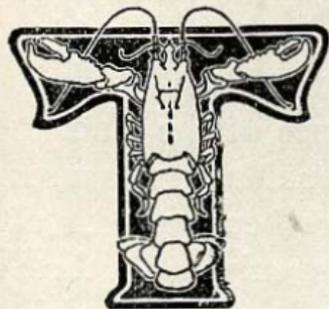


ROUND THE MAINLAND.

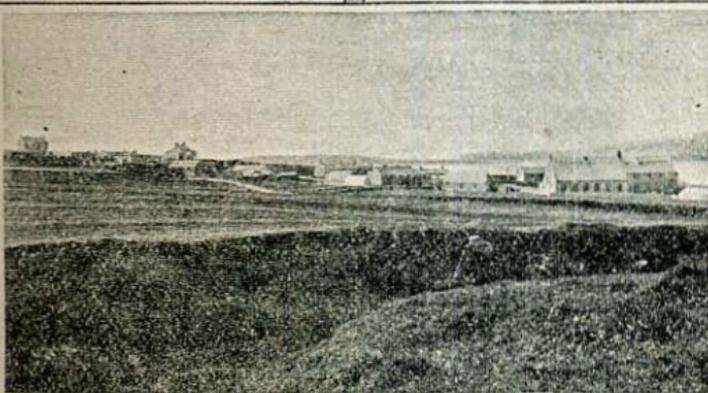
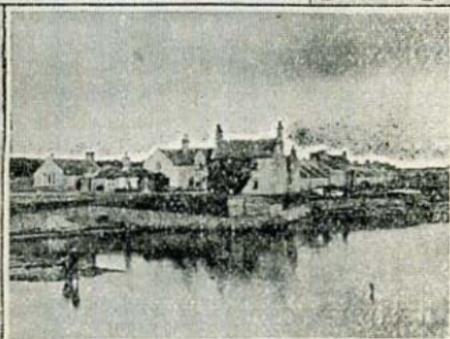
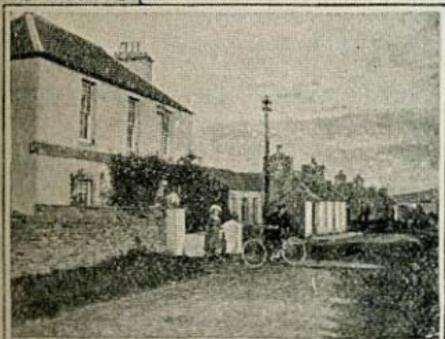
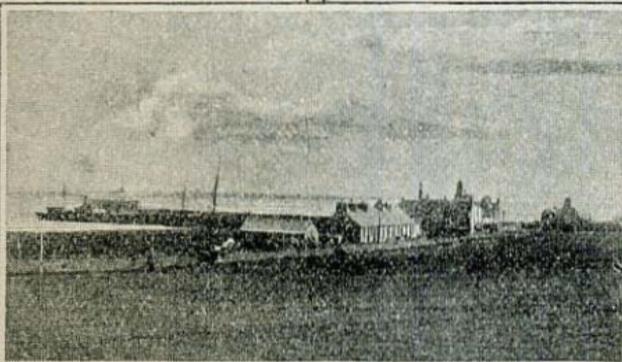
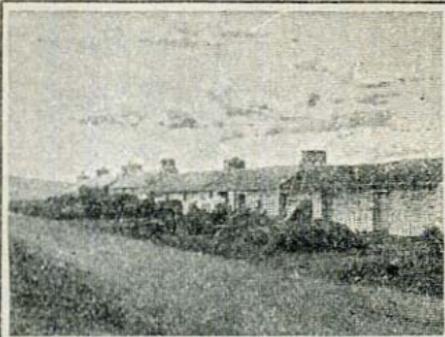
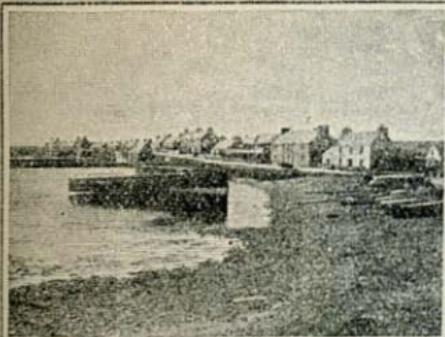
First Day.



THE best way to see the Mainland, and the only way to appreciate its extent and the variety of its scenery, is to make use of the excellent roads by which it is now traversed and encircled. On this tour the bicycle will be our best conveyance; and if we can secure the company of a congenial friend, we may spend a few days very pleasantly and profitably on a ride round the Mainland.

We shall begin with the East Mainland. Leaving Kirkwall by the Deerness road, we shortly afterwards find ourselves skimming down the long brae of Wideford—not Wideford Hill, but the farm of Wideford, about two miles south-east of the town. On our left is the wide expanse of Inganess Bay, with its beach of sand and shingle, where we can recall seeing on one memorable occasion a school of whales stranded after a great whale hunt: that was in our early school days, now rapidly becoming a part of the time known as “long ago.”

We next pass the long, low peninsula of Tanker-



Orkney Villages.—II.

1. St. Mary's, Holm. 2. Orphir. 3. Kettletoft, Sanday. 4. Finstown.
5. Balfour Village, Shapinsay. 6. Evie.

ness, which lies between Inganess Bay and Deer Sound. On its south side, between the loch and the shore, stands the Hall of Tankerness, its position marked out by one of those rare patches of dark green which indicate that trees may still be made to grow in Orkney under intelligent fostering care. The cliffs near Rerwick Head are worth a visit. There are several caves, one of which, tradition affirms, gave refuge for weeks to one of the Covenanters who were shipwrecked at Deerness in 1679.

After passing through the parish of St. Andrews, we reach that of Deerness. Deerness is literally a peninsula—very nearly an island indeed. The isthmus which joins it to the Mainland is not only narrow but low and sandy, and in former days mariners approaching from the south sometimes overlooked its existence when making for shelter, and came to grief accordingly. On this narrow neck of land is found an ancient mound or *haug*, which bears the name of Dingishowe.

