



## SUMMER IN THE HEBRIDES.

“ Thus in a season of calm weather,  
Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
That brought us hither ;  
Can in an instant travel thither,  
And see the children playing on the shore,  
And hear the mighty billows rolling evermore.”

MEMORIES like these, are all that are now left to us, after having spent more than six seasons in our low-lying and treeless island home. But while the thought of its lonely beauty, and the remembrance of the kind hearts we left there are still fresh, I would willingly note down a few impressions of our life and surroundings during that happy time, when we passed our summers on Oronsay.

We were drawn to the island by a high-sounding advertisement in a well-known time-table. There we were told, in language truly Johnson-

ian, that "a run to this island will be the happiest recollection in a man's terrestrial career; for there is the purest atmosphere, and the mildest climate in the west of Scotland. Its scenery is beautiful and varied: its grand gigantic cliffs, in front of which the sea-gulls, cormorants, and eider ducks, float and scream continually in countless thousands: its pure yellow sandy beaches, some a mile wide, on which the never-ceasing Atlantic swell tumbles in and expends itself in white foam: its endless and extensive caves, are sights that should be seen!" Good news this for a brain weary and jaded with the whirl of life as we live it now-a-days, and tired of continental touring, with its endless climbing of hotel stairs, its long railway journeys, tedious *table d'hôtes*, and restless haste to cram as much sight-seeing as possible, into a holiday of three or four weeks. So one fine afternoon in the early autumn of 1880 we found ourselves on board the Highland steamer at Greenock, and after disposing of our affairs, and partaking of an excellent tea, we had a long moonlight evening still left, to enjoy the fading beauties of the frith of Clyde, in company with a merry party of friends.

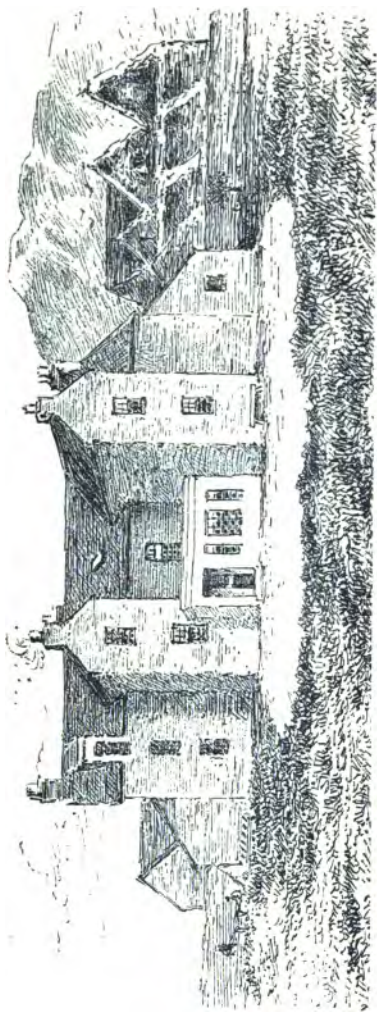
Steadily and quietly we leave behind the lights of the many villages on either side of the noble estuary, till passing the Cumbraes, we find ourselves under the solemn shade of the dark

peaks of Arran, whose rosy flush has long since faded into hues of purple and brown. And so we move on, standing or sitting by the deck cabin, gaily chatting, and at ease in our minds, for we know that the dreaded "Mull" will be calm to-night, and not until Pladda light is left behind, do we break up and go to quiet rest. This, no doubt, is the poetry of the occasion. I, who have sailed round the tempest-tost "Moil" more than thirty times during the past seven years, have had very different experiences from this. Storm, rain, howling gales, even shipwreck itself have been my lot; and yet, strange to say, neither I nor my household fear the raging sea, the rough Highland ferry-boat, or the long and tedious waiting for the steamer on her return; and our very dog,<sup>1</sup> which has completed his twenty-sixth passage, is as happy and at home on the "Dunara Castle," as he would be sleeping by the fire. Every one on board knows him and his master, and stewards and crew are kind and attentive to us all. To return to our advertisement. Fervid as its language was, we were not disappointed in the reality. For although in wet, bad weather,—and there is always too much of that,—nothing can be more sullen

<sup>1</sup> Swift-footed "Clyde," the collie, who (I cannot bring myself to say *which*) loved so much to scour over the strand after the gulls and oyster-catchers.

The bones of our wise "Jerry" lie in Oronsay.

and sad than the aspect of our isle, where not a single tree, or even a whin bush has been able to resist either the blighting wind, or the nibbling sheep and goats, yet, on the other hand, "weather permitting," nothing can be more exhilarating than the delicious atmosphere, bracing, yet soft, or more inspiring than the glorious views on all hands. For the great mountains of Islay, Jura, and Mull form a background to the south and east and north, while to the west the blue ocean dashes and tumbles and breaks amongst the rocks and skerries stretching out towards America, between us and which there is no land. It was not strange therefore, that we resolved to make a summer home in an old mansion, so long disused as to be partly ruinous, but which, under ingenious hands, and with little but the roughest material, soon wore a cheerful aspect, and formed a comfortable and charming dwelling, large enough for as many friends as we chose to add to our number. Close to our house, which indeed was partly built out of its wreck, stood an ancient priory, one of the many founded by St. Columba in the Hebrides. This ruin, with its sacred associations, added greatly to the interest of our life. The following lines seek to express the happiness which we felt in these remote scenes, hallowed by associations so religious and so peaceful:—



ORONSAY HOUSE.

## SONNET.

Sweet Orisoy!<sup>1</sup> amid the sounding seas,  
Fanned by salt breezes from the Atlantic main,  
Thy solitudes are peopled once again  
By children's voices, laughing in their glee,  
Heedless of aught but sport, through sun and rain.  
See! as they merry fly across the strand,  
How the shy seal, that fishes in the bay,  
Or basking, lies upon the yellow sand,  
Scarce heeds the sound of their impetuous play ;  
Here solitude and peace are all around .  
Where bless'd Columba's holy monks did dwell,  
And made this isle a spot of sacred ground,  
Where many a pure and pious heart was found,  
To watch and pray, and sing, in hallowed cell.

This island was the first land upon which St. Columba set foot, after he left Ireland, in his *curach*, or wicker boat covered with skins, for his mission to our then benighted country. A voluntary exile, at the age of forty-two, he landed upon our isle, and with his friend Oran, climbed the rugged Ben which rises in the middle. From this summit he found that he could still see Ireland, his native country, for whose soil his soul retained a passionate love. "Death in faultless

<sup>1</sup> The original name.

Erin," he cried, "is better than life without end in Albyn;" and to view, even afar off, that beloved country, was too great a trial. Descending the hill, he resolved to seek farther off, a shore from which he could catch no glimpse of his fatherland. Never did he cease to mourn over his exile, and in one of his poems he says:—

"What joy to fly upon the white crested sea, and to watch the waves break upon the Irish shore; what joy to row the little bark, and land among the whitening foam upon the Irish shore!

"My foot is in my little boat, but my sad heart ever bleeds. From the high prow, I look over the seas, and great tears are in my grey eye, when I turn to Erin—to Erin where the songs of the birds are so sweet, and where the clerics sing like the birds; where the young are so gentle, and the old so wise; where the great men are so noble to look at, and the women are so fair to wed."

Thus, filled with melancholy patriotism, the Saint sailed out of our little port, but not before he founded a small community, and left a few rude buildings of wood and wattle, for the island was not then treeless, as it is now. The present ruins are of later date, and were the seat of a priory of Canons Regular of Augustine, dependent on the Abbey of Holyrood. They are built of hard, grey schist, sparingly dressed with freestone, and are little decorated with carving or tracery. The church is sixty feet long, by eighteen wide, and has an early English window

with three lancet openings in the east end, where stands the high altar, which is partly broken down. To the north of this is an arched recess which was used no doubt as a chapel in the days of the monks, and which is now filled with carved tombstones. The church also contains a chamber to the west, which was probably a baptistry, a side chapel to the south, and cloisters to the north, which in this case would be the sheltered side of the buildings. Half of the arches in the cloisters are pointed, and half are round. The ruins of a smaller chapel, dormitory, refectory, and other domestic buildings are to be traced, and remain much as they were when Pennant, the indefatigable Welsh traveller, visited the Hebrides, and figured them in 1772. Plain, however, as the ruins are, decorated with little else than the ferns and herbs which hang in their crevices, and which crown their walls, there is a rich treasure in and around them of sculptured stones, adorned with that intricate and admirable celtic work which takes us back to the age of the arabesques of the Alhambra, or the work of the Byzantine Christians. This sculpture in our Hebridean monastery, decorates the tombs of the Highland chiefs, Lords of the Isles, the dignitaries of the monastery, or of noble ladies of the time; for our island had the reputation of being a very holy one. Half-way over the strand, which



separates it at high water from the larger island, there are the remains of the Sanctuary Cross,<sup>1</sup> which formed the limit of the privileged ground. Once the fugitive had embraced its shaft, the avenger of blood had to turn back, and the hunted man was safe, so that the living as well as the dead had there a place of rest and peace.

Islay and Jura sent funeral trains in barges across the sea, to bury their chiefs in its holy soil, and many of the stones represent warriors in full-clad armour, some of whom are made to appear seven feet high, no doubt to impress on posterity their greatness and their power. An Abbess, with the feminine attribute of the shears; the wicked Abbot Murchardus in a recessed arch; and a giant, represented buckling on his belt, while angels at his feet guard his repose,<sup>2</sup> are amongst the stones. Far more beautiful than these, however, are those which do not attempt the expression of the human form, but

<sup>1</sup> See further, page 112.

<sup>2</sup> Figured in Pennant, "Tour," vol. 1, p. 271, plate xx. Asking a native one day what he made out of this sculpture of the angels and the knight, he replied—"Och! they'll pe kittlin' him for peace," meaning that the warrior being weary, the angels, his attendants, were shampooing his legs. This struck me as being a very practical way of doing duty as watchers whether, as such, they belonged either to earth or to heaven. There is an almost identical figure at Saddell Abbey. See Captain T. P. White, "Archæological Sketches in Kintyre," plate xliii. (Edinburgh, 1873, folio.)



