STRAY NOTES.

A NOVEMBER VOYAGE IN THE "MARIE."

A Letter to my Sister.

MOOREPARK, CARDROSS,
November 4, 1884.

MY DEAR MARY,—I have tried to find time for a few lines to you these past days, but it was not easy. On Tuesday last we made everything ready to go, and drove over to Scallasaig with the children and servants to see them off. I left them just about to lie down, ready dressed, at the Inn; for after the gales we have had, the steamer was not to be expected for many hours. Unfortunately they were routed out at 1 a.m. on a false alarm, and ultimately had to wait at the pier till 8.30 next morning, when they got on board and away. From the east attic I saw the "Dunara," under fore and aft sail, crossing the white water op-

posite our house, and knew that they must have had a disturbed night. They did not reach Greenock till 8.30 next evening—the children, the two eldest especially, fresh and happy; the servants, it seems, more dead than alive. So much for them! As you know, David was determined to sail home in the "Marie," and I could not let him go alone. Donald was against the undertaking; for the gales were continuing high, as the slates showed which were lying on the ground from off the roof of our house. However, his Celtic nature asserted itself, and he gave himself up to his master's wishes. They therefore made all their arrangements, and while I finished shutting up the house, carted over the "Nancy" to the strand, where the "Marie" was lying, laid in water and provisions, made all tight, and set their minds in general to the adventure. The two families on the island—the shepherd's and the ploughman's—were much against our going, and prophesied evil. They came to see us off, distressed at our thus leaving them, and about 11 o'clock we set sail under double reefs and without the jigger; passing at first through the calm shallows of the mouth of the strand, eastwards past Eilean Goidmal,[1] and southwards into

[1] Eilean Goidmal—"the Island that stole the rent." In Blaeu's Atlas (say 1648) "Eilean na guid." The tradition is that a messenger who was carrying the money rent of Colonsay to the mainland rested here

the wild water, towards Rhu Vail. Our first misfortune was the swamping of the "Nancy," which we should not have attempted to tow, she was ill fitted for such a sea.[1] She might, however, have been indispensable for us had we required to land where there was no pier, or it might be, to save ourselves if wrecked. This put us in real danger, for the Atlantic seas were by this time running very high, and the swamped boat acted as an anchor to hold the "Marie" down in the water. Donald was ready with his open knife to cut the painter, and cast her loose, but his "*nature*" (economical fisherman!) rebelled against this, and we continued sailing slowly on, the "Nancy" diving, disappearing, rising again, and losing her spars and oars one after another. When we got into the smoother water of the Sound we made an effort to bale her out, the seas still running high. Wild work it was, and Donald cut his hand in the attempt, but after several ineffectual efforts we succeeded, and she floated again. We sailed swiftly past Port Askaig, enjoying the wonderful orange and purple tints

when the Islay people came over and relieved him of it. In Islay is Rudha Vhail, (Rhu Vail, the point on which the lighthouse stands; in Blaeu's Atlas, "Row na Vaill")—Rent point. It is said that a man hid his rent there and could not find it again.

[1] Too long and flat-bottomed, but at this time we had no punt.

of the bracken upon the hills of Jura; but the rain did not long give us an opportunity to see the scenery, and, what is worse, darkness came on, and we stuck upon a sand bank, in the endeavour to find a short cut between an island in the Sound of Islay and the mainland of Jura. This warned us that it was in vain to try to round the south of Jura that night; so we shoved cautiously off, and ran three and a half miles, with a free sheet back again to Port Askaig, with the poor "Nancy" towing behind us, swamped again, sometimes even out of sight. Arrived at the port, we were not long in getting dried and fed at the inn, and next morning we made arrangements that the smaller boat should be sent on to Greenock by steamer, as we saw that it was hopeless to attempt to take her with us. We were detained at Port Askaig by the tide, which runs in the Sound some five or six knots an hour, till half-past one o'clock. This was far too late a start for a November day, black with rain and white with squalls. We were obliged to tack the whole way down the Sound, and there was something terrifying in coming every time we were opposite a big hill, to places where there was so little wind that the sails shook, not knowing how to fill, and then in a few minutes to corries and glens where the squalls rushed out and almost

threw the boat on her beam ends. Scenery there was little or none; only dark waters, lowering skies, and drenching rain. So we rounded Jura, and getting away from the squalls, sailed with a free sheet into great rolling seas, over which we rose and fell, bowling on, the good boat behaving gallantly, and like John Gilpin's horse, "right glad to miss" the poor drowned "Nancy" "lumbering at her heels." So we ploughed and rolled along, leaving M'Arthur's Head far behind, till we got into shelter behind the "Small Isles," the port where we were to pass the night. This place is a little harbour in the south-east of Jura, where there is a village called "Craighouse," a distillery, a small church, an inn, and a row of cottages. Bleak enough the place looked in the rain and wind, and as we were stiff and wet, we took a walk up the steep road which leads to the interior of the island to warm ourselves whilst waiting till tea should be ready at the inn. Donald on his part had to get through his "cracks" with the loafers on the quay, who were certain that he and the other "fishermen" were taking the poor woman wrapped up in the stern, to consult a doctor on the mainland. A few steps from the village took us into a wild and savage scene. Against the mist in the gathering darkness, the Highland cattle loomed out on the moor, and on one eminence quite