Deerness is on the whole flat, the highest point in the peninsula, the Ward, being only 285 feet above the sea. Yet the view from the road, which crosses the centre of the parish, is very extensive. To the south we notice the island of Copinsay, formerly much frequented for gathering sea-birds' eggs, and its "Horse," a steep black rock rising high out of the water.

If time permits, it will be worth our while to cycle to Sandside, and thence walk along the cliffs to the Moul Head. The scenery here is fine, and we shall find the Broch, with its ancient ruined chapel, specially interesting. A church existed here before

the Norse period, and was doubtless the cause of the name *Deir-ness*, or the ness of the Culdee priests, being given to the district. Not far distant we see another object which recalls priestly memories—a gray stone pillar erected to commemorate the shipwreck by which two hundred Covenanters lost their lives when on their way to be sold as slaves in the American Colonies or “Plantations.”

The story is a dark and tragic one. There is some reason to believe that the shipwreck was not entirely an accident; it is said that the ship was not even provisioned for so long a voyage, and that the fate designed for the unhappy prisoners was not slavery but death by shipwreck whenever circumstances favourable for such an “accident” should arise.

On returning to the St. Andrews road we may strike off towards the south and make our way homewards through the parish of Holm. The most fertile part of this parish lies in a broad valley sloping towards the south, where the crops ripen early. As we descend into this valley, the mellow light of an autumn afternoon reveals to us a view of rare sweetness and charm.

Amid the river-like tidal stream of Holm Sound lie the green islets of Glims Holm and Lamb Holm or Laman, with Burray and the darker Hunda, and the imposing stretch of South Ronaldsay beyond. To the westward, Hoy rises in deep-blue shadow, reflected in the still surface of Scapa Flow. Over the gleam of the Pentland Firth we see the flat shores of Caithness, while the more distant peaks of the Sutherland mountains rise sharp and clear above the horizon.

But there are a few miles of road yet to cover, so we hold on our way towards the sea-shore, where the steep-gabled mansion of Graemeshall stands beside its pretty reed-fringed loch. A mile beyond lies the village of St. Mary's, with its pier and its line of cottages stretching along the beach; and after taking a passing glance at this well-known fishing-station, we turn our faces northwards. We have a long hilly ride in front of us here, and by the time we reach the end of it our interest in the charming views is not so keen as it was. Then comes the welcome change of gradient; we spin down the "Distillery Brae," and soon our circuit of the East Mainland is completed.

Second Day.

Our second day's circuit will take us round the central part of the Mainland, which is divided from the East Mainland by the isthmus of Scapa, and from the larger mass of the West Mainland by the lochs of Stenness and Harray and the wide isthmus between the latter and the Bay of Firth.

We leave Kirkwall by the "Head of the Town" and keep to the old Scapa road for about a mile, when we turn sharp to the right and soon begin the long ascent of nearly three hundred feet to Greenigo. This is followed by a corresponding dip down to the valley of Kirbuster, whose loch lies on our right; but as fishing is not our programme at present we keep to the road as it ascends once more, and soon find ourselves entering upon the broad fertile slope which forms the most thickly inhabited part of the parish of Orphir.

Westward we see the road stretching across this well-cultivated district, dotted with houses large and small, which gather here and there in groups and clusters almost ranking as villages. Time does not press, and we are out for the purpose of seeing all we can, so we decide to leave the main road here and take a by-road to the right which skirts the east side of the Ward Hill. It is fairly steep, and the riding cannot



Orphir.

be called good, but it has the advantage of bringing us within a mile of the Ward Hill itself, the top of which we shall find a pleasant halting-place.

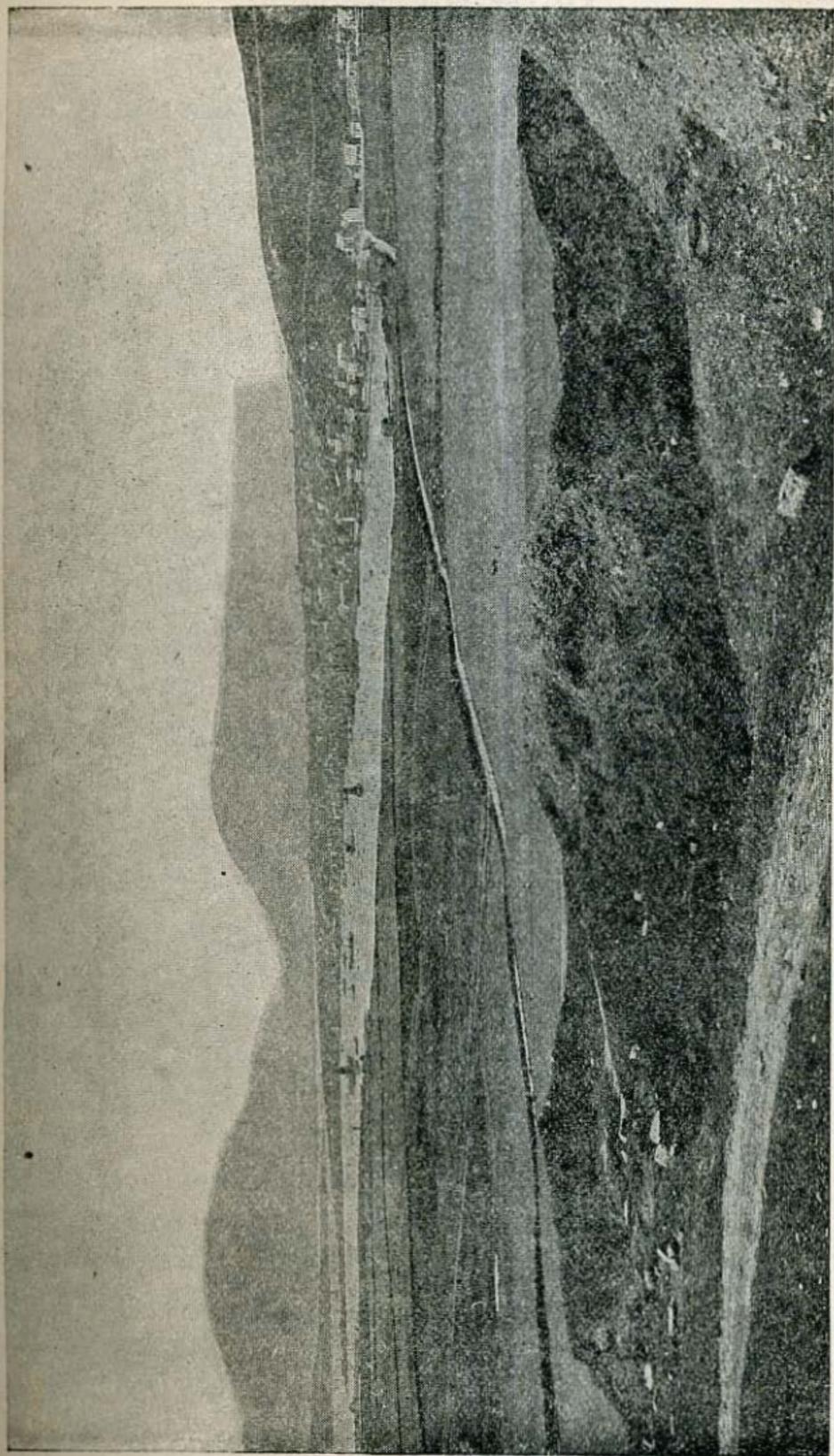
Leaving our bicycles by the roadside, we face a pretty stiff climb through luxuriant heather and bracken, and soon find ourselves on the highest of a group of hill-tops, 880 feet above the sea. If we are favoured with a clear atmosphere, the scene before us will amply repay the labour of our ascent.