IN HOC SIGNO  
VINCITUR  
MUNDUS  
SARACENI  
ET  
DEUS

ORONSAY CROSS.

content themselves with displaying that delightful basket and foliage work, which after winding in and out in a thousand graceful curves, often ends in dragons and other mystical animals. Some of these stones have the galley or berlinn in full sail cut at their base, to show that the tombs are those of island lords; and others have trophies of hunting, dogs, stags, and weapons of the chase, interwoven with the basket tracery. But far the most beautiful and perfect relic is the cross, which stands at the west end of the church. This is an entire stone of a lovely design, mounted on a pedestal, sixteen feet high. One side represents the crucifixion, the other, an elaborate pattern in basket work, the freedom and delicacy of the execution being remarkable indeed. When the morning or evening sun lights up this beautiful carving, it becomes transfigured, and the passer-by must need stand and marvel at its delicate beauty.

Close by these ruins, was the old garden of the monks, surrounded by a great wall, and sheltered by the steep, grey cliffs of the hill climbed by Columba, which shut out the cold north wind from its fruits and flowers. We found that this garden had shared in the dilapidation of the rest of the place, and that it had been for many years sown down in grass. Toil and care, however, which, to me in a garden, is ever a labour of love, soon rewarded us, in that loamy, long-cultivated soil,

with fine crops of vegetables and brilliant flower-beds. There, enclosed by the high walls from the sight and sound of the sea, we used to work and watch the starlings and the red-billed choughs, nesting in the lofty and craggy, ivy-covered rocks; while we enlivened the time by waking a most beautiful echo, which, in the still weather, would repeat ten or eleven times, the notes of a song. Delightful garden! the creation of our own hands out of the green turf of many years; soil that produced so luxuriantly till the blasts of the late autumn, too soon, alas! cut all its abundance down; worked in so long ago by generations of shaven monks, who laboured for the meat which perisheth, while devoutly meditating on the things that belonged to their everlasting peace. Their task accomplished, they were gathered to their fathers, and now sleep in the little church-yard near the ruined priory; their successors are gone, and we too are gone, and so it is—

“That from the garden and the wild  
A fresh association blows,  
And year by year the landscape grows  
Familiar to the stranger’s child.

“As year by year the labourer tills  
His wonted glebe, or lops the glades;  
And year by year, our memory fades  
From out the circle of the hills.”

Had St. Columba looked down upon us from the

hill at our work or play, his ascetic principles would not have approved the sight. To tell the truth, the pious Saint abhorred the female sex, and he would have shuddered had he heard my voice waking the echo from the cliff. He hated women to such a degree, that for their sakes he even detested cattle, and would not allow a cow to come within sight of his sacred walls at Iona, while the wives of his workmen had a separate island all to themselves.

“Sfar am bi bo, bidh vean,  
Sfar am bi vean, bidh mallacha !”

he said: meaning thereby that “where there is a cow there is a woman, and where there is a woman there must be mischief.” Who shall say that while fanning such holy zeal, he did not betray the consciousness that “prudence is the better part of valour,” and that had his rule yielded one jot in asceticism, there might have been among the community, a victim to some fair penitent’s charms?

So hints Moore in the following well-turned lines, which I shall now sing to you:—

#### ST. COLUMBA AND THE LADY.

##### *The Saint.*

O haste, and leave this sacred isle  
Unhallowed bark 'ere morning smile,  
For on its deck though dark it be  
A *female form* I see ;

And I have sworn this sainted sod  
Shall ne'er by woman's feet be trod.

*The Lady.*

O Father, send not hence my bark  
O'er raging seas and billows dark,  
I come with humble heart to share  
Your morn and evening prayer ;  
Nor mine the feet, O hallowed saint,  
The brightness of your sod to taint.

*The Narrator.*

The lady's prayer, Columba spurned,  
The wind blew fresh, the bark returned,  
But legends hint, that had the maid  
Till morning light delayed,  
And given the Saint one rosy smile,  
She ne'er had left his lonely isle.

Although on a clear day we could see the flat land of Iona, lying like a cloud upon the horizon behind the dreaded Torrens rocks, it was long before we ventured to face the Atlantic waves and visit its shores in our little yawl of 18 feet keel, which we had brought over from Gothenburg in Sweden. Yet, as the years passed by, we had turned many a longing eye thither, always hoping to make it a summer's excursion, when sea and sky should seem sufficiently settled and the wind favourable. It was not, however, till last June<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Good weather was not the only essential to such an excursion ; another necessity was that we should be alone. Our visitors in general had a Jewish horror of the sea, especially taken in connection with our open

that we found the fitting opportunity to do so. After some days of storm and heavy swell, the weather at last assumed a very settled look. It was mid-summer, the light was long, or rather there was no darkness, so we set off one morning in our strong and able, but strangely-rigged vessel, for our long sail. The sky was blue, the day magnificent, and as we dashed through the waves, which near the Torrens rocks were awfully grand, I confess that I looked anxiously ahead, to see when we might hope for calmer water. Not that we were in any danger, so long as we kept well off the rocks and their treacherous reefs, but the roll was so great that the tops of the high mountains of Mull disappeared from view as we sank from the long swell into the trough of the sea. As we neared the coast of Mull, at whose south-western point Iona lies, the island which we had left, faded and lessened behind us, although the dome-like masses of the Paps of Jura seemed to increase in height in the blue distance towards the south-east, as they rose over its lower and nearer out-

boat. Some found it grand and even beautiful when viewed from the dry land, but few would have enjoyed the prospect of going forth upon it as did St. Columba, and we his poor successors. But our "birlinn," for such in truth it was, though "a brute of a boat," as Donald called her, built coarsely, put together with wooden pegs, and very heavy, was a splendid sailer, provided there was half a gale on, and she was not expected to beat into its teeth.

line. The gulf of Coirievreachan, and the bald round rock of Scarba opened up towards the north, and the rugged precipices and granite cliffs of Mull approached nearer and nearer, as we held our course steadily on, over the rolling billows of the open ocean. At last we came in sight of the isle of our pilgrimage, and sailing into the calm waters of the sound, saw the familiar square tower of the cathedral, set in a little plain of living green.

Which of you children, I cried, can repeat those beautiful lines of Sir Walter Scott's, in the "Lord of the Isles," which describe so well this very scene? For yonder are the ruins of Iona, and farther to the north, like a little cloud on the horizon, is the rock of Staffa, where is the famous cavern, formed, like the coast along which we are sailing, of regular columns of black basalt. Listen, while I say it to you, altering the direction of the wind and the islands to suit our course.

"Merrily, merrily, goes the bark  
On a breeze from the westward free,  
So shoots through the morning sky the lark,  
Or the swan through the summer sea.  
The shores of Mull on the northward lay,  
And Islay dark and Colonsay,  
And all the group of Islets gay  
That gird famed Staffa round.  
Then all unknown its columns rose,  
And dark and undisturbed repose



The cormorant had found ;  
And the shy seal found quiet home  
And weltered in that wondrous dome,  
Where as to shame the temples deck'd  
By skill of earthly architect,  
Nature itself, it seemed, would raise  
A minster to her Maker's praise !  
Not for a meaner use ascend  
Her columns, or her arches bend ;  
Nor of a theme less solemn tells  
The mighty surge that ebbs and swells,  
And still, between each awful pause,  
From the high vault an answer draws  
In varied tone, prolong'd and high,  
Mocking the organ's melody.  
Nor doth its entrance point in vain  
To old Iona's holy fane,  
That Nature's voice might seem to say,—  
' Well hast thou done, frail Child of clay !  
Thy humble powers that stately shrine  
Task'd high and hard—but witness mine !' ”

Our Highland boatman was, as you may suppose, little interested in poetry, however beautiful or appropriate. When we repeated poetry, or sang songs, he seemed mostly impressed with wonder that we could remember so much, and would exclaim with a subdued air, when we had finished, “It's *awfu'* !” meaning that to remember so much was *awful*. On this occasion, he profited by the smooth water and the calm sweet evening, to recall certain memories of his early days, never written

down or made into poetry, when he spent his summers, fishing lobsters, with a neebor lad from Colonsay, in the sounds, and on the reefs over which we were then sailing. "Do you see that roun' lump behind the ruins?" he asked, "That's Dunee, you'll mind it in the song, 'Hel me sees.'"

"What's that song about, Donald?" said Sylvia.

"Oh! it was Ruari or Rodger, a droll<sup>1</sup> fellow, that was taken away by the fairies to Dunee, and when the rest of the folk went after him, he was got dancing to their fiddlin' in the hollow of the hill up there."

"But what are the words?"

"O they're just nonsense—

'I look up and I look down  
Not a bit of Rodger at me,<sup>2</sup>  
When I reached Dunee  
Where was the speaking,  
Every one was putting on the fiddle,  
A hearty tune to Ruari.'

He then sang us this fragment, which was all he knew—

"Hel me sees, hel me suas  
Sarog ball dho Ruari agum  
Hel me sees, hel me suas  
Haro ball dho Ruari.

<sup>1</sup> The Highlanders mean by "droll" half-witted, or as the Lowland Scotch say "innocent."

<sup>2</sup> This appears to be a literal translation of a Gaelic idiom—"at me" was often so used. "Not a bit could I see Rodger" is the true sense.

“Nuari raynoch me Dunee  
Sayum a sheen ee var-ee vrean,  
Hulufer a Koorufeal  
Hur port chreal dho Ruari.”<sup>1</sup>

We all joined heartily in the chorus of this merry song, but as we neared the land he became silent, and after a pause, began to tell us of a young lass that he had met at Iona, when lobster fishing many years ago. He praised her beauty, her black hair, her red cheeks, and her good sense, modesty, and kindness. When he was courting her, he himself was a tall handsome young fellow of four and twenty. They were to have been married, but in the meantime he was, he said, “keepin’ it blin’ to the ithers.” He wrote her a letter, but got no answer. After a while, for he was but a poor scribe, he wrote again. Then a letter reached him from her brother, to say that the young lass was dead. For years he never got over the shock. He went, he said, with a stab in his heart. “After that,” he remarked simply, “ye canna say but what there’s a power in love. It’s no but what I ha’e a good woman for my wife, but I’ll never forget Katie M’Ilroy.” This tale of true love, strong as death, made us all sad and thoughtful, and no sound was heard for some time, but the noise the vessel made slipping over the calm, clear waters of the sound. In a low plaintive

<sup>1</sup> Spelt phonetically.

voice, I broke the silence by singing a song which occurred to me as telling much the same story, set to an old and beautiful Highland air :—

AIR—"Kinloch of Kinloch."

