

be transmuted, by some blessed internal predisposition of his nature, into pearls of great price !

It formed one of my standing enjoyments at this time to bathe, as the sun was sinking behind the woods, in the deeper pools of the Conon,—a pleasure which, like all the more exciting pleasures of youth, bordered on terror. Like that of the poet, when he “wanton’d with the breakers,” and the “freshening sea made them a terror,” “’twas a pleasing fear.” But it was not current nor freshening eddy that rendered it such ; I had acquired, long before, a complete mastery over all my motions in the water, and, setting out from the shores of the Bay of Cromarty, have swam round vessels in the roadstead, when, among the many boys of a seaport town, not more than one or two would venture to accompany me ; but the poetic age is ever a credulous one, as certainly in individuals as in nations ; the old fears of the supernatural may be modified and etherealized, but they continue to influence it ; and at this period the Conon still took its place among the haunted streams of Scotland. There was not a river in the Highlands that used, ere the erection of the stately bridge in our neighborhood, to sport more wantonly with human life,—an evidence, the ethnographer might perhaps say, of its purely Celtic origin ; and as Superstition has her figures as certainly as Poesy, the perils of a wild mountain-born stream, flowing between thinly-inhabited banks, were personified in the beliefs of the people by a frightful goblin, that took a malignant delight in luring into its pools, or overpowering in its fords, the benighted traveller. Its goblin, the “water-wraith,” used to appear as a tall woman dressed in green, but distinguished chiefly by her withered, meagre countenance, ever distorted by a malignant scowl. I knew all the various fords—always dangerous ones—where of old she used to start, it was said, out of the river, before the terrified traveller, to point at him, as in derision, with her skinny finger, or to beckon him invitingly on ; and I was shown the very tree to which a poor Highlander had clung, when, in crossing the river by night, he was seized by the goblin, and from which, despite of his