The view from the Ward Hill is supplementary to that from Wideford Hill. Parts of the landscape to the east and north are shut out by Wideford Hill itself, by the long Keelylang ridge, and by the broad-backed mass between Harray and Evie. To the south the scene is somewhat similar to that seen from Wideford Hill; to the westward, however, the panorama now before us is unique.

Ireland, or *Ayre-land*, as it once was, sloping gently downwards to its bay, lies at our feet, a patchwork of farms and fields in varying tints of green and yellow and brown. Beyond it, the picturesque "western capital," Stromness, fringes its landlocked harbour, secure in the shelter of the protecting hills behind. To the left lies Graemsay with its lighthouses, an "emerald set in a sapphire sea," and beyond it the frowning cliffs and the purple ridge of Hoy dominate the scene.

Away towards the west the horizon line, more than thirty miles distant as we now see it, cuts sharp and straight against the soft blue sky. If we have a good glass, we may make out on this line, just above the town of Stromness, the Stack of Suleskerry.

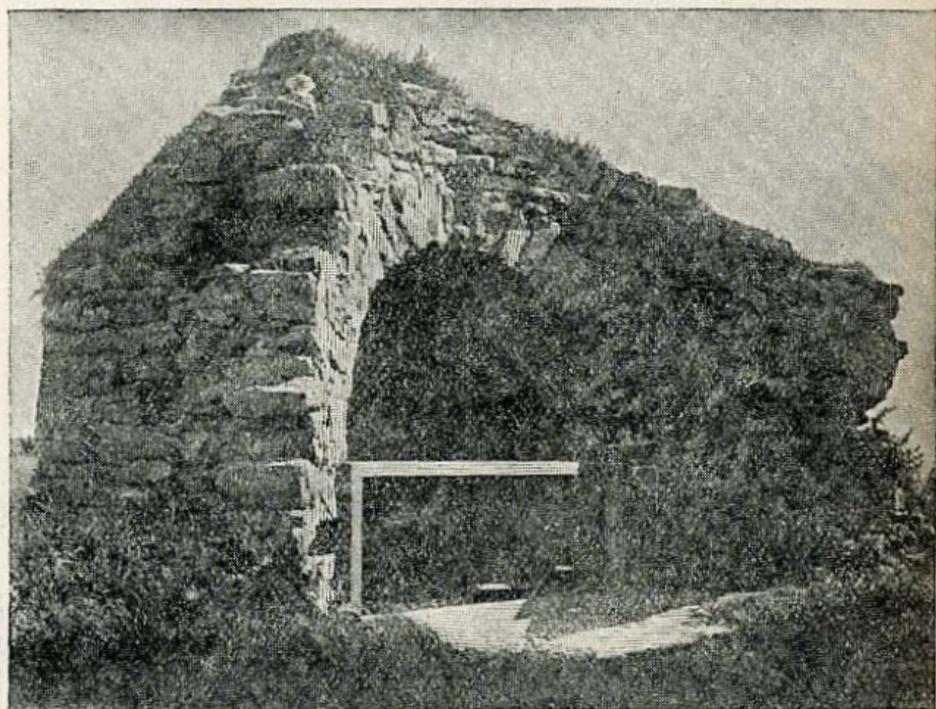
But our day's ride is yet mostly before us, so we descend from the Ward or "watch-tower," mount our bicycles, regain the main road, and continue our way through the smiling landscape which lies in front of us. Orphir was an important district in the old Norse days, and a residence of the Orkney Earls stood on the sea-shore near the parish church; and adjoining that church may still be seen part of a much earlier church, one of the few circular temples in this



Stromness from the east.

country which were built in the time of the Crusades on the model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. In the little cove sheltered by the Head and the Holm of Houton, some of King Hakon's ships found shelter during the winter after the battle of Largs, while the king himself lay dying in the ancient palace at Kirkwall.