close to us, sharply defined against the sky, we saw two fine red deer, which fled at our approach. The inn or rather tavern was comfortless enough —the damp parlour full of smoke from a chronic blow-down in the chimney, the house resounding with drinking songs, fiddling, and laughing. The host and hostess were kind, but they lacked the means to make us comfortable. Nevertheless, we woke up refreshed with our night's sleep and anxious for an early start, but the wild wind and ceaseless rain seemed to conspire to prevent us getting away. After waiting for an hour or more Donald declared that he would try it. "It wass an awfu' like thing to be shut into such a roguish hole when the wind wass fair!" So off we went, waving an adieu to a row of men and boys on the pier, who, as at Portaskaig the day before, predicted no good for us, or for our sailing. And truly, when we got into the big seas outside the little bay, I began to wish myself beside a good fire in a snug armchair, for the sailing powers of the "Marie" were fully put to the test during the course of the next hour and a half. However, as the day wore on, and we got further up the Sound of Jura, the sea fell, although not for one moment did the rain abate; and so with a free sheet we drove along the wild coast of Jura to the north, and crossed to the mainland, entering the mouth of the Crinan Canal about 2.30 in the afternoon.

While waiting for the capture of the Highland pony which was to tow our boat, and which was in the meantime enjoying itself on the hill pasture behind the inn, we were curiously inspected by a company of idle fishermen who employed themselves speculating as to who and what we and our strange craft could be. About half an hour after our arrival we were again "under weigh," but this time in charge of an old white pony on the smooth waters of the canal. What a contrast! Only the wet remained the same; and we were glad to get a run along the banks, during the passage of the locks, to warm ourselves a little. Through the mists we saw the wooded, rolling, and comparatively cultivated country which stretches north towards Poltalloch, and on the tow path passed groups of children hurrying home from school with turnips in their hands to celebrate Hallowe'en! Arrived at Ardrishaig, we were most comfortably put up in the "Argyll Arms," and next morning were ready for an early start down Loch Fyne. We moved out of the harbour with a favourable, though light, breeze, and were able for the first time to shake out the reefs and hoist the jigger, enjoying the scenery the more, as the other days had been so misty, that we had seen nothing. All went well till we passed Tarbert, when the wind began to fall, and at last we came into a calm, which forced

us to take to the oars. For a while this served to amuse us and persuade us that we were still moving, and as the evening was mild and the evening effects charming, we did not weary as long as daylight lasted. But soon after dark, an east wind sprung up which, though light, brought both rain and cold with it, and in that rain, and against the tide and that light air, we beat hour after hour, our way lit by a moon, well hidden behind masses of ominous clouds. So we passed the night, till between six and seven in the morning we reached Kames, in the Kyles of Bute. Then Donald, for want of a small boat, had to strip and carry us ashore, and we made our way in the first of the light of day to an hotel at Tignabruaich. You will believe that our *breakfast* was not till half-past one, and then we saw that the wind had shifted to north, and that the rain had ceased. We therefore sallied forth—Donald to visit a married sister, the look of whose face he had almost forgotten, and we to visit my husband's old friend Donald Nicol, who lives at Ardmarnock, near Kilfinnan, on the shore of Loch Fyne. The mists had now vanished, giving place to clear and sparkling effects, and the rain—for of course there was *raïn*—consisted of sleety showers, which were soon past. The oak coppice which abounds here, and the orange-red of the withered bracken, gave a glow to the middle distance,

while blue hills and masses of clouds hemmed in the horizon. Late autumn, lit up with these vivid tints, is thus the finest season for the landscape painter in the Highlands. Our road, which was a steep one for the horse, opened up new views at every turn—indeed, I do not remember a more delightful drive. We found the family at home, and enjoyed a pleasant evening in their company, talking over days and scenes long passed, when the friends were schoolboys together. Then we returned in the bright moonlight, observing in the course of the drive one of the finest "brughs" (halos) round the moon which I had ever seen—a double circle of all the prismatic colours.

Next morning we got away at nine o'clock with a light but favourable breeze, and clear sunshine. The Kyles never looked more lovely, for here again the bracken and the oak made the hills aglow. With all sail set—even the topsail, the boat's pennon flying, and the decks clean and dry—we felt as gay and happy, as the scene was bright and beautiful. And so through the Kyles, round Toward, up to the Cloch, till at last, after a splendid day's sailing, our friend the rain began, and a calm fell on the water. Small matter! we had had one lovely day, and although a little disappointed that we could not reach home that night, we were happy in that we had enjoyed so much already. We stayed at Kil-

creggan all night, and prepared for a great day's work to-day. We were to pick the "Nancy" up at Greenock, sail to Fyfe's, to consult with him as to the disposal of the boat for the winter, thence for a run to Broadfield, then home to Ardmore. Alas! we managed to carry out but little of this programme. After beating to Greenock, we found the sea too rough for towing the "Nancy," so we tacked over to Craigandoran, hardly knowing what next to do. Ultimately we decided to run back to Kilcreggan again, and give the "Marie" in charge to a boatbuilder there, and then make our way home by steamer and train to Moorepark. This we accomplished, and here we are, after a comfortable tea, beside a good fire, and I have finished the evening by writing my long story to you about our cruise, only I do not yet understand why we should cease to be wet all day, and out all night, and live like fishermen in an open boat. It seems, however, that the reason for all that is past, and I have now to begin and answer my letters, which I see include an invitation to a dinner-party to-morrow, and a dance the day after.