"O Mary was modest and pure as a lily  
That dew draps o' mornin' in fragrance reveal ;  
Nae fresh bloomin' floweret in hill or in valley  
Could rival the beauty o' Mary M'Neill.

"She moved, and the graces played sportive around her  
She smiled, and the heart o' the cauldest wad thrill ;  
She sang, and the mavis cam' listenin' in wonder,  
To claim a sweet sister in Mary M'Neill.

"But ae bitter blast, on its young promise blawin',  
Frae spring a' its beauty and sweetness will steal ;  
The winter, the maiden found stricken an' deein',  
And spring spread the green turf o'er Mary M'Neill."

It was not till the evening that we dropped anchor in the little port of Iona, near one of Mr. MacBrayne's gaily painted, vermilion-coloured ferry-boats. As usual, we created much astonishment with our foreign-looking hull and queer rig, which resembled, however, the outline of the galleys on the old sculptured stones, some of which, no doubt, came like our own "Marie" from the Scandinavian peninsula.

The long, long twilight was beautiful. We spent it in carefully examining the abbey church and precinct, where, while the monastery : little

better than an assemblage of wattle huts, Columba and his successors achieved the greatest success over barbarism which the world has seen for more than a thousand years, the conversion of the northern nations. It was not, however, the pointed windows, the fair columns of the nave, the groining of the chapter-house, or the long lines of kings, warriors, and abbots buried there, which filled our minds with interest, but the few and simple relics of that earlier time ; the well out of which St. Columba quenched his thirst, the stone pillow on which he laid his head at night for so many years, and the little port in which he first cast anchor in his wicker boat. It was the thought that here this good and great man lived and died, that here he laboured and prayed, and that here, sitting on the wild seashore, he made hymns and sang psalms in honour of the Christian's God.

“ Delightful would it be to me,”

he breaks forth in one of his poems,

“ Delightful would it be to me to be in Uchd Aliun  
 On the pinnacle of a rock ;  
 That I might often see  
 The face of ocean.  
 That I might see its level sparkling strand,  
 It would be no cause of sorrow ;  
 That I might hear the song of the wonderful birds,  
 Source of happiness ;  
 That I might hear the roar by the side of the church  
 Of the surrounding sea ;

That I might search the books all  
That would be good for any soul.  
At times kneeling to beloved heaven,  
At times psalm-singing ;  
At times at work without compulsion,  
This would be delightful.  
At times plucking duilisc from the rocks ;  
At times fishing,  
At times giving food to the poor,  
At times in a *carcair* [solitary cell].  
The King, whose servant I am, will not let  
Anything deceive me."

So he sang, and so he laboured, till feeling that his death was approaching, this good servant of God consumed his strength in vigils, fasts, and dangerous macerations. In proportion as the end drew near, he increased his austerities. In the thirtieth year of his exile he heard the welcome call to go. "On Saturday of the following week," says Adamnan, "he went, leaning on his faithful attendant, Diarmid, to bless the granary of the monastery. Seeing there two great heaps of corn, the fruit of the last harvest, he said, 'I see with joy that my dear monastic family, if I must leave them this year, will not at least suffer famine.' 'Dear father,' said Diarmid, 'why do you thus sadden us all by talking of your death?' 'Ah well,' said the Abbot, 'here is a little secret which I will tell thee. To-day is Saturday, the day which the holy scriptures call Sabbath or rest, and it

will be truly my day of rest, for it shall be the last of my laborious life. Thou weepst, dear Diarmid, but console thyself. It is my Lord who deigns to invite me to rejoin Him.' Then he entrusted to his only companion a last message for the community. 'Dear children! let peace and charity reign always among you. If you act thus, Christ, who strengthens the just, will intercede on your behalf.' These were his last words. When the community sought him next morning, weeping at the sight of their dying father, Columba opened his eyes once more, and turned them to his children on either side, with a look full of serene and radiant joy. Then with the aid of Diarmid he raised, as best he might, his right hand to bless them all. His hand drooped; the last sigh came from his lips, and his face remained calm and sweet, like that of a man, who in his sleep had seen a vision of heaven."

Such was the life and death of the first great apostle of Great Britain. "We have," says Montalembert, "lingered perhaps too long, on the grand form of the monk, rising up before us from the midst of the Hebridean sea, and who for the third part of a century spread over these sterile isles, and gloomy distant shores, a pure and fertilizing light. In a confused age, and unknown region, he displayed all that is greatest and purest, the gift of ruling souls, by ruling

himself, and we can hardly turn from the tall old man, with his fine and regular face, his sweet and powerful voice, the Irish tonsure high on his shaven head, his long locks falling behind, clothed in his monastic cowl, and seated at the prow of his curragh steering through the misty archipelago and narrow lochs of the north-west of Scotland, bearing from isle to isle and shore to shore, light, justice, and truth, the life and conscience of the soul."

Next day we sailed away from Iona about noon, under a hot sun, and in almost a dead calm. Hour after hour we rose and fell on the ground-swell, now on the summit, and again in the trough of the great, smooth ocean rollers, often making little or no way on our journey home. It was then, with no little satisfaction, that about half-past six, after we had put away our spirit lamp and the tea things, that we felt the stirring of a little air on the quarter. To sleep all night in this little open boat of ours has been too often our lot in summer to seem a hardship. There is a tiny fore-castle, into which two or three children may stow, but the rest is open to the sky. Yet in the Hebrides even nights in June are chilly, although the wonderful light in the north never fades, and the morning is bright around, before you realize that it has begun to be dark. Breezy and fresh



as the night turned out, with the wind, ere long, almost in our teeth, we all slept soundly, and that in spite of the jumping and splashing of our short-keeled boat in a cross sea, and occasional sprinklings from the water which we shipped. It was not till between two and three that I waked for a moment, to find that we were under the cliffs of Kilchattan, six miles from home. Then it was, that we began to enter those difficult, and intricate passages, with hungry reefs and sunken shelves bristling on all hands, which cause the western coast of our island to be marked one continual "danger" on the chart. Here none but the seven sleepers of Ephesus, could have slumbered through the noise made by the constant tacking of the boat, forced by the skilful hands of our boatman, to spring away from the thousand perils known to him as a bold and successful lobster fisher on that wild coast. Oh! the thumping and the bumping, as the stout little craft splashed the water from her broad, round bows, and not till we reached our little *Port-na-lutch*<sup>1</sup> was there peace. Then, indeed, she ran into the long, narrow harbour with a free sheet, and on an even keel, and I got up to look around me, and saw the sheep and goats already pasturing on the rocks, and the eider duck and oyster-catchers

<sup>1</sup> So it is pronounced, *Port-na-long* it is written on the map; the genitive of *long* (a ship) is *luinge*.

dressing their plumage on the quiet waters of the port, and the soft, green shores glistening in the dew of a lovely summer morning.

We arrived at home about half past five, and after giving the children<sup>1</sup> great junks of dry bread to keep them quiet, sent them off for two or three hours to bed. After all, we enjoyed our breakfast at the usual hour next morning, and felt fresh for the duties and pleasures of the day.

Our excursions, however, were not always of so summer-like a character. As the season advanced, and the weather became broken, we often encountered fierce storms which tried the mettle of our staunch little boat, under double-reefed mainsail and foresail. Once we sailed home to Cardross by way of the Crinan Canal.<sup>2</sup> We were on the way the greater part of five days in November, and encountered storms which made the steamer twelve hours' late in calling at Scallasaig. Another time, in October of last year—a black, squally, rainy day it was—we crossed nine miles to Jura, to put a shepherd on shore, who had urgent need to keep an appointment to drive some sheep over the

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy and Sylvia, at this time aged twelve and ten years, good sailors, and hardy girls, accustomed to be out in many a storm.

<sup>2</sup> See further, page 73.

hills, from the east coast, to the ferry at Port Askaig, in Islay. That day, for safety, we had two men, and our run across at racing speed made us hope that for the return voyage all might be well, since the weather moderated as we neared Loch Tarbet, in Jura. We were even thinking of putting on more sail, when a fearful squall struck the vessel, and for several minutes she staggered and heeled, as if she would not rise again. The wind howled so loud that the voices of the men were drowned, as they shouted in Gaelic to each other directions as to shortening sail. The tops of the waves lashed to fury, poured into the boat. My little girl and I, the only passengers, seated in the stern, looked at each other and said nothing.

At length, for it seemed a long time, sail was shortened, then the wind lightened, and in almost darkness we sped home, afraid to take off too much sail, lest black night should overtake us before we reached the anchorage. The following sonnet was written before the remembrance of the peril had passed from my mind.

*Off the coast of Jura, October, 1885.*

Fierce Squall! that rushest o'er the waters white,  
Flying from out yon mountain corrie dark,  
Spare us, oh! spare us, and our little bark  
That quivers, anguished, 'neath thy giant might ;

And send us, Heaven! one ray of blessed light  
 That we may steer our course across the foam,  
 For dearly loved ones call to us from home,  
 And strain their eyes to greet us through the night.  
 "Heave up the foresail!" for the worst is past,  
 "Slack out the mainsheet!" for we needs must sail  
 Through the wild billows, on before the gale.  
 See, yonder, as we follow, free and fast,  
 The welcome moon behind her cloudy veil.  
 Courage! we yet shall meet our dearest ones at last.

But if our Island is pre-eminent in anything besides rocks and heather, let us give it the palm for getting up a *big wind* on the shortest possible notice. Donald, the boatman, had a way of calling a wild sea a "*saaft*" sea, which seemed very ridiculous to us, and *saaft* very often it was; so much so, that on that rough, open coast we were frequently hindered from sailing and fishing, and too often lost our stouies<sup>1</sup> among the breakers. The rugged heads of Dungallon and Uragaig, meeting the Atlantic as it hurls its mighty flood into the Sounds of Kilchattan and the Bay of Killoran, the white foam flying over the long line of cliffs where the seagulls and the cormorants make their comfortless nests in the spring, the booming of the billows as they rush hissing and boiling into the countless sea-worn caves; these were

<sup>1</sup>The floats of cork and wood to mark where the lobster creels are sunk.

sights and sounds which we would take a long drive in the gig to enjoy, when a big storm hindered us from going on the water. To the most of our visitors, indeed to nearly all of them, this kind of sailing on terra firma, behind a willing horse, over moors and up and down rocky hills, was ever, even in fine weather, more agreeable than adventuring out to sea; but in a high storm it was delightful to us all, as the cliffs were seven miles away, and after crossing the strand, and driving to the crofts of Kilchattan, we had still a ramble of miles, over the common pasture ground of the crofters, before we had explored their many windings, and steep ascents and descents.