After a particularly stiff ride over Scorriedale, we enter upon a long and somewhat uninteresting



Ruins of circular church, Orphir.

stretch of road through Clestran and Ireland, and at last reach the main road from Kirkwall to Stromness, close to the Bridge of Waith, which crosses the narrow strait between the Loch of Stenness and the sea. We can see just above this bridge the traces of a still older one, and the name Waith probably indicates that this was originally a "wading-place" or ford at low tide.

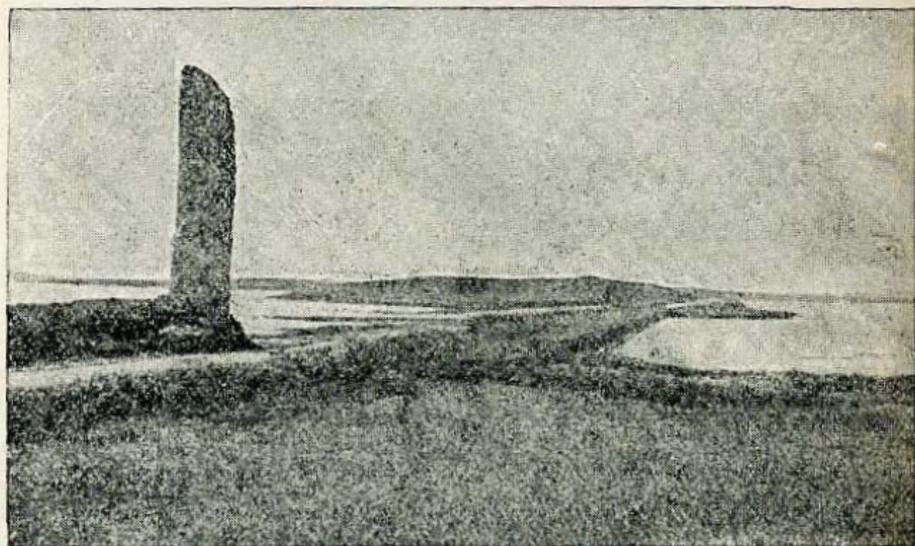
But we are not to cross the bridge to-day; we turn back towards Kirkwall to complete our tour of the Central Mainland. The road runs along the side of the loch, through the pretty district of Clouston, and past the comfortable hotel which has been erected there for the convenience of such summer visitors as are attracted by the trout-fishing of the loch. The largest trout ever seen was caught in the Loch of Stenness, and if the proverb is true that "there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," the same may yet be proved true of this loch.

We halt only long enough to obtain a welcome cup of tea, and then continue our ride. Less than a mile brings us to the road which leads over the Bridge of Brogar to the Standing Stones, and we decide on making a brief pilgrimage to this the most ancient shrine in the islands—if, indeed, it was a shrine. But as the afternoon is wearing towards evening, and we have been here several times before, we merely sit down on the short heather beside the circle long enough to let the mystery and "eeriness" of the scene sink into our minds and set us wondering silently what it all meant in the far-off days when it was new.

We need not wait here in the hope of finding out, so we ride back past the tall "sentinel" stone and the smaller circle of Stenness to the main road. Another mile brings us abreast of Maeshowe, and with the spirit of the past upon us we stop once more. We obtain the key of this famous chambered mound from the farmhouse opposite, in order that we may spend a few minutes more in "wondering."

There is nothing about Maeshowe, or even about

the Standing Stones, to attract the superficial mind, but to those who "wonder," and who can see things which vanished from outward view many centuries ago, those places are almost holy ground. They embody and embalm some of the deepest thoughts of a long-vanished people; and though we can hardly guess what these thoughts were, the monuments are sacred relics to us. They are milestones, we may say, marking early stages in the long advance of our race.



The Sentinel Stone, Stenness.

After leaving Maeshowe we face an incline just heavy enough to recall our thoughts to the present, and soon we are passing through the pretty glen which opens on the Bay of Firth. The patches of shrubbery and trees round Binscarth on our left give a pleasing variety to the scenery, and show us once more the possibilities and the limitations of our islands as regards the cultivation of woods.

The village of Finstown, the half-way house between Kirkwall and Stromness, has a beautiful

situation, which can be better appreciated from the hillside above it than from the road, and it is well placed for attracting a share of the ordinary business of the districts around. It has a prosperous look, and its name reminds us that it claims to be more than a mere village.

Before us on our left lies the wide, shallow Bay of Firth, or "The Firth," as it might more correctly be called, which gives its name to the surrounding



Maeshowe.

district. To the Norsemen it was the "Sea-trout Firth," and must have been important for its fishing. In more recent times it had a famous oyster-fishery; but that too has become a thing of the past, though by the exercise of a little foresight and public spirit it could easily be restored.

In the bay lie the Holm of Grimbister and the island of Damsay, or "St. Adamnan's Isle." The latter, as its name indicates, was the site of a Culdee monastery, and is mentioned in the later Saga story.

Damsay has also its share of the legendary tales which are connected with many of the old ecclesiastical centres in the island.

On our right the old Kirkwall road branches off, passing over the southern shoulder of Wideford Hill; and beside it, on a rising ground, we see the manse of Firth, the home of the soldier-poet Malcolm, whose father was minister of the parish. Soon our road bears to the left to avoid the steep, dark mass of Wideford Hill; we cross the broad stretch of Quanterness, and a bend to the right brings us once more in view of Kirkwall, lying beyond the Peerie Sea, whose still waters mirror the dark mass of St. Magnus, now gleaming with a dusky red in the glow of sunset.

Third Day.

Our third day's tour is of a different character; we are to make our way through Rendall and Evie to Birsay. As we shall spend the night there, our bicycles must be loaded with a few necessary articles; but old campaigners always march light, and our baggage is reduced to its absolute minimum.

The first stage of our journey takes us to Finstown, along the main Stromness road which we traversed yesterday. Then we turn sharp to the right, and cross the bridge over the mouth of the "Oyce," which reminds us of the Peerie Sea and its Ayre. The district in front of us, the "North Side" of Firth, consists of a broad slope, almost a plain, fringing the bay, and the steep escarpment of a long range of hills on our left. Most of this range is 500 feet in height, and parts exceed 700 feet.