Such are the contrasts of life!

I am wearying to hear from you, and hope to do so very soon. There was no letter from Barochan awaiting me. With kind love,

Your affectionate sister,

F. M.

PACKET RETURNING TO COLONSAY FROM ISLAY.

A SHIPWRECK.

WHEN one considers the manifold perils and difficulties of coast navigation, it is wonderful that so many vessels spend their time steering past dangerous reefs and over deceitful shallows, and yet duly arrive at their journey's end. Our Highland steamer was well-manned and carefully sailed, yet an accident once occurred to her, on the south end of Islay, a few particulars of which it may be interesting here to record. One night in the beginning of September, 1882, on the passage outwards, our party was sleeping soundly in the deck cabin, when I was awakened by what I supposed at first to be the anchor going down at Scallasaig. But the next moment feeling a decided bump, and hearing no chain paid out, I looked out, and seeing in the dim light of a misty morning that something was wrong, I roused the children and told them to dress. In a few minutes we were ready, and upon issuing from the cabin were told that we must instantly leave the vessel. In less than an hour all the passengers were landed on a grass-covered islet, pastured over by a few sheep. By this time it was about six o'clock, and a miserable, soaking morning, which before long turned into a pouring wet day. It was

soon apparent that there was no immediate danger to the vessel, so, raining as it was, some breakfast was sent out, which we divided by means of pocket-knives produced by the passengers and sailors. Then by dint of pouring paraffin upon coals, a fire was lighted and an effort made to get shelter by raising tarpaulins on oars; but our situation was not improved, the ground under foot was like a sponge, and we were half suffocated by the smoke of the fire which poured into the tent.

Morning light showed that we had struck three miles to the south of Islay, nearly opposite Kildalton, the seat of Mr. John Ramsay, and there we might have landed, but as the captain hoped that the vessel might get off at high water, he wisely determined to keep his passengers together. This was not to be, the flood passed, and the steamer did not float. Then we watched the tide fall, and saw her gradually heal over on her side, while she uttered a loud booming noise like a creature in pain as the waves lifted her and let her fall back again upon the ground.

During the day the clouds never lifted and the rain burst on us in torrents. As we afterwards learned, the river at Kildalton rose fourteen feet; stooks of corn were carried out to sea, and a bridge swept away. Had it not been for the spate of rain, and our fears for the vessel, this adventure would have been for us, little else than a

picnic; but the steerage passengers, at least the womenkind, who were in the majority, were in despair, as their terrors led them to believe that their last chance in life was gone. Some swayed backwards and forwards, crying, "Och hone! och hone! what'll she do now, och hone! och hone!" To cheer this feeble folk, the elder children and I sang songs and told stories, but good as were our intentions, the crisis was, in their opinion, too imminent, and we met with but little success. So the day wore on, and the pitiless rain never ceased, the poor creatures suffering the more, as "they had peen that putten aboot an' that in the nairves" that they had not even brought with them the few wraps they possessed. At low tide, the vessel's poor old ribs, which must needs have been of iron to stand the strain, had a few hours' rest, but the flood brought back the bumping, and her groans began anew. Twelve hours after landing, about six o'clock p.m., we were told that all hope of getting off for that tide was gone, and that we were to pass the night at Kildalton, on the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. Happy news for us, but the steerage passengers were almost past caring what became of them.[1]

[1] One old woman stoutly refused to leave her kist, which with incredible pertinacity she had induced the sailors to land on the rocks, although nothing else whatever came ashore. Such was her joy to see it again, that she sat on it all night. By this time I had had the

The boats had hardly touched the strand before we were welcomed by the kind hostess of Kildalton, attended by a train of servants. She led the way up the hill to her house, and soon everyone, old and young, nearly forty in number, was in dry, warm clothes, and seated at a comfortable meal. The children were bathed and put to bed, and I myself was arrayed in a dress of Mrs. Ramsay's preparatory to appearing at dinner, where I formed the eleventh of a merry company, amongst whom I was glad to meet with some familiar faces. What contrast could have been greater than that of the cold and wet and misery of the desolate islet and the luxury and genial hospitality of that pleasant Highland home!