For miles along that wild coast, there is not the sign of a natural harbour, and vessels sweep cautiously far to the south and west, to avoid the long lines of breakers and sunken rocks, which stretch their cruel reefs far out into the Atlantic. About four years ago, we had the worst gale—an equinoctial—that we experienced during our residence on the island. Our low-lying land to the south end, was like a submerged peat; clouds of foam, and, what is worse, of sand swept over us for three days, so that we could not stand the pain in our eyes, when we attempted to face the blast. The young ones were lifted off their feet, and thrown promiscuously about; slates rattled off; panes were broken in the windows; and, at the

very beginning of the storm, every green thing in the garden was swept flat or killed outright. I need not finish the picture by stating that great trees were blown down in scores; that touch must ever be wanting in an account of the Hebrides, for in our island, with the exception of one small rowan tree, which hangs in a cleft where no goat can reach, there is not as much wood to be had, as would make a pea-stake or a porridge-spurtle. That was a very bad season for the poor crofters. They were struggling, as usual, with their uncertain climate—doing their best to secure their corn, barley, and beans, with small force and imperfect means. The storm broke over them when they were thus at work. Their grain was in stook. Alas! much of it was carried in a whirl out to sea, or blown over the moors beyond hope of recovery. Sheep, too, are often knocked about with the wind. About a month ago, as we were sailing along the cliffs, towing two great logs of wood which had been cast up, some eight miles from our house, among the rocks, on a little gravelly beach, one of the boatmen showed me a shelf in the precipice, where, last winter, one of his father's sheep passed a fortnight, eating nothing but its own wool.<sup>1</sup> The poor beast had fallen over the cliffs from the common pasture of the crofters. "Never one of us," said the man, "could look near her,

<sup>1</sup> See further, page 112.

and we thocht she was deed. She got that licht, that wan nicht a wun' from the wast got up and caught her, and lifted her cannilie to yon bit o' green grass; and in the mornin' she was gotten eatin' awa at her laysure, no a hate the war!" The wind, however, does not always do so kind a turn, and many are the tales of shipwreck which the islanders have to tell. Yet, though we were not as bad as the wreckers in the old days, who burned lights to lure vessels to their destruction, we could not help having a keen eye to what a big storm would cast up on our shores. We always got something, if it were no better than a ship's pail or a cane broom; but to poor folk, who see little ready money, a barrel of paraffin or flour, a box of candles or of soap, is a boon for the whole winter. Indeed, one woman, who for a wonder had plenty of English, declared indignantly, "It wass sich a like thing that aall the wrecks were comin' on the south end of Islay, and the puir folk here needin' what they could get, far mair." Perhaps we sympathized, more or less, with her disappointment.

One of the best boat races we ever saw pulled, was between a Kilchattan crofter and our own Donald, for a keg of rum which had been left on a bare rock by the outgoing tide, and which with eagle eye each boatman had espied.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The vision of Highlanders would naturally be more acute to discover spirits than anything else. The Blue

Five years ago, you could get as much corned beef, tinned apples, and American flour in sacks, as you liked, at the store at Scallasaig, the only one on the island—all of which had been drifted from the wreck of an Atlantic steamer which had grazed a rock, and had been obliged to jettison her cargo in order to float off. Strange to say, the bags of flour were unspoiled, the sea water having caked the flour half an inch deep, and left the inside unharmed. Several of the islanders were on that occasion, victims to their conscientious regard for the Highland Sabbath. All afternoon they sat watching, with hungry eyes, a rock covered with this precious wreckage, but not till twelve o'clock at night did they launch a skiff, to land the goods. "There's many a slip," says the proverb, "'twixt the cup and the lip." One of those sudden storms blew up, for which we are so famous, and they had the vexation of seeing the treasure floated away in the direction of Tyree. Taught by so hard an

Ribbon movement has made little progress in the island, and the natives would hardly think the spirit of the following lines exaggerated :—

"Fhairshon had a son  
Who marrit Noah's daughter,  
An' almost spiled ta Flood  
By trinkin' up ta water ;  
Which he would have done—  
I at least pelieve it—  
Had ta mixture peen  
Only half Glenlivet."



experience, one sagely remarked that, "aifter aall, it would have been shust as weel to have been oot after it, as sittin' in the kirk an' on the rocks maistly a' day, thinking about it."

And then the drift wood brought by the gale! great logs of teak, and long bamboo canes from the Antilles, borne eastward to our shores by the gulf stream; and pine and spruce, fresh as they were launched on the St. Lawrence River, from the lumber regions of Canada;<sup>1</sup> masts painted red and white, with the iron bindings, blocks, and cross-trees still attached to them; oftener planks and logs which have rolled about for years on the ocean, covered with brown and white marine foliage, and drilled in all directions by sea shells. Sometimes these are sound, though battered; oftener heavy as stones, and almost worthless for burning, through being so long in the water. It was great fun for the young ones, and a mild excitement for us all, to collect this drift wood for our evening fire; reserving the good planks for stools, chairs, or other necessary articles, which we made at our joiner's bench in the store on wet days. Thus, in wild weather, when no fishing, sailing, or

<sup>1</sup> Of the eastward drift there is no doubt. Pennant mentions, in corroboration of the fact, that "part of the mast of the 'Tilbury,' man-of-war, burnt at Jamaica, was taken up on the western coast of Scotland." I quote from Pinkerton's valuable "Collection of Voyages," iii., p. 289. See also Hugh Miller, "Cruise of the Betsey," p. 46.

lobster creels was possible, we would enjoy a run over the island to search the bays ; or, if more poetically minded, leave the others to their sport, and, pacing alone the fine white sand of our beautiful beach, watch the great rollers break upon the shore ; or keeping higher up amongst the miniature hills and valleys of the sandy bents, midst the sweet Scotch roses, and the populous cities of the rabbit warrens, we would view the fury of the gale, breaking in white foam on the east, south, and west of our island.

“ There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture in the lonely shore ;  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea, and music in its roar.  
I love not man the less, but nature more  
For these, our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express, but cannot all conceal.”

But who shall describe the beauty of the Hebrides in calm summer weather, when the first bells of the heather begin to bloom, or earlier still, in the beginning of June, when the primroses and the sea pinks nestle in every nook and corner of the cliffs ; when all the little inland lochans, where the mallard, teal, and eider duck are breeding, are decked with water-lilies ; when the grass is thick and green and

studded with myriads of dwarf red daisies and bright yellow buttercups, the pasture of merry lambs, and shaggy, contented Highland queys. Beds of the yellow iris cover the damper spots, and the marsh marigold makes the streamlet gay with its large, handsome cups; the song of the blackbird and thrush re-echoes from the cliffs, and all is solitude and peace in the glen. Nay, listen, there is another strain, a young girl singing at her work among the lazy-beds of her father's croft. "O listen! for the vale profound, is overflowing with the sound."

"No sweeter voice was ever heard  
In spring-time, of the cuckoo bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas,  
Among the farthest Hebrides."

And this is the song that Mary Cameron sang. A song of sorrow for the massacre of Glencoe, and of warning from the piper, who rose betimes to urge the Macdonalds to fly from the soldiers of King William.

"Women of the glen," so the girl translated the song for me—

CHORUS.

"Women of the glen,  
It's time ye was risin'.

"It was me that rised early,  
It was you that had the need of it.  
They killed the herd that was following the cattle.

CHORUS.

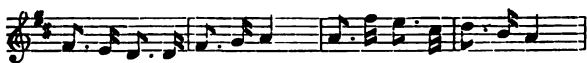
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"The cows they are lifted,  
 Their men are all stabbed ;  
 Ian Dhu, peroch Dhu <sup>1</sup>  
 Following the cattle.

## CHORUS.

"Women of the glen,  
 It's time ye was risin'."

Sing me another, Mhairi! These Gaelic songs sound sweet to me. Sing that one about the praise of hunting in Islay, and Fear a Bhàta, the boatman's song. I will join in the chorus. And so she left her work, not unwilling to rest among the brackens and the foxgloves under the shadow of the crags, where the air was laden with the scent of honeysuckle, and drowsy with the humming of the humble bees at work among the flowers.



Chì mi thall ud an Airdmhòr, Aite 'choilich dhuibh's a' gheòidh;



Ait' mochridhe 'us mo ghaoil 'S an robh mi sotram, ain-meil.

SEISD.—Hó ro Eileinich, ho gù  
 Hó, i rithill, hó i thù  
 Hó ro Eileinich, ho gù  
 Gu bheil mo rùn 's an Landaigh.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ian dubh, bhiorich dubh, means literally John Black, Sharp Black. The family name of the Macdonalds of Glenco is Clan Ian Abrach, that is, of Lochaber.

<sup>2</sup> Landaigh, an estate on the west coast of Islay, can be seen from the windows of Oronsay House.

Chi mi thall ud an Airdmhòr,  
 Aite choilich dhuibh 's a' gheòidh ;  
 Aite mochridhés mo ghaoil,  
 Far 'n robh mi aotrom ainmeil.

S'ged 'tha 'n Landaidh creagach, ciar,  
 'S moch a dh'éireas oirre 'ghrìan ;  
 Innis nam bàlaoigh 's nam fiadh,  
 'S gn 'm b'e mo mhiann bhi thall ann.

'S tric a leag mi air a' bhruaich  
 Earba ghlas a' mhuineil ruaidh ;  
 Bhiodh an liath-chearc leam a nuas  
 'Us coileach ruadh an dranndain.

'S tric a leag mi air a thaobh  
 An ròn ballach anus a' chaol,—  
 Eala bhàn a mhuineil chaoil,  
 A 's coileach fraoich nam beanntan.

### THE PRAISE OF ISLAY.

#### CHORUS.

“O, my island ! my love is in Islay.”

“I see before me Ardmòr,  
 The place of the black cock and wild geese,  
 The place where my heart and my love is,  
 Where I was light hearted and beloved.

“Supposing the land is rocky and gray,  
 Early rises on it the sun ;  
 A good place for cows with calves and deer,  
 It would be my choice to be there.

