of rabbits were drowned, and many were found, as on the Findhorn, alive on the tops of the trees.