There is a certain monotony about the road, due to its straightness; but there is really no reason why it should turn either to the right hand or to the left, so we pedal away, mile after mile. When opposite the Bay of Isbister we pass a very pleasing valley, that of Settascarth, through which a road crosses the long ridge into the parish of Harray. Then we reach the parish of Rendall, and find a long ascent in front of us, as the road runs straight up the "dale" whence the name of the parish arises. We pass between the high, steep ridge on the left and a group of hills on the right which lie between us and the sea, forming a broad peninsula between the Bay of Isbister and Woodwick.

When we reach the summit of this rise, we are quite ready to halt for a while and enjoy the new panorama which opens out to the northward. The inner group of the North Isles—Rousay, Egilsay, Wyre, and Gairsay—lie at our feet, as it seems; and the more distant members of the group can be easily made out. Rousay is the dominant feature in the landscape, and its steep brown hills, descending in step-like "hammars," make an impressive background to the green fringe of farmland and the liquid blue of the sea.

As we resume our way along an undulating road, we pass through a district which, despite its northerly exposure, seems able to support a large population, and numerous tidy cottages cluster here and there along the roadside. By-and-by the cultivated strip becomes narrower, the sandy beach of Aikerness gives place to the rocky shores of Burgar, and the road turns inland with a steep incline to dip down on the other side of the ridge towards the Loch of Swannay.

Here we shall find it well worth our while to make a somewhat longer halt than before, and, leaving our bicycles, we turn to climb Costa Hill, and to view the wild cliffs at Costa Head. From the hill we look down upon the mysterious green islet of Eynhallow, the "Holy Island," where the ruins of an ancient monastery have been traced, and round which more than the usual crop of legends has sprung up. A fair contrast it offers to the bold, rocky cliffs of Rousay just beyond.

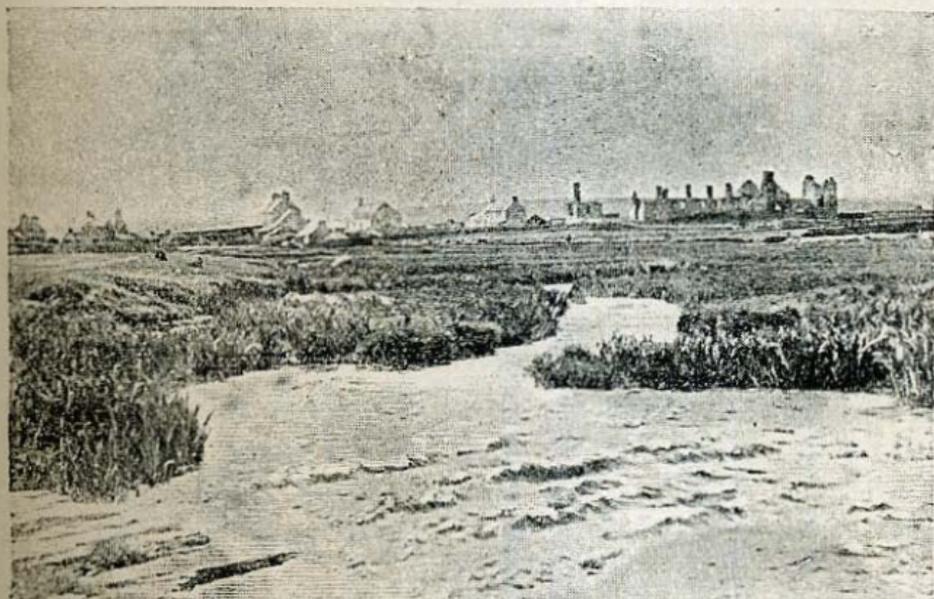
If it happens to be the time of spring tides, and the ebb is running out, we shall see at this place one of the most impressive sights which our coasts present. However calm be the sea, as soon as the tide begins to gather strength, the channels on either side of Eynhallow for some distance out to sea become a mass of heaving, foaming billows, reminding one of the long stretch of boiling rapids below the Falls of Niagara.

And that is just what this "roost" is—rapids on the course of the tidal river which is now sweeping westward through Eynhallow Sound. When we look at our pocket map, we see that on each side of the islet the depth of water is only about five fathoms. In about a quarter of a mile it becomes ten fathoms, and within a mile of the west end of the island twenty fathoms. Thus the tidal river first passes over a ridge on each side of Eynhallow, where it is less than thirty feet deep, and then plunges down a slope which dips nearly one hundred feet in a mile.

If there is a long swell rolling in from the Atlantic, as there often is on our western shores, the turmoil is increased, and the boiling fury of Burgar Roost, as it is called, is a sight which it is worth going far

to see. The roost which is formed in Hoy Sound with a strong ebb-tide is due to similar causes but there the dip in the sea-bottom is not so steep. When the tide turns, the change seems almost magical, and in a short time there may be not a ripple on the water to mark the scene of this mad dance of the billows.

The cliffs at Costa Head are the highest on the Mainland, but we can only see them from above,



Birsay, the Barony.

and thus we lose much of their wild grandeur. We enjoy, however, an impressive view of the cave-pierced shores of Rousay, and of the stern ramparts of Noup Head, in Westray, with its sentinel lighthouse.

Sooner or later we must return to our bicycles, and now we coast rapidly down to the Loch of Swannay, sweep round its northern shore, and, crossing the burn, climb the opposite slope towards the part of Birsay quaintly named, "Abune the Hill," or "Above

the Hill," as the map-makers have it. Instead of following the road which strikes southward through the centre of the parish, we turn towards the west, and by means of an older road make our way to the Barony of Birsay, where we shall find accommodation for the night.

But we have still a long evening before us, and after due rest and refreshment we shall find time to explore our surroundings. The place is full of historical interest. The old name of *Birgisharad*, in which we may trace the names of Birsay and Harray, indicates that here was the chief hunting-ground of the Norse Jarls. The mixture of hill and loch and stream, the valleys being then perhaps furnished with coverts of brushwood where now there is only pasture or crops, made this northern part of the Mainland the best hunting-ground in the county.