“ Many a time I made to fall upon the brow of the hill,  
 The fallow deer with the dun neck,  
 Also I would have the grouse  
 And the drumming moorcock.

“ Many a time he fell on his side,  
 The spotted <sup>1</sup> seal in the sound,  
 The white swan with the long neck,  
 The heath cock of the mountain.

## CHORUS.

“ O, my island ! my love is in Islay.”

So singing, and translating the songs we passed a sunny hour in the sweet Temple of the Glen —“ Tempull na-gluine ”—with its little ruined church now roofless and desolate; where once a priest’s garth and cell, with its dependent dwellings, rescued a plot of cultivated ground from the heather and peat of the surrounding moorland.

How often, indeed, throughout the whole island are such faint traces of an earlier time to be met with—a heap of stones, a little patch of green, a clump of nettles, the never-failing friend and relic of man; a ring of rowan or bour trees beside a little burn. These are the only signs, that in so many places remain, of the

“ Cheerful cottage in the glen,  
 The auld wife spinning at the sunny end,”

<sup>1</sup> This word *spotted* seemed difficult to translate; *changing coloured*, perhaps is nearer the true meaning.

the white-headed, bare-legged, children sporting on the lea, the stalwart men and women going to and fro with their back loads of peats, or their nets and creels. Half the population has now left the island within these hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Some are gone to America or the colonies, and some to seek work on the mainland of Scotland. Most have thriven and prospered, and are better off in a worldly point of view than they used to be under the peat-reeked roof-trees of their island clachan, but the same spring of human feeling, which leads us to look back with tender regret upon our vanished childhood, must sometimes cause the exile's tears to start, when, amid the virgin forests of Canada or the rolling prairies of Iowa, he remembers his old home on the wind and wave-swept treeless island of lonely Colonsay.

## SONG.

O, why left I my hame,  
 Why did I cross the deep?  
 O, why left I the land  
 Where my forefathers sleep?

<sup>1</sup> The population stands thus :—

1772,	between 500 and 600
1791,	718
1801,	805
1821,	904
1851,	933
1861,	598
1871,	456
1881,	395

I sigh for Scotia's shore,  
And I gaze across the sea,  
But I canna get a blink  
O' my ain countree.

O, here no Sabbath bell  
Awakes the Sabbath morn ;  
Nor song of reapers, heard  
Among the yellow corn.  
An' I canna see the broom  
Wi' its tassels on the lea,  
Nor hear the lintie's sang,  
O' my ain countree.

But in the old days, the people were not only more populous, it seems that they were more pious, for both islands were full of ecclesiastical buildings. At the present time, with half the population, the church is nearly empty. Even in summer there is often no English service, and those who attend it, such as the elders and the precentor, do not understand too much of what they hear. One day, for instance, we appeared at the door of the church at the appointed time, but saw no sign of a congregation. Before long we were met by the elder, and told by him that as the "Cailleach from Machrans" (an old Lowland woman from Galway) had come, the sermon would go on. Ultimately, a scratch congregation was got up, consisting of the schoolmaster, the minister's sister, and the aforesaid elder, who, with the



minister and precentor, gave a sufficiently clothed aspect to the bare, cold church. But in the good old days, our island, which is only twelve miles long, and not two miles broad, possessed no less than nine chapels and cells, many of which are now little to be distinguished from the mossy turf and heather around, but whose sweet-sounding names, "Kilavreedeia," "Killoran," "Kilavourie," "Kilchattan," "Kilakatrina"—remain to tell the tale of the piety of other days. It is still the custom, when the thirsty passer-by has drunk at St. Columba's well, upon the farm at Balnahard, to put down a coin or other little gift, and you may find them, when you come to quench your thirst, still there, held in their places by stones.

Beside the remains of the church of Kila-katrina, or cell of St. Catherna, at the extreme north of Colonsay, there is a water-worn, pear-shaped stone,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, which goes by the name of "Cioch nam Ban." The small end of this stone fits into the hole of a piece of pavement beside the priest's well or baptismal font. Here, in the old days, the natives used to turn this stone sunwise (*deiseil*), in the hole, and this ancient rite has left its mark in the ring, which forms a kind of neck to the stone.

Many other relics of the days when the Roman Catholic ritual prevailed in the Hebrides exist in the island, but even more interesting

and far more remote, are the traces of an earlier and ruder race than the builders of the chapels and cells. On several of the higher hills are still to be found fortifications of a more or less regular construction, called Dunes. In many cases, the top of the steep hill has been levelled away, to give space for dwellings and an enclosure for cattle ; and regular works of built stones surround the most accessible sides of the fortified hill.

The most elaborate of these dunes was on the top of a steep rock behind our house. It consisted of three circles of defence on the northern and eastern slopes, on which sides the rock did not end in an overhanging cliff. "Dundonall"<sup>1</sup> has a road cut in certain places out of the rock. On its summit are the remains of buildings, a stone hollowed out as if for pounding corn or bere, and a "kitchen midden," overgrown with nettles, ever the sure proof of the presence of man. This refuse heap contains an endless quantity of limpet shells, and bones split that the marrow might be sucked out.<sup>2</sup> Only once

<sup>1</sup> Dundonall reminds one very much of Dun Macsniochan or Beregonium, upon Loch Nell, but on a smaller scale.

<sup>2</sup> This is the common explanation of the fact that all the bones in such heaps are broken into small lengths ; but it has been suggested that as all bones, whether marrow bones or not, are so broken, this was done to permit of their being put into a pot to make soup.—Dr. J. A. Smith, "Notes on Mediaeval Kitchen Middens in

were we lucky enough to find a carved bone, and once the horn of a stag, an animal now extinct upon the island. Whether these comfortless places of abode were intended as a refuge for the terrified inhabitants against the constant incursions of the Norsemen, or whether these sea pirates built them as a retreat for themselves where they might store their ill-gotten booty, we cannot tell. Bleak and wretched indeed must have been the lot of the people who resorted to them, and surely a hard struggle for existence must have been theirs, in which the stern law of the survival of the fittest, must have been rigorously carried out.

Looking down from the summit of this dune upon the ruins of the priory below, the monks and their buildings seemed but of yesterday, and our own grey house near by, more recent still. The great features of the landscape, the rocky shore, the dashing breakers, the lofty hills of Jura, remain the same—and so we realize the truth of the Scripture, which says, “One generation passeth away, and another cometh; but the earth abideth forever.” There are no less than twenty of these dunes to be found on the two islands. Of course, but a small portion of these are regularly built of stone, and show the remains of buildings; most of them are “green

Iona,” in the “Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,” XII., p. 111.

dunes," consisting of loose stones and soil, and their outer faces are obliterated or demolished, the material having been used for other constructive purposes. Dun Aving, Dun Gallon, and Dun Coll are the next largest and important of those that remain.

The standing stones and circles in other parts of the island belong to the same age. Whether such megaliths were used as "Things," or open-air local parliaments, or whether they marked the occurrence of battles or the death of a hero, is not known.

Once we had a visit from a lady of great antiquarian taste, who had made drawings of such monuments all over Scotland. She had a theory that these circles were once roofed in, and that they served as dwelling houses, but this view did not commend itself to my judgment. Much, indeed, has been written by the learned as to their origin and use, but whatever these were, it is certain that such remains now form a weird and beautiful foreground to a view, whose middle distance is rocky moorland, and whose horizon is the blue mountains of Scarba and Jura, and the ever-moving sea.

When we contrast the old days with our own time, one is tempted to wonder whether, after all, the present way of living of the poorer inhabitants is so very different from that of the skin-clad and limpet-sucking dwellers in the caves

and dunes. Their ranges of wretched dwellings, scarcely possessing a window or a chimney, the long, irregular wave of the roof-tree's curve, and the low walls of rough unplastered stones, are to this day hardly to be distinguished from the hill side. But "man wants but little here below," and when one sees the happy content of the inmates of such dwellings, and their ready kindness to each other, one is tempted to wonder whether the thousand artificial necessities and endless and varied appliances of modern civilization, are a benefit or otherwise to our race. Certain it is, with no doctor on the island, and with none nearer than a day's journey, and with little communication with the outer world, the natives are healthy and contented, polite, refined, and wonderfully clean, in spite of the unpromising outside of these tumble-down dwellings. You never see a child sickly looking or with bandy legs, consumption is unknown,<sup>1</sup> and they are

<sup>1</sup> Professor M'Kinnon, himself a Colonsay man, points out in an article upon the health of the Western Islanders, that, whereas indigestion caused, by low and improper diet is common in the Hebrides, chest diseases are virtually unknown, unless they are brought from the mainland by strangers, or by islanders who have fallen into ill-health in the great towns. The healthiness of the islands was remarked by Bishop Leslie in the sixteenth century. Speaking of the Orkneys he says:—"To the doctour of medicine amang thame na man compleines, or makes his mane; because thay ar al induet with a gude constitutione, and starke complectione of body, and farther they haue the benifite of a

able to endure extremes of hardship, with a stoicism which puts to shame those brought up to wrap up in fur coats and muffs, and to live in well-warmed and well-ventilated houses.

But, indeed, when you consider that every cottar can cut as much peat from the hill side as he wants, that his rent consists of a few days' service in spring and harvest to the farmer, on whose land he dwells, that he can raise as many potatoes as he likes, and fish as many saithe, flounders, and sometimes other white fish, as his lazy nature permits him to get up and seek for, that he can save oil for his winter lamp,<sup>1</sup> that he has a handful of hens, and that he can spin and dye his own wool, much of which he can gather on the whin bushes about the shore, you can understand that the life of a cottar, not to say a crofter in the Hebrides, possesses many advantages over that

verie hailsume air ; to quhilkes, the labour, quhilke thay vse be sey and land, sa that it be moderate, gif thay apply, makis a zoung and lustie age."—"The Historie of Scotland," Part I., p. 64 (Scottish Text Society, 1885.

<sup>1</sup> Until the introduction of paraffin they burned oil in a cruise made by the blacksmith, with the pith of a rush for wick. The oil was got from the seal, or what is locally known as the king fish (Gaelic, *dallag*), and also from the seath, or coal fish (Gaelic, *piocach*). Boswell mentions the same thing in Coll.—"Tour to the Hebrides," p. 373 (1st edition. London, 1785). The "cruisean" and the preparation of the oil are described by the Rev. Alexander M'Gregor, of Skye.—"Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland," XIV., p. 145.

of a mechanic in a large town, whose rent, coals, taxes, doctor's bills, half-time or idleness, and a far higher standard of living, combine to make life a hard struggle, even for the respectable and well-doing.