Next morning a tug, favoured by a lucky change of wind, which slewed the vessel round from her dangerous position on the rocks, contrived to get her off, and our fellow travellers were summoned on board, to return, unfortunate beings, to the Broomielaw, whence they came. I also hastened out to secure our luggage and above all our provisions, and thus prevent their going back to Glasgow. Although the vessel was already in motion, and the hurry supreme, for the captain was impatient to be off, the crew worked with a will to assist me, and the whole of our belongings were

inventory of its contents, and knew every present she was taking home to her grandchildren in Skye, out of her poor stock of "weel-hained" pennies.

pitched overboard, *sans cérémonie*, into a fishing skiff below. Nothing, however, was left behind or destroyed, and even a case of jams and jellies, and a coop of live pigeons survived uninjured the descent into the skiff. The fishermen, whose boat thus laden resembled a Noah's ark, faithfully delivered their charge at Portaskaig in time for the packet to take them on to Colonsay on Monday evening. We stayed three days at Kildalton, waiting on the sailing of this boat, and I much enjoyed the time in the society of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, visiting the beautiful surroundings and examining the antiquities. These are much of the same character as those at Oronsay, especially a Celtic cross a cast of which our hostess had just erected near the house, under the superintendence of Mr. William Stevenson, whose paper on Colonsay, contributed to the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, we found most helpful and interesting, during our sojourn on that island.

On Monday evening, after a drive of thirty miles through Bowmore and Bridgend, from the south to the north of Islay, we reached Portaskaig where we met my husband, who had come by the West Tarbert route. We had a favourable run in the packet to Scallasaig, and touched the shore in the fading light. "Hurry! hurry!" was Donald's greeting upon meeting us, "the tide's

rising fast, and if you want to cross the strand, push on, and don't look behind you!" We needed no other exhortation, for we were most anxious to join my husband's mother and her niece, who had suffered much anxiety in consequence of our absence, for as there is no telegraph, it was two days before they ascertained why neither we nor the steamer had arrived. Donald and my husband followed closely, and, taking a shorter route, waded the strand, the water reaching to their arm-pits. When we came to the flowing water, it was so dark that I could barely see the land looming a mile off on the Oronsay shore. One moment only I hesitated, then gave the horse, a trusty animal, her head. The night was calm, the animal knew her way, but it was spring tide coming in fast, and delay would drown us. Before long the water washed through the box of the tall gig, and still we had not passed the deepest part, when we heard the welcome sound of oars. No one spoke. Nearer they came through the darkness. It was the shepherd's people, who, fearing too deep a strand, had rowed round in their boat to take us over. The living cargo was quickly transferred to the boat, where, if not a "cargo" in the correct meaning of the term in the gig, it speedily became one in the fishing skiff, while I was left with the wise but tricky Highland pony to make my way half swimming through the

deepening water to the rocks.[1] There sat Mrs. Murray and cousin Agnes watching through the gathering darkness for our coming, ready with the welcome which they feel, who have known the "hope deferred," which "maketh the heart sick." No need to add how warm and cosy the old house seemed, and how we enjoyed the evening meal together, as we recounted our mutual adventures, once more a united family, in our island home.

TRAVELLING BY STEAMER IN THE HEBRIDES.

ONE of the features of our life in Oronsay was the difficulty which we sometimes encountered in getting there or getting away again. There was always the risk of weather too rough for landing, and in the season of ferrying cattle the steamer was often late through calling at all sorts of odd places. Such a boat may advertise to leave at seven in the evening, and yet keep you waiting till seven in the morning, without any manner

[1] The passage through the "rocks" was a shorter, but very rough one, so trying to springs as never to be attempted but when there was danger in wading the shore at their base.

of apology. This was the more inconvenient in our case, as not only had we six miles to drive, but we were also obliged to cross the strand when the tide suited, which sometimes caused us to leave home some hours before the time advertised for the steamer's arrival. Indeed, when days began to shorten in October, and the autumn gales to blow, we thought upon our return to the Clyde with some anxiety. If we were fortunate to have a dry, moonlight night, all was well, but at that season there was often wind, and blackness, and rain, which made the evening start very trying to souls fearful of journeys by sea in rough weather. Many a time we have stayed up all night, on the *qui vive* for the hoarse whistle which signalled the ferrymen to hasten to get all aboard the boat. Once the wind blew from the north-east, the steamer was late, and it was doubtful if she could lie off till the boat could be got out. That, perhaps, was the wildest experience which we had, for, unfortunately, darkness and rain added to the discomfort of the night. Bundles, babies,[1] bales, and beasts, were all heaved on board from the top of a big wave, and when my turn came, I accomplished the ascent in company with two collie dogs, which it was my part to look after. One of the animals, our good Clyde, a well-behaved, experi-

[1] Anthony was then only eighteen months old.

enced traveller, was easily managed, but the other was a young dog, ten months old. The insubordination of the animal came very near costing me dear. Straining before me on his rope, through the wet and darkness, he compelled me and his companion to follow him up the ladder to the quarter deck. This he no sooner reached than he wheeled round, and, jumping to the bottom, landed the other dog and me on the top of some sheep. Had my fall not been broken by that sturdy islander, the keeper (Murdoch M'Neill), it might have been a serious one.