Birsay may be said to have been the capital of the Earldom at one time. It was the favourite residence of the Earls, and it was also the ecclesiastical centre, and the residence of the first bishop of the islands. When the sainted Earl Magnus was slain, it was in Christ's Kirk in Birsay that his body first found burial. On the Brough we may still see the ruins of a very ancient chapel dedicated to St. Peter.

The Stewart Earls, of dishonoured memory, found Birsay an attractive locality. They raised on the site of its old Norse castle a palace built after the plan of Holyrood in Edinburgh, the ruins of which still form one of the chief features in the landscape. The whole district, in short, is full of those remains which we have called milestones of the past, marking stages in the history of our race.

The shore near the Barony is interesting. We may walk to the Brough at low water, but we must take care not to be caught and imprisoned by the returning tide. The cliffs rise to the southward, and in Marwick Head reach a height of nearly three hundred feet.

The chief attraction for tourists is the Loch of Boardhouse and its trout fishing. This loch receives the drainage of a wide stretch of country, its chief feeder being the Hillside Burn, which rises in the hills between Rendall and Harray, flows north-west for



The Brough of Birsay.

some five miles to the Loch of Hundland, and under the name of the Burn of Kirbuster reaches the larger loch in about another mile. This drainage basin is next in importance and area to that of the "Great Lakes" of Orkney, the Lochs of Stenness and Harray.

If we have time and energy left to climb Ravie Hill, on the south side of the loch, we shall get an excellent idea of the "lay of the land," and the relation of these two loch basins. We may notice in particular that the Harray basin extends northward

almost to the hill on which we stand, and includes a number of small lochs near it which look as if they ought to belong to the Boardhouse or Birsay system.

If scenery rather than geography is our study, we shall be equally well repaid for this walk. From its isolated position, Ravie Hill commands a very extensive view, despite its moderate elevation. The panorama of hill and valley and plain, of land and lake and sea, which is spread out around us, is really one of the finest in Orkney, and we can quite understand how the picturesque Barony came to occupy so important a place in the past. Even at the present day its rich soil and pleasant situation give it some right to be called the "Garden of Orkney." But meantime we must make our way back to our inn, for the sun is dipping in the western sea, and to-morrow will bring us fresh tasks to perform.

Fourth Day.

Our fourth and last day's exploration will be confined to the western shore of the Mainland, between Birsay and Stromness. As we leave the Barony and ride along the south side of the loch we are tempted to stop and view once more the landscape from Ravie Hill, before we finally turn our back upon this romantic corner of the Mainland. While we watch the people at work in the fields, and listen to the restful sounds of country life, it is hard to picture the past whose relics stand yonder, plain in our view.

If Birsay were to display before our eyes this morning a pageant of her past history, the procession would be a varied one. The hunting-parties of the Norse Earls, the coming of the first bishop to teach

the new faith, the building of the first Norse church, the burial of Earl Magnus, the procession of pilgrims seeking miraculous healing at his tomb, the removal of the sacred relics to the church of St. Olaf at Kirkwall to await the building of a more magnificent shrine, the ruinous favour of the Scottish Earls, the raising of a second Holyrood in the old Barony whose stately splendour was the measure of the robbery and extortion suffered by the people, the passing of this incongruous pomp and the return of welcome obscurity and quiet—truly a long and picturesque procession!

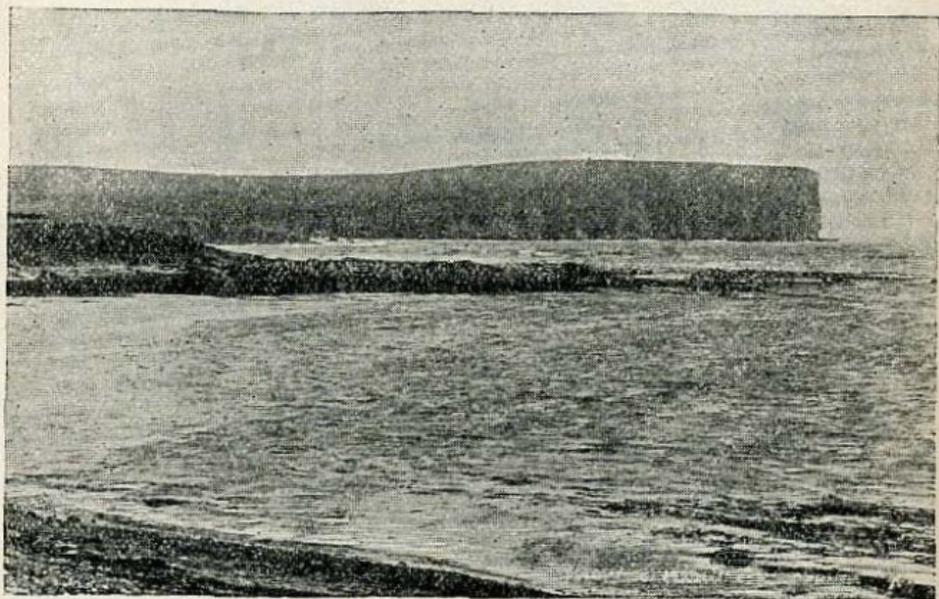
We resume our journey, however, and soon reach Twatt, where the road divides. The branch to the left leads to the important district of Dounby, on the borders of the three parishes of Birsay, Harray, and Sandwick, and then passes through the whole length of Harray to join the Kirkwall and Stromness road.

Harray is an interesting parish. It is the only parish in Orkney which does not touch the sea. Its soil is on the whole fertile, the surface being diversified by moraines brought down by glaciers from the steep hills to the east. The farms are generally small, but the farmers are mostly in the happy position of being owners as well as occupiers, and the number of "lairds" in this parish has long been proverbial in Orkney.