When Niel Darroch, the lobster fisher and cottar, discovered two years ago that his family of eight or ten children were something cramped for room in his unplastered hut, he gathered some stones which were lying not twenty paces away, sent a message to the neighbours, laid in two bottles of whisky, and a few loaves of bread, and in one day the addition was ready for thatching.<sup>1</sup> At the going down of the sun of the next day, the bent was roped and made fast with stones, and the family installed under the new gable. But Neil is a man of exceptional energy. Kate M'Gilvray, whose fire is on the clay floor, has long wished a grate to burn her peats in. Last year I presented her with an old fashioned little grate, made of nothing but three bars bent into three sides of a

<sup>1</sup> If you want to give an island family a treat, present them with a loaf from your supply which comes by the weekly steamer. Although there is little sweeping and less scrubbing to do in a hut with a clay floor, there is always one occupation to take up the time and strength of the housemother. This is endless and daily baking of scones and cakes, to feed the hearty and clamorous appetites of the household. The sack of meal and flour must never be awanting to "keep the hoose," or else the bairns will have to go supperless to bed.

square, and she had further the offer from an obliging mason, that he would build the cheeks for this, if she would only find the materials. But though she dwells in a rocky land, and heaps of stones lie on the beach below her habitation, not one of her family has, up till now, gathered one single chuckie stone for this purpose. "If yon lazy rascal," said Angus, pointing to Kate's brother, "had shust put wan in his oxtar every day when he cam up the brae, the heap wad hae been lang syne gaithert!"

But they are a pleasant, kindly people in the clachan at Balleraomim Dhu, and as the day is fine, let us take a sail this afternoon, and pay them a long-promised visit. It is but a few minutes and we are all aboard the boat, and after beating against the west wind out of the port, and battling with the breakers at its mouth, we put about, and leaving Ardskenish, are glad to enter the still waters of the sound, which at high tide seems to be an inland loch between the northern island and our dependent isle. From this point onward, the water is smooth, for now we are under the lee of the land, and have done with the wicked breakers of the wild west coast. Slowly we slip along the land-locked sound, in which we seldom sail, but are constantly obliged to cross at low tide in the gig or a cart. Now we are almost passing over the site of the old sanctuary cross, and



in a few moments more we have sailed over the deepest part of the strand, where we have so often felt such anxiety in crossing with wheels, when the south-west wind was driving in a racing spring tide. A few moments more and we have opened the pleasant fields and white-washed house of the farm of Garvart, sole trace of humanity in a wild and desolate scene, where rocks and heather and green grass form a foreground, hemmed in by barren and naked hills. Inland, though this view is, there is not a bush or tree to be seen. If we could follow the road across the strand northwards, through the sweet Temple of the Glen, we might see hanging in the clefts of the steep rocks, a few rowan and hawthorn trees, at whose base stunted ivy and honeysuckle strive in summer to cover the grey schist rocks, but these are hidden from us, and as we glide on, we observe instead, sharply defined on the left hand, the beak-like profile of the "Hanging Rock," which in the scarcity of wood took the place of a gallows in the olden time. In this airy situation, it is said, that many an offender was hung in the olden time, the last victim being an unpopular factor of the then Duke of Argyle. At a short distance to the east, on the same level, there is a small cave, now used by sheep and goats as a little shelter. Thither on a certain day in spring-time, children still climb to make a fire, and fry pancakes, taking a pleasant

holiday as children ever love to do. Donald Saighdear (Soldier), a worthy man who had seen long service in India, and who had acquired much knowledge of the world in his wanderings, had discovered for himself that it was on Easter that these pancakes were fried. The islanders themselves had no idea of the meaning of this old custom. "Many a time," said he, "when I was a boy, I went up yonder to the cave, and had a fine holiday with the neighbour's weans—a sheltry place it is."

Here then, in a presbyterian atmosphere, was a curious relic of the old monkish days, when, as we learn from the rule of St. Columba, "the pascal solemnity was their chief festival, a time of special joy and gladness, and the period of the greatest indulgence of the year." It is small wonder, however, that traditions are hard to die out, and that changes come slowly in a corner where they have only a weekly steamer, and where they still hold old year's day, and old Hallowe'en. As we talk of these things, we are sailing smoothly on, past Traigh Ban, the lovely white beach with the crescent curve and the scallop shells; out of the eastern mouth of the strand, and on to Balleraomim Dhu, where on a steep hill side stands a little clachan, a farm house, and Kate M'Gilvray's cottage, with its back to the hill, and the indispensable stack of peat at the gable end. In spite of a splendid

natural drainage, there is in front a fearful and wonderful hole, over which, the south-west wind, fresh from the fields of ocean, blows and wafts (thanks, kind wind !) the flavour of limpets, stale fish, and other unutterable odours away.

We enter ; a cry of welcome rises from the hut ; but nothing can we see, the peat reek is too dense, our eyes smart, we cough and are driven back to the door again. The fire is on the floor : the chimney hole above it, with a stout tarred rope dangling down, to lead up the smoke, and to show where if it had a mind it might find an exit. The walls are black as night, and the rafters are hung with pendants and festoons of shining peat reek.<sup>1</sup>

They support a covering of turf and bent, bound with heather ropes, which keeps out the rain wonderfully well. As to furniture, there is a very small dresser with a little delf, a wee kist, a bed, above which the hens roost, the bedding of which, however, seems clean and white. There is no table, but a little shelf in the window, and such a funny window, a mere hole, with four little panes set in, one broken and stuffed with rags, one with a glass bull's eye, and two filled with pieces of wood. The rest of the furniture consists of two or three little stools

<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more antiseptic than this said peat reek. Most healthy, if not pleasant to strangers who have been brought up without it.

and two logs of drift-wood on either side of the fire, supported on a few peats by way of legs. Kate's principal chair was made of natural scrub wood twisted by nature into the shape of a seat with arms.<sup>1</sup> The words of the old song came into my mind, as these various objects loomed through the smoke—

“I hae a house on yonder muir  
Three sparrows micht dance upo' the floor.”

There was indeed barely room to turn round. In this hut the mother, four children, and two brothers, the latter of whom slept in an unseen recess, lived a healthy and happy life, and here it was that the late Campbell of Islay, heard from a M'Gilvray now dead, his long-winded story of the “Knight of the Red Shield,” which you will find in volume second of his most interesting “Highland Tales.” Here also, out of a hole in the ground, it is said that the piper came to the light of day, who entered the bowels of the earth on the western cliffs of the island, through the cave known as the “Piper's Cove.” Duncan, whose shaggy white hair, long, curly beard, and coat of many patches, gave him an appearance half

<sup>1</sup> I begged for this curious little “piece,” which was hardly bigger than a child's chair. I have it now, but unfortunately the owner in an access of zeal, scrubbed it before presenting it to me, and the ebony blackness is much destroyed, but the flavour of the peat reek will never leave it.

venerable, and half absurd, is a narrator of Gaelic stories only second to his late father. Several of these connected with the island I have noted down, after getting them translated by one who understood English. I give two here in a very unadorned and abridged style, to serve as specimens of a class of tales, now much in request by those who seek to find the origin and springs of history among the traditions of primitive peoples.

## STORY I.

There was once a man lived at Balnahard. He was a humpbacked man. He left his house on Hogmanay, meaning to reach Scalasaig to buy what he needed for the New Year. As he was passing a green knowe above Killoran bay, he suddenly came upon the fairies dancing on the hill side. The words of the tune to which they were dancing were, "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday." He looked at them in great astonishment, and saw that there was something wrong with the reel—it would not go right—it was out of tune and time. Suddenly he cried out "*Wednesday!*" and the fairies at once took up the words and sang, "*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.*" The dance then went on all right, and when it was done, the hillock opened, and the fairies went down under the ground, taking the man with them.

To reward him for his kindness in helping them with their dance, they resolved to take off his hump; and this they did, and sent him, with their thanks, back to the world again, a straight-backed man.

At Garvart there lived another man, who was likewise humpbacked, and he heard how the fairies had helped the other man. A year after that time, he met the fairies dancing merrily, as he was passing the Temple of the Glen. He hoped, of course, to get their assistance too, and taking his lesson from the first man, he cried out "*Thursday!*" But unfortunately this word put them all wrong, though they were right before, and they stopped dancing. They were very angry, and laying hold of the man, took him underground to consider what punishment he should get for the harm he had done. Their decision was to have the hump taken off the back of the Balnahard man and to put it on the top of his own. So instead of getting rid of his hump, as he hoped, he was burdened with another, and was in a worse case than before.

## STORY II.

There was a Lord from Lochlin<sup>1</sup>, and he wanted to marry the daughter of the Lord of Colonsay. Her father said that she would not get him till he would stay three days and a night in the whirlpool of Coirievreachan.<sup>2</sup> So he went away, and asked all the maidens of Norway to give him their hair to make a rope to moor the boat in Coirievreachan. The maidens must all be true, or the rope wouldn't hold. They were all true but one, so the rope held for two days and two nights, but the third night it broke, and the Lord was drowned, and never married the girl after all.

Amidst the childishness and rubbish contained in these and similar tales there is much that is interesting, and often a good moral is to be found. For instance, in the story of the maiden's hair and the whirlpool, we are told by a parable that fidelity can conquer every difficulty and danger,

<sup>1</sup> Lochlin means Norway in Gaelic. All the adventurers who came from the Baltic, or from the Northern Seas, and the countries bordering upon them, whether Norwegian, Swedes, Finlanders, Russians, Livonians, Poles, Pomeranians, Danes, Finlanders, or Icelanders, were by the Irish and Hebridian Scots called *Lochlinich*. John Macpherson, "Critical Dissertations," p. 261 (London, 1768). The author was minister of Sleat, in Skye.