Such misadventures, however, did not discourage us; many a pleasant hour we spent in the inn waiting for our truant vessel, and sometimes we would pass the time in the store on the pier, hearing stories, or Gaelic songs, till the time for going on board came. Then in the morning the children would wake up in the calm water of the Firth of Clyde with sharp appetites, and more than ready to do justice to the abundance of Mr. Kay's breakfast; —ham and eggs, fish, fresh butter, biscuits and marmalade galore,—the recollection of which still fills them with delight.

The following letter from my sister Evelyn, written before entering the Sound of Islay, after a long wait for the steamer at Scallasaig, may be introduced without apology in this connection:—

Sound of Islay, October 3rd, 1883.

My Dearest F.—I have just been taking a last look at Oronsay[1] as we passed into the Sound. I am wondering if any of you are looking out of the attic window, and, seeing the puff of smoke, recognize the "Dunara," and run down to tell the news that she is in sight. Last night I little thought that the morning light would show me Oronsay again, but here we are in this famous blow of north wind, which makes everything so clear, and still my eyes look out on familiar scenes. How we waited for the steamer! It was about half-past ten o'clock this morning when we were fairly moving off. I feel, however, amply repaid for the daylight, which reveals this exquisite landscape, and which will permit me later on to have a view of the "Mull," which I have as yet always rounded by night. There is very little cargo aboard, so there is ample room and opportunity for tossing. A large quantity of cattle went off at Oban, and this caused the long detention. There will be some difficulty in the steamer's getting away from the Broomielaw to-morrow night, and I have a vision of Donald's having a long wait for the boat again

[1] Our house, with the ruins, farm buildings, stackyard, and cottages in a long line, appears from this point to be a village or little town.

on Friday.[1] Miss M'Neill, of the inn, was very attentive; and you must not think that I am too "skee,"[2] for towards five o'clock I fell asleep, after all my watching, and this morning feel fresh again. Besides, I feel compensated by the unusual privilege of a daylight, and such a daylight voyage among the glorious scenery. As we steam along, and the island, with its low line of houses, recedes from view, I am busy thinking of you all, and what you are doing—the drawing-room,[3] learned with its little band of students, Anthony bringing his primer to his grandmother in the dining-room, and Eunice trying to spell out with Marie all about "poor little Jane," who was so pale and thin; Donald will be out at the creels, catching an extra big lobster among the rocks of Bogh an Aillerich.[4] I shall long think of you all in dear old Oronsay; and the memory of the sails, the lobster fishing, and the rustic teas on the Seal Island and the

[1] This was our only steamer for landing provisions, and it was no laughing matter if the meat, bread, and groceries, instead of being put out at Scallasaig, went a trip north to Harris, and only reached us upon the return voyage of the "Dunara."

[2] Gaelic, *sgith -e*, tired, weary.

[3] It was in this charming room, with its well-filled book-case, that I taught my little school, consisting of the two elder girls, while the German maid busied herself with the two younger in the old-fashioned nursery below.

[4] *Bogha*, a sunken rock, a blinder; primarily a bow, a bend, an arch.

Black Island[1] will not fade away from my mind. There is a large shooting party on board from the North, with their ponies and dogs. I hope the lobsters which you sent with me will arrive in good condition.

Many kind messages of affection for you all, and thanks for your kindnesses manifold.—Your affectionate sister,

EVELYN.

THE SEALS.

IT was not uncommon to see a herd of forty or fifty seals basking on the rocks at low tide at the mouth of the Strand. These animals are usually credited with being "shy" and "timid," but they are not so at Oronsay. Now and then they are shot at by a party of sportsmen; but, upon the whole, immunity has so emboldened them that they followed us quite close when fishing with the fly, and would not be driven away when the fishermen chewed limpets to attract the fish to the lines. It was a curious sight to see them rise head and shoulders above

[1] Eilean an Ron, and Dhu Eilean.

the water to inspect us—following our boat like great Newfoundland dogs. They knew that they would not be interfered with, at least by us. But the fishermen disliked them, because they devoured such quantities of fish; and, certainly, they always seemed sleek and in the best condition. Formerly, their oil was much prized for lighting purposes, but paraffin has rendered them useless for this, so that now there is little reason to disturb their peaceful existence, except for "sport," their fur being too coarse to dress.

The following extract is taken from a lecture which I gave upon "Rural Life," and finds a place here as illustrating the precociously combative habits of the infant *phoca*. More than once we had an opportunity of watching a similar outburst of early developed rage:—

"When we look upon life as a whole we can hardly help referring to Shakespeare's classification of the 'Seven Ages of Man.' First, of course, comes the infant muling and sprawling in his nurse's arms. Curious little bundle of humanity, image of innocence and gentleness, not born blind like puppies and kittens, but doomed to a far longer period of dependance, and totally unable to shift for itself, long after they are ready for themselves, in the battle for existence. Poor little unconscious mite! Well it is that in every woman's heart there is a place for you—an instinct to care for and cherish you