We decide, however, on taking the road to the right, as we wish to see something of the famous "west shore." Three or four miles brings us to the head of the Harray Loch; but instead of descending to the mill of Rango we turn to the right at the cross-roads, and shortly reach the hamlet of Aith,

beside the Loch of Skail, our charming "Loch in Orcady." Here we turn once more to the right, following a road which skirts the loch and leads us almost to the shores of the Bay of Skail, a fine sweep of sandy beach, but exposed to the full fury of the Atlantic.

At its southern corner we examine a large "Pict's House," now opened up—the "Weem of Scarabrae." Then we decide to climb the slope beyond and visit the "Hole o' Roo," a famous cave piercing a bold

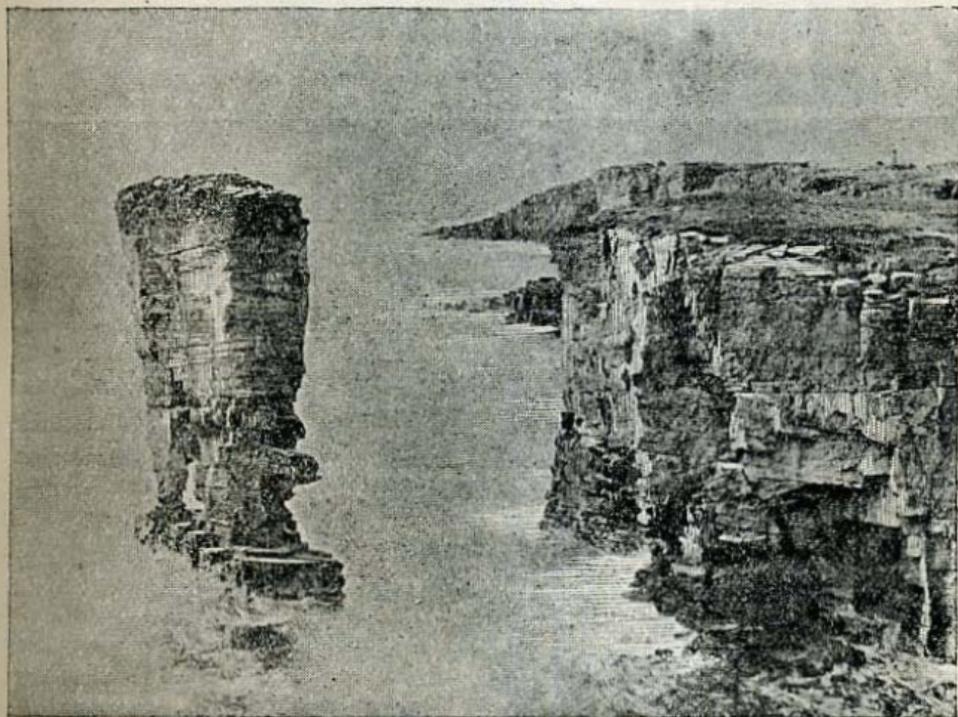


Marwick Head, Birsay.

headland, which from the horizontal lie of the rock strata looks as if it had been built of gigantic flagstones by a race of Titans.

We are now entering on the finest stretch of cliff scenery in the islands, with the exception of Hoy, and from here to Stromness, a distance of some eight miles, the walk is one to remember and to repeat. But now for the first time we find our bicycles a hindrance instead of a help, and we are at a loss

what to do with them. We may decide to turn back to the main road, ride to Stromness, and, leaving them there, explore the coast on foot, which is the most satisfactory plan. If we decide to take them on with us, we shall find that considerable stretches of the ground are level enough to permit of a rough ride on



The Castle of Yesnaby.

the turf, and for the last three miles of the distance there is a fair road.

The next point of interest after leaving Row Head is the Noust of Bigging, sheltered by its Brough, an excellent place from which to watch the Atlantic breakers when a heavy sea is running. A little way to the south is the Castle of Yesnaby, one of those isolated stacks of rock which have withstood the battering of the ocean while the cliffs around have

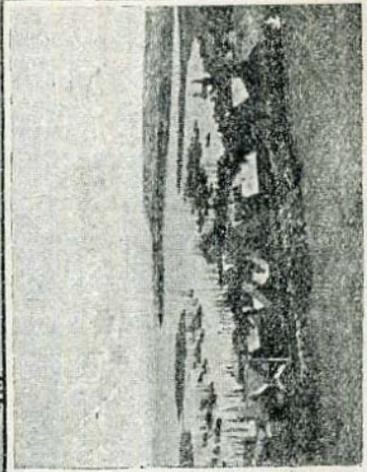
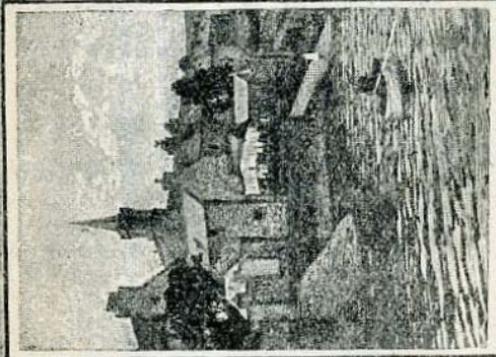
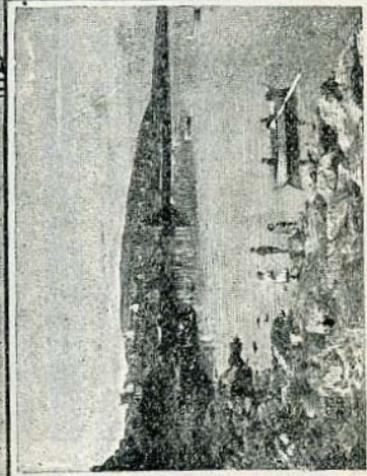
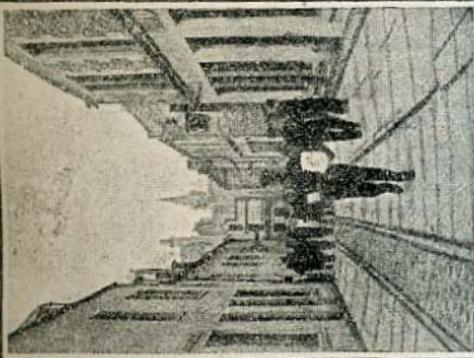
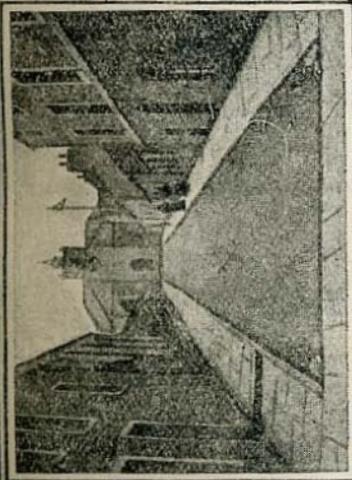
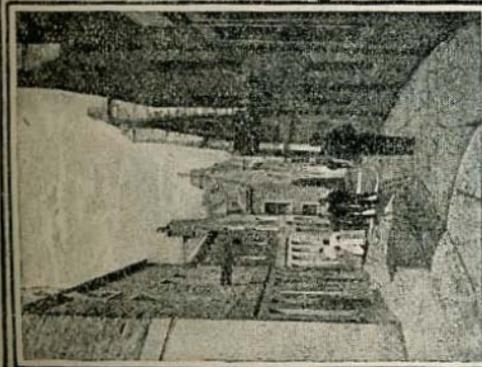
crumbled and fallen. Its slender base, however, proclaims that its fate is only a matter of time.