<sup>2</sup> Coirievreachan (Coirebhreacain, cauldron of the speckled sea) can be seen between Scarba and Jura, about 15 miles to the north-east of Balleraomim Dhu. The popular etymology is cauldron of Bhreachan, the Scandinavian prince referred to in the story.

and that the least lapse from virtue may be followed by fatal results. In the first story the moral is not so apparent, but resolution and ready wit are made to succeed when stupid and servile imitation fails, and fails doubly ; and a better lesson perhaps could not be taught. In many other stories the creed of the people is shown to be that wisdom and courage, though weak, may overcome strength, and that the most despised is often the most worth. I confess that after reading, say twenty minutes, at these tales, as collected by Campbell, I never failed to feel my intellects hopelessly confused, and the effect is still worse when they are told by word of mouth.<sup>1</sup> They seem to have neither beginning nor middle nor end, but the two which I have chosen to give here, must be allowed to be beautifully perspicuous ; and as I have freed them almost entirely from the repetitions and vagueness of the spoken tale, they must not be taken as typical examples. Of course, similar stories are found common to all languages, and the brothers Grimm have led the way by moulding nursery tales and confused,

<sup>1</sup>The effect is something like Dr. Johnson's wicked description of a learned work on "Gaelic Antiquities"—"You might read half-an-hour, and ask yourself what you had been reading : there were so many words to so little matter, that there was no getting through the book."—"Tour to the Hebrides," p. 247 (1st edition. London, 1785).



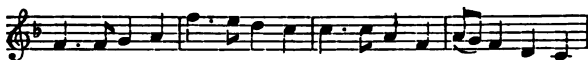
long-winded folk-lore in general, into a form fit for the studies of mature men and women, and raising it to the rank of a separate and important science. Thus these simple tales, dross in the eyes of some, turn into fine gold in the crucible of those whose art shows how through them we may discover the origin of the language and history of the early peoples who inhabited our islands.

Before leaving the little clachan on the hillside, we paid a visit to the other families living there. One of the huts was the dwelling-place of a very aged man, Malcolm Gorm, whose years numbered only two less than the century. For the last eighteen months he has been bed-ridden, and we found him lying in a clean bed with a jug of flowers beside his pillow in a very small room. His face wore a rosy, contented expression in spite of the marks of great age. We tried to speak to him, but he had not one word of English, but when it was explained that we proposed to sing a Gaelic song to cheer him up, his face lighted with a pleased smile, and he accompanied the measure with hands

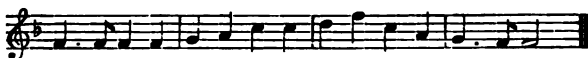
“ Long and lank and brown,  
As is the ribbed sea sand,”

while all the rest joined with us in the chorus.

GUN CHRODH GUN AIGHEAN—THE  
TOCHERLESS LASS.



Sings.—Ged 'tha mi gun chrodh gun aighean, Gun chrodh laogh gun chaoraich agam ;



Ged 'tha mi gun chrodh gun aighean, Gheibh mi fhathas òi - gear grin.

Fhir a dh' imicheas thar chuantan,  
Giùlain mìle beannachd uamsa  
Dh' ionnsaidh òigeir a' chuil dualaich,  
Ged nach d'fhuair mi e dhomh fhéin.

Fhir a dh' imicheas am bealach,  
Giùlain uamsa mìle beannachd ;  
'S fhaod 's tu innseadh do mo leannan,  
Mi bhi 'm laidhe so leam fhéin.

'Fhleasgaich thàining nall a Suaineart,  
Bu tu fhéin an sàr dhuin'-uasal ;  
Gheibhinn cadal leat gun chluasaig  
Air cho fuar 's g'am biodh an-oidhch'.

Nàile ! 's mise 'tha fo mhulad,  
'Us mi tàmh 's an t-seòmar mhullaich ;  
An leannan bh'agamsa an uiridh,  
Sann tha 'n diugh rium cùl a chinn.

Nàile ! 's mis' tha dubhach, déurach,  
'N seòmar àrd a fuaghal léine,  
Chaidh mo leannan do *Jamaica*.  
'S ciod am féum dhomh 'bhi 'g a chaoidh.

CHORUS.

Though I've neither cows nor cattle  
Yet I'll get a braw, young man.

*To the Messenger.*

This man is going o'er the sea.  
He will take my thousand greetings  
To the curly-headed fellow,  
Though he never may be mine.

You'll be climbing up the corrie.  
Carry thousand greetings to him.  
You may tell my handsome sweetheart  
That I'm waiting here my lone.

*To her Lover.*

Handsome lad, come ower from Sunart.  
A right gentleman you must be.  
I could sit and talk beside you,  
Were the night wind ne'er so cold.

*To Herself.*

I am sad, and very lonely,  
Working weary in my chamber.  
Last year's sweetheart,—must I say it?—  
He has turned his back on me.

O but I must weary for him,  
Sewing in my little chamber.  
To Jamaica sailed my sweetheart.  
What need I grieve though he's gone?

Though I've neither cows nor cattle,  
Yet I'll get a braw, young man.

Days in October are not long, and the sun westering behind the hill, warned us that we must not delay too late at Balleraomim Mòr. The sail home was an ideal one. Wind and tide were with us, the sky blue, the brackens, now

frostbitten, lighting up the hillsides with hues of orange brown; the air clear, but not cold.

We talked together, as we slipped along through the strand, of old-world stories, and of the tales and superstitions still believed in by the people of the island.

“Did you ever see a ghost, Dugald?” I asked. “Not very often,” he answered, evasively. “Had you ever the second sight,” I insisted. “Tell us what you heard and saw?” “Well, I saw *lights*, but everybody here sees lights. But wance I got a frecht. It micht be eight years ago, when I was in the packet.<sup>1</sup> It was a warm nicht, so close that I could hardly breathe, and so calm that you micht have heard a wee bird that would jump oot on the road, and it was very dark, about the end of winter. It micht be between wan an’ two in the mornin’, and I wass comin’ doon the pier to get the packet ready to sail wi’ the first o’ the tide. It came over me all at once when I had got the length of the big gun on the pier, as if I was squeezed between folk, and couldna’ get on, an’ I heard a great roar like groanin’ and greetin’. I got that hot and then shivery that the sweet was rinnin’ aff me, an’ I began to look about me, but I could see naethin’; an’ I nearly lost my senses, an’ got that weak

<sup>1</sup> A boat of fifteen tons, heavy enough to ferry cattle, which sails to Islay once a week to bring letters and passengers.

that I daurena' gang doon to the packet. But I did go on, but dear knows what way. But when the corp cam hame, two years after, it was Allan M'Ilroy's, that was drooned in the steamer off the Helensburgh pier, I knew the sound of the voice that was greetin', it was his mother's. She threw hersel' upon the coffin at that verra place by the big gun, where they laid it down, an' for years I could na put it oot o' my mind. There was no frecht in me at the time, and that was the only sicht I ever got myself, but my mother happened to be in the hoose her lane aboot an hoor afore sunset. She heard the sound o' a cairt with the voice of M'Intyre, that lives at Scallasaig. It was a calm day; the sun was shining before it went doon. She heard the voice of the neebors—there were thirty or forty men—and she was wondering what voices were speaking so low, and only the voice of the driver speakin' kind o' strong to his horse; and when the corp cam hame she knew the voice at once, and the men aboot the cairt. But all the rest were jeering at her at the time when she told it."

"Was this your brother who was drowned?"

"Yes,—Malcolm. He was twenty-four years old, and a beautiful singer, the bonniest o' us a'. But when ye'll get hame ye must hear the ploughman's story of the lady in the green silk gown that he saw walking up and

down on the leads of the porch above your window.”<sup>1</sup>

The sail home was, indeed, too short. When the talk ceased, I sang to our little party a song which the conversation had suggested to my mind. This was that sweet Scottish lyric, “Mary’s Dream,” which has long been a favourite of mine.

#### MARY’S DREAM.

“The moon had climbed the highest hill  
Which rises o’er the source of Dee,  
And from the eastern summit shed  
Her silver light on tower and tree,  
When Mary laid her down to sleep,  
Her thoughts on Angus far at sea,  
When soft and low a voice was heard  
Say, Mary, weep no more for me!

“She from her pillow gently raised  
Her head, to ask who there might be,  
And saw young Angus shivering stand  
With visage pale and hollow e’e.  
O, Mary, dear! cold is my clay,  
It lies beneath a stormy sea;  
The storm is past and I at rest,  
O, Mary, weep no more for me!”

<sup>1</sup> In relating these tales I have not attempted to imitate the Highland accent, much as to do so would add to the life likeness of the story. But to leave out a flavour of the broad Scotch would make the narrative unnatural. I have, therefore, introduced a little of this dialect, which, however, the Highlanders use less than the Lowland Scotch.

When we reached the western shore again, the sky was all aflame with gold; for the sun was about to plunge into the sea behind the distant column of Du'ir-teach Light. The clouds ranked tier above tier, and in fast-rolling masses were lit up with every shade of purple and red. Our imaginations, fired with weird and strange thoughts, could fancy that splendid shapes were moving to and fro in the sky. So, with the poet, I exclaimed in a kind of rapture—

“As when some shepherd of the Hebrid Isles,  
Placed far amid the melancholy main,  
Whether it be lone fancy him beguiles,  
Or that aërial beings sometimes deign  
To stand embodied to our senses plain,  
Sees on the naked hill or valley low,  
The whilst in Ocean Phoebus dips his wane,  
A vast assembly moving to and fro,  
Then all at once in air, dissolves the wondrous show.”<sup>1</sup>

If October days are short, the evenings are long, and the moonlight beautiful, and so when the day's work was over, we would often assemble in the drawing-room, that charming, low-roofed, harmoniously-toned room, and there, round a fire of blazing driftwood, we would spend an hour or more learning to sing Gaelic songs, the people of the farm sitting opposite and teaching us both the music and the words. These

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, “Castle of Indolence.”

we impressed on our minds, by carefully noting them down, spelling the unpronounceable Gaelic phonetically, to be sure that we were as near the original as possible. They were all fond of music, but they sang through their nose, and mostly out of tune. Although the directions for singing Gaelic songs are generally, *slowly* and *plaintively*, we found these in reality but ill-carried out; and our teachers often sang each on his own account and at his own pace, not to say in his own key. We have even heard a man with stout lungs, sing eight or ten verses with a chorus,<sup>1</sup> and never once strike a right note. In one instance, I heard a man in a large gathering sing a tender love song,<sup>2</sup> with a rapt expression of joy on his face, two whole tones above the key in which the most of the others were singing. Indeed, when I said to Angus, who had a high natural tenor, and some idea of singing into the bargain, "That's begun too low for you, Angus," he answered, "Och, it'll do; I'll pe singing it higher mysel' when I pegin." But this same individual did not enjoy being put out himself, for he complained of a neighbour in these terms:—"When I'm singing wi' Dugald, he'll pe puttin' his own turns on the nyairs,<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Every Gaelic song has a chorus repeated after each verse.

<sup>2</sup> "Mo run geal dileas."

<sup>3</sup> Nyair = air.



when I'm singing, I'm shust comin' against him as I wass comin' against a rock." <sup>1</sup>

The Gaelic songs certainly have a beginning, but they never seem to have an end. After thirty or forty verses, and the inevitable chorus between, the singer will break off with—"Haich, I have no more, an' I'm losin' the nyair!" <sup>2</sup> It was very difficult for us to get a good translation of a song. People who seldom or never read or write, naturally find it impossible to translate into another language; and they take no account of particles such as *of*, *though*, *for*, or *by*. Verbs and nouns you may get, but you must fill up the blanks for yourself.

Here, for instance, is a song "made for" the Marquis of Lorn, and set to the well-known air, "Funerie"—

CHORUS.

"Eerie nyarie new herd!  
My love to the Marquis of Lorn.

<sup>1</sup> Yet these peculiarities are, after all, more in consequence of their isolation from the centres of improvement than because of their race and language. I remember very well when the singing at Kilmacolm and Houston churches was much the same as that which I have just described. Indeed, when I was a girl, one of our favourite occupations was to practice this style, and we were contented when imitating the tone and quality of the precentor, we could at the same time gently let our voices down until we landed, at the end of five or six verses, in such depths as that we could go no further. This we regarded as a very amusing performance.

<sup>2</sup> Losing the air.

*Princess Louise loquitur.*

“ He’s a fine cheery young man,  
 No nonsense or pride about him,  
 I would rather tak’ him without a gold coin  
 Than any prince in a palace.

## CHORUS.

“ What’s a king’s palace to me  
 If the darling o’ my heart’s not there ;  
 Better than to be a king’s wife  
 Is to be the wife of Lorn.

## CHORUS.

“ News has come across the seas  
 That King Prooshia is not pleased  
 For being mentioning at aall  
 The gentle Merkiss of Lorn.

## CHORUS.

“ Then my ceevil mother said  
 Louise put aff y’re murnin’,  
 Me and Gladstone will arrange  
 Between us as to the man of Lorn.”

But the difficulty of getting at the precise meaning of this. “ Who is this song about ? ” No answer. Dugald looks at Jessie. Can’t tell. “ Is it about a lad or a lass ? ” Pause, then, “ He’ll pe a lass.” “ Oh ! who was she ? Where did she live ? ” “ She’ll pe Louise.” “ O, the Princess Louise, was she ? ” “ What’s the meaning of “ flaal og<sup>1</sup> ? ” “ He’ll pe takin’ out the meaning that he was a hearty young man.”

<sup>1</sup> *Flathail* is gay or princely, from *fath*, a prince or hero.

“Who says that?” “O, it’ll pe herself that’s saying it.” And so on.

But although some songs may continue for ever and a day, there are others which seem to be repeated within very narrow limits. “What’s that, Morag, that Angus is singing, while he’s mendin’ the creels?” “O, that’s a sang he’s aften singing. He says it was made for himself by a lass at Killoran, but all the words I ever hear are

‘Big plack Angus,  
Braw plack Angus!  
Its me that wishes ye was back,  
Safe in the packet again.’”

“But may be,” she added, for sharp tongues in women’s heads are found all the world over, “may be the lass did na make it for him at aall. He’s aye braggin’ that the lasses are daft about him. I dinna ken. He pelieves it himsel’.”

But if the singing be at times wild and discordant, what shall I say of the groans and grunts of the pipes, when the bag is filled up ready for action? Our piper, Hugh M’Neill, was a tall, hale old man, with rosy cheeks, and a very good musical ear, for he could sing the most difficult reels and strathspeys, in a thin, cracked voice. The pride of his bearing, as he marched, playing “Macdonald’s Lament,” at the head of a company of thirty persons, to meet me in the

drawing-room, during the pause before the supper of the ball in the granary of the farm, beggars description. The poor old fisherman of everyday life, seemed transformed into a bard for a royal feast, and I into the bright ladye of a moated castle, receiving the homage of a little court. In return for their courteous thanks, for the Highlanders are high bred, and graceful in their manners, I sang them, to the accompaniment of our sweet harmonium, two Lowland songs, "When the Children are Asleep," and a ballad of the Cuckoo,<sup>1</sup> which I was sure they would understand. When the company retired, and supper was over in the kitchen, the fun again waxed fast and furious on the granary floor. Between the dances the company, seated round the barn, which we had hung with turkey red and decorated with heather, beat time with their hands and took the chorus of the song, while the leader would often improvise a verse to suit the occasion or yield to some one else to do the like. So they passed the evening in harmless mirth, till, about one o'clock, the piper, tired out, cried them mercy, and took his way home, conveyed by the whole party for a mile, to the strand which he had to cross before reaching his hut at Kilchattan, six miles off. This was only one out of several such merry makings, but as this was to be our last season in Colonsay, I

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's—"When daisies pied and violets blue,"

invited the whole island to a concert and dance in the schoolroom at Scallasaig, as a kind of good-bye to the people, whom, for more than six years, we had learned to respect and to love. The evening was a delightful one for all present, and, the weather was still and fine. There was enough of music and dancing, and many kind words were said in Gaelic and English by the natives of the island. The good-hearted Inn-keeper, gave us hearty thanks for the entertainment, and his sister made an eloquent and beautiful speech in Gaelic, which I could feel, if I could not understand.

The minister, the schoolmaster, and others, did all they could to render the evening pleasant for the guests, and I, for my part, in the interval of the singing and dancing, read them a few lines, which I meant as a good-bye to them from us all, and which I shall add here at the close of this little sketch of our happy "Summers in the Hebrides."

#### WORDS OF GOOD-BYE TO ORONSAY.

We come, my friends, to say, Farewell !  
For we must hence o'er billows swell,  
And leave this sea-girt, treeless isle  
Where we have dwelt with you a while,  
Sharing with you your Highland cheer,

And mingling with your pleasures here.  
Much happiness has been our lot  
Among you, in this quiet spot ;—  
Joy that shall never be forgot.

We've climbed the rocks, and sailed the deep,  
And hung upon the giddy steep  
Where seagulls nest, and tempests sweep ;  
Near where Kilchattan's crofters dwell,  
Beside St. Chattan's holy cell.  
Or, if our steps would farther rove,  
We wandered to the "Heavenly Cove,"<sup>1</sup>  
All strewn with sand and white sea shells,  
And over-hung with heather bells.  
There we would rest, and watch the bay  
Where golden sands with waters play,  
And see the crofts of Uragaig  
'Neath rocks uprising, craig o'er craig ;—  
And view the ocean rolling free,  
To distant isle of low Tyree.  
Then up and climb the hill away  
To the north point of Colonsay,  
Where, 'neath its meadows and stackyard,  
Behold the farm of Balnahard.  
There we shall find a welcome free,  
Scones, butter, and reviving tea ;  
Thanks ! gentle Weirs, the courtesy.

<sup>1</sup> Uamh Neamhnach.

Returning when the dewy eve  
Calls the tired crofter work to leave,  
How sweet, reflected from the sky,  
On fair Loch Fad the shadows lie.  
Haunt of the timid coot and hern,  
Of wild duck, and the graceful tern ;  
Sweet loch ! encircled by the hills,  
And fed by mossy mountain rills,  
Where hidden in a leafy screen,  
Killoran<sup>1</sup> nestles all unseen,  
Remote in blessed peace, serene.

Yet here we must not pause, but go  
While lingers yet the sunset glow,  
And leaving Scallasaig behind  
No rest our willing steed must find,  
Till, on the margin of the strand,  
We near our own delightful land ;  
And in the closing light of day,  
Across a wide and watery way,  
Behold the Ben of Oronsay.

<sup>1</sup> Although the island is indeed treeless wherever exposed to the blast, there is a part of the larger island so protected as to be well wooded, and where there is a garden so shielded that semi-tropical plants like the myrtle and hydrangea grow freely in the open air. The woods and plantings are of small extent however. Since leaving Oronsay, I have observed on the island of Gigha, the hydrangea growing wild on the eastern shore, and near it, some acres covered with dwarf rhododendrons, mixing freely amongst the heather. The spot is just below the ferryman's house, on the south of Admenish Bay.

The strand is deep—Columba,<sup>1</sup> fly,  
 Spring tide is rising, night is nigh.  
 Press on across the deepening strand  
 That we may safely reach the land  
 Where loved ones wait us, and the light  
 Is shining for us through the night,  
 With store of comfort, warm and bright.

Such memories, and many more,  
 Of how we lived in days of yore,  
 We all shall carry from your shore.  
 The peat reek rising from the hearth,  
 The piping and the songs of mirth,  
 The dancing on the granary floor,  
 Climbing the ladder to the door.  
 Our vessel straining in the gale,  
 Close-reefed with every shortened sail,  
 While breakers raging white prevail.  
 The lobster fishing and the creels,  
 The eider ducks, the timid seals,  
 The piocach<sup>2</sup> hung up to dry,  
 For winter store a good supply ;  
 The mushrooms springing in the mead,  
 Where shaggy Highland cattle feed.  
 The driftwood cast up by the tide,  
 The goats upon the steep hill sides.

<sup>1</sup> Not the good Saint, but our horse—so named because like Columba he was tall, powerful, untiring, and good.

<sup>2</sup> The seath, or coal fish.



The sweet Scotch roses on the bent,  
Their perfume straight from heaven sent,  
Emblem of peace and calm content.

But most, our memory shall dwell  
On bless'd Columba's hallowed cell,  
And on the Celtic cross so fair  
Standing beside the ruin there ;  
Where lie in peace the happier dead,  
The soft, green turf above their head,  
A mossy, velvet, cover spread.

Once more, kind Highland hearts, adieu !  
Sad thought that we must part from you.  
May peace and plenty crown your store,  
May sorrow darken not your door !  
Where'er we go, where'er we dwell,  
Our thoughts shall burn, our hearts will swell  
When thinking on the past.—Farewell !

ORONSAY, *October*, 1886.





**ORONSAY PRIORY.**