and love you all the better for your inveterate fits of crying, and aggravating habit of turning night into day. What would become of us, I could not help thinking the other day, if we were to be used the same way as the young seals are treated by their indifferent relatives! My brother and I were fishing with the rod off the coast of Oronsay, an island which lies to the north of Islay and the west of Jura. The sport had been good, and the saithe had been flying about our heads in a truly astounding manner, but it was getting late, and most unwillingly we put up our lines and prepared for home when all at once a cry was raised that a baby seal was on the rocks of 'Caen riva,' a desolate reef to the south of our island. There it was sure enough, its pale yellow fur gleaming in the fast fading light of day, while its mamma and a number of relatives, some of them big-tusked patriarchs, were disporting themselves on the waves at a little distance, and curiously inspecting our boats as we drew near their haunt. As this was the first baby in all likelihood of the season, I asked the men to put in, to take a look at it; and this we did with some difficulty, as the Atlantic swell makes it no easy matter to venture near the reefs of that wild coast. We were not long in picking our way over the sharp upstanding schists, to the comfortless bed of the little crea-

ture, and were not a little astonished, at least we Lowlanders were, to see the infant rise upon its hinder end, knit its brows, snarl like a dog, and angrily try to beat us off—we, who had come with love and pity in our hearts to greet it and wish it all manner of happiness upon its arrival on its amphibious existence. To add to our astonishment and amusement, the boatmen declared that from the colour of its fur it could not be more than a day old. Strong, active, vicious, cross, able already to do for itself and to defend itself, and fully conscious of the danger to which it was exposed through the visit of human beings, I could not help contrasting it with a day-old infant of the human species, who, cradled in downy pillows, and surrounded by every luxury, the admired of all the friends who come to ask after its welfare, is totally unconscious of their care and attention, and unable to provide for the smallest of its wants."

"ART FURNISHING."

SURELY so large a house as ours was never furnished so simply and yet with such good effect. Barrels, boxes, and crates as soon as they were

emptied were straightway transformed into cabinets, tables, or chairs, covered with cretonne and so-called "antique lace," which soon rendered them fit for the rural dwelling of a queen. When the days were stormy and wet during my husband's holiday, he betook himself to the joiner's bench in the store, where he turned out with great pains and labour, as his only material was the coarse and ill-assorted driftwood from the sea, certain stools, chairs, and a wonderful wooden bed, which it cost me an extra pang to leave behind. Twenty-seven barrels were used as tables, the principal of which was, doubtless, the sugar hogshead, which served as a lobby table. This, when cut into shape and covered, answered its purpose excellently well, in that quaint and roomy porch, with its pictures, shells, white curtains, pots of geraniums and lobelia, and its wicker-work table and chairs.

Nor must the scallop shell, so dear to Michael Angelo and the artists of the Renaissance period of Art, be forgotten in our notice of the decorations of Oronsay House. These we arranged in groups or half circles on the walls, varying their delicate colours and their sizes to produce an excellent effect; and so with many other devices, simple in themselves but admirable in their combinations, made our island home a dwelling more quaint and charming than what we shall easily find again.

THE CLIFFS NEAR KILCHATTAN.

SOME OF THE BIRDS OF COLONSAY AND ORONSAY.

OUR island in spring is the happy hunting-ground of the ornithologist, and has been visited by not a few for this purpose.

The perigrine falcon hovers over the higher cliffs, and scares its prey into the sea-caves which line the coast; the sparrow-hawk and kestrel haunt the brows of lesser eminences, and are found on the steep rocks behind our house ready to pounce on smaller fry.

The rock-pigeon (*columbia livia*) breeds in the Piper's Cave and other similar coves of the wild west coast, passing like a flash before the explorer's eye as, blind from the outside glare, he seeks to penetrate their gloomy depths.

The woodcock (*scolopax rusticola*) arrive in numbers in September, thankful, no doubt, for a rest on *terra firma* after their long flight from Norway and Sweden.

The sandpiper in flocks crosses and recrosses the strand at low tide for its food.

The curlew (Scotticé, *whaup*), melancholy but musical, may be heard over the moors, and numbers of the lapwing (Scotticé, *peeweep*) frequent the low-lying end of Oronsay, striving there, as elsewhere, to lure away the herd from their lowly

nest, by their feint of lameness and their plaintive cry.

Grey herons (*ardea cinerea*) are exceedingly common and may be seen fishing in the pools of the rocky shore, and the starling (*sturnus vulgaris*) may be said to be the leading bird of the island. We used to watch flocks of them sitting on the ridge of our house, or on the gable of the monastery, their glossy coats shining in the sunlight, making a living addition to the skyline of the original architectural design.

Neither is the island wanting in song-birds, foremost among them being the thrush (*turdus musicus*) and the cuckoo. These musicians whom on the mainland we think of as "songsters of the grove," appear like ourselves to take quite kindly to the bare rocks instead, where they may be heard "tuning their merry notes" all day, and at times waking the echoes with their song.

Less charming a vocalist, but one not to be overlooked in such a list, is the corncrake (*crex pratensis*), which used to treat us to an uninterrupted concert in the field before our windows all the summer long, much as we might have wished to eject him from the premises. The fieldfare, the wren, the redwing, the stonechat, and the water-wagtail are plentiful, and no doubt many other song-birds might be observed in the plantations about Killoran House. Game birds—partridge and grouse—are few in number,

but strong on the wing, and wild duck, teal, widgeon, and snipe frequent the inland lochans and lochs. But in an island lying among shoals of rocks, and abounding in precipices, the sea-fowl must naturally form the chief interest to the lover of birds.