In another mile and a half, after passing Lyre Geo and Inganess Geo, two impressive examples of how rocks decay, we reach the Castle of North Gaulton, a singularly slender and graceful pillar of rock. Then we cross a stretch of low ground, after which there is a steep climb up to the summit of the Black Craig. The height of the hill is 360 feet, and that of the cliff little less, while its sheer plunge down into the waves makes it look higher than it really is.

As we descend towards the south we pass over a district which is sacred in the eyes of geologists, for it was here that Hugh Miller discovered the fossil remains of the *Asterolepis* or "star-scale" fish, a monster of the ancient days when the rocks of this hill were being laid down as mud and sand on the bottom of a primeval lake. The great geologist describes this district as "the land of fish," and the rock strata fairly swarm with fossils.

The shore in front is now low and tame, but the whole district from hill to sea is fertile and well peopled. That it was so in the past also we see sufficient proof. For there, on the shore of Breckness, stand the ruins of a mansion built by Bishop Graeme, who knew well where to build; and a mile beyond it, in the lonely churchyard by the lonely sea, rises a fragment of an ancient church. There stood the church of Stromness in former days, and there also the manse; while the names of Innertown and Outertown doubtless refer to their relative nearness to this centre of parish life.

But times have changed, and it is no longer fertility of soil but convenience for trade which draws men together in close neighbourhood, and so the



4

5

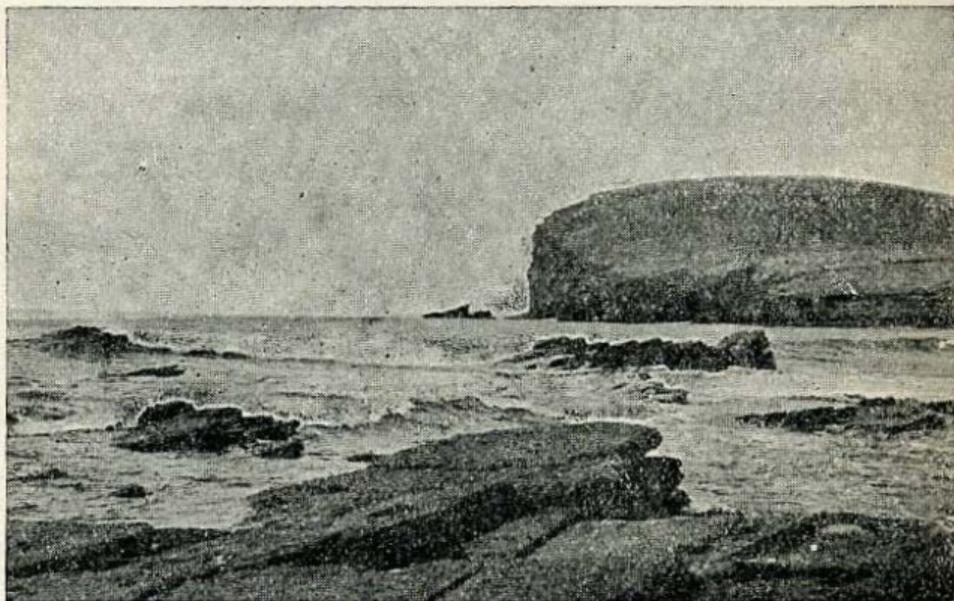
5

Round about Stornness.

1. Dundas Street. 2. Church Road. 3. Victoria Street. 4. From the South End. 5. From the Harbour. 6. From the Hill

modern Stromness arose on the shore of that romantic little bay which spreads out beneath us as we cross the ridge to the left. That landlocked sea, and not the rocky hillside, was the source of its life and growth; and as we note the frequent steamships and the clustered fishing-fleet we realize that it is still the sea which brings prosperity to the little gray town.

Here, then, our circuit of the Mainland fitly ends, for in the opinion of many the town of Stromness, the "ness of the tide-stream," is the fairest spot in all the islands. However this may be, it is indeed fair, and the Stromness boy will wander far and sail over many seas ere he will find a fairer scene than his island home;—fair when it lies before him under the pearl-gray light of its northern sky; fairer still, perchance, when the golden haze of memory gilds the landscape, and the joyous vision of the outward eye has given place to the wistful retrospect of the imagination.



The Black Craig.