The wild geese (*anser-ferus*) and the barnacle geese arrive in flocks, and, attracted by their loud cry, we often watched the latter in the autumn evenings sweeping by on their strong wings, in a long-shaped letter V, their forms sharply outlined against the sky.

The eider-ducks, and the oyster-catchers (*haematopus ostralegus*) make our island their breeding grounds, and the "Wild Bird's Preservation Act" did not prevent keen hunting parties among the children for their most palatable eggs.

The gannet or solan goose (*sula bassana*) is a constant visitor and may be seen at all times diving and splashing in the sea for his dinner, and truly in shoal of fish he has the advantage of weight and size, in the struggle for existence, over others of his kind.

But of all the birds, the sea swallow or common tern (*sterna hirundo*) is the most graceful. They come in the spring and are a never-ceasing delight with their rapid flights and lovely forms, crossing the skies in the sunshine, like spirits with a message from heaven.

Several other and larger varieties of gulls nest in the precipitous cliffs of Kilchattan, and in the months of May and June their rocky haunts are alive with thousands of these winged creatures, which seem to pass their time in sitting on their rocky shelves nursing their two or three eggs, or wheeling in airy curves between the sea and sky, floating, diving, soaring like

"Unbodied joys whose race is just begun."

Many a pleasant hour we spent watching them, looking up from below at the narrow ledges where they nest in the face of the rock, or more frequently leaning over the overhanging precipice, at whose feet the blue sea broke in white crests and ran booming and surging into the caves of the rocks below.

The cormorant or scart is another characteristic bird on the island skerries. It was a common, and a comical sight to watch them standing motionless in a long black row, all facing windward, on a low rock, just rising above the tide, their swart forms sharply outlined against the setting sun.

A VISITOR'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE ISLAND.

AMONG the many guests whom we entertained we were happy to count our three cousins, the Bowens, from America. Although they came in June, they had unfortunately bleak and cold weather all the time of their stay with us. That they were able, in spite of this drawback, to make the most of their time, is proved by the following lively paper, written by the sporting member of the party, "Cousin Frank," and contributed to an American journal called "Forest and Stream." As it shows some aspects of our life from an outside standpoint, it may prove interesting here:—

ANGLING IN THE HEBRIDES.

Thump! thump! all night long, beat the pulse of the steamer "Dunara Castle," and two loquacious Scotchmen spent nearly as much time, just outside of my berth, in trying to find a "night-cap" that would fit. This they accomplished at last, or perhaps the nightcaps gave out, and I was left to twist my eight feet (only two requiring shoe leather, the others preferring trousers and coat into a five-foot berth.

Balmy sleep (we had a load of cattle aboard) came at last, and then the next thing I heard was a rough voice say: "We're off Colonsay." We were to disembark here, so in a few moments I was on deck. We were anchored in a little bay a few rods from shore. The dozen houses had emptied themselves of the natives, who were now busy shouting in Gaelic (garlic as pronounced by them) and launching a huge ferry boat to come for us. When they had rowed their ark alongside, very little was to be seen of the boat, for every available inch was occupied by a man or boy. Barrels and boxes, baskets and bundles of all kinds and sizes tumbled into the boat as she rose and fell in the surge. Finally our turn came, and what a time we had! Waiting till the boat rose nearly to the bottom of the ladder we would step off, and then down, down would sink the boat seemingly from beneath our feet, and soon recovering itself would go rushing up the iron sides of the steamer in a frightful way, though fascinating. Seen from the steamer, the ferry boat appeared clumsy and loggy, but now after resting for a moment in a pocket of the waves, then mounting to the top, she would swim down the other side like some huge sea-bird, full of grace and life.

Upon landing we were stared at by that small portion of the inhabitants who had not gone off in the boat to meet us. After collecting our

twenty-two bundles (the twenty belonging to the two ladies), we inquired for Donald, our cousin's Poo-Bah; for he was the coachman, skipper, gardener, weather prognosticator and adviser on all subjects of Oronsay. Withal he was a modest man, and so he was the last one to be asked, "Are you Donald?" Acknowledging himself to be that all-important personage, he produces for carrying five people, who attained their growth several years since, but whose bundles appeared to have grown and multiplied indefinitely ever since leaving Greenock, a dog-cart. Donald looks at us, then at the bundles, finally at the cart, and murmurs in his soft voice, "It *is* a bit wee." We get in, however, three on the front seat and two on the back (told to sit hard and heavy), and taking such bundles as we can hold, give the horse his head.

How wild and desolate everything is! Masses of heather-covered rocks; ragged hills, unsoftened by trees; meadows of rank grass, on which feed some tawny Highland cattle. It is like a forgotten sketch of an artist, rough though strongly drawn, but with the colouring—the warmth of life—unpainted.

The two islands, Colonsay and Oronsay, are connected two and a half hours at low tide by a stretch of sand showing above the water, and covered with the pyramid markings of the sand worms. The flowing tide covered these and

over a foot of our wheels before we reached the other side, but the horse splashed on as though he were on a turnpike. Donald amused himself by telling how, a few weeks previous, the west wind blowing in the water quicker than usual, the wheel of the cart struck a sunken rock and pitched him headlong into the water. Each of us instinctively sought the middle of the cart when we looked at the icy water, after he had finished his story. We reached Oronsay in safety though, and a few minutes more brought us within sight of the monastery. Generations ago a small band of monks sailing from the north of Ireland, first landed here, and the lonely island afforded them a safe haven for their prayers and meditations. Of the original chapel and cloisters, only the thick stone walls and a small portion of the roof remain, but enough to show the rough beauty of the carved pillars and windows. In one corner of the chapel lay several stone coffins, the last resting place of the holy men, with their images carved on the slabs. Time and exposure had scattered even the dust from within. A few yards from the building stood a stone cross, exquisite in shape and proportion. The dead grey of the sky, the beating of the ageless sea upon the rocks, the crumbled mass of the sacred buildings, all were of the past. The cross alone remained. The more modern building our cousin had made habitable for some

months in the summer, and life was not wanting there, nor comfort, with plenty, and a kind welcome.

We spent four days on Oronsay, and did nothing twice. The first evening about eight o'clock Donald produced two poles 10 feet long, to which were attached by strong linen lines two huge yellow flies, and asked if I wanted to go fishing. I always say "yes" to such invitations, but was somewhat staggered by the looks of the tackle. A few moments found us rowing outside the breakers, Donald working the oars, while I sat facing the stern, and having inverted the poles with their 'tother ends in the water sawed them up and down, apparently seeing how many times I could "touch bottom" a minute. What antics those flies cut up a few feet astern! Swish, went the line, circling toward the bow with a tremendous rush. My tackle, thanks to its size, held, and in a trice a fish of about 2 lbs. lay struggling in the boat. The Gaelic name for it I have forgotten and its looks—well, it was a little like a herring and more like a trout. It was all so novel. The small boat tossing near the breakers as they rolled from black to foamy white; the soft light of the sunless sky; the gulls shrieking in our wake for a fish; an old gray seal drying his whiskers as he looked around out of the water for the same purpose.

The next morning we started out to examine the lobster creels we had placed the night before. We only found four, but one creel was alive with delicious crabs. What a bloodthirsty set they were! Crawling around on the bottom of the boat, the moment two of them came together there was trouble, and the weaker generally scrambled away, wiser to the tune of a "lost cord," or rather claw. Before we had landed, the boat looked like a pension office on pay day, so many veterans were limping around on wood. After a dinner made of lobster principally, while Donald was testing some "Lone Jack," puffing out great clouds of smoke after each deep breath, and wondering where it all came from, (being used to molasses-soaked "plug," which required an exhaust pump to keep the fire in it from going out,) I asked him what we should do the morrow. His lips scarcely opened, but the delicate trail of smoke formed, "Trout," in feathery letters.

Early in the morning the dog cart, with lunch and borrowed rod and tackle, was ready, and then an hour's roll over the sandy reach to Colonsay, and back over the barren hills and half way down the other side a turn to the left and—"Are there trout in that place, Donald?" I asked, wondering how a high-toned colour fish like a trout could soil his spots in such peaty water. It was like that in South Street, New

York, when the East River gets its back up. We soon found the one boat, and after getting the tackle in shape tumbled in and almost tumbled out again, for that boat, in spite of its ample bottom, had a habit of spinning around that was decidedly skittish and unbalancing in its tendency. My first cast proved conclusively that the bow seat was the place for me, for every motion of my wrist and rod was followed, and instantly, too, by a counter motion of my feet and the boat, and in my efforts to keep erect, snap went the tip, short off. An extra tip was found, and taking a seat this time, the flies flew to the desired place and spat! spat! went half a dozen fingerlings, as they somersaulted out and in the water again. The trout seemed to be of but two sizes, scores of little shavers and now and then a handsome one of a pound. Three hours later I had thirteen of the latter in my basket, and had sent five times that number home with the toothache. The next day we took a long walk along the rocks and coarse grass by the shore, flushing every now and then, though the season was late, an eider duck ("duke," as Donald called them). Going to the place where they got up, we would find from two to five huge eggs, protected in a rather unsavoury way by the old "duke" the last moment before rising.

Scores of seals, big and little, were to be seen

sleeping or sunning themselves out on the rocks left bare by the fallen tide. Clicking two stones together would start them for the water in an ungainly waddle, and a moment later they would pop their heads out of the water, their protruding eyes curious to see what it all meant. On our way back we ascended a high hill and, driving hundreds of "bunnies" before us into their burrows, examined the summit where there was in the old days one of the forts of the islanders, to which they retreated on discovering the approach of the dreaded ships of the Norsemen. Little remained besides the mound of earth and heaps of shells, to tell of the unequal struggle against murder and starvation.

A month later I stood in the National Museum at Christiania, Norway, examining the much written about Viking ship, the very one, perhaps, that carried terror to the hearts of the peaceful dwellers of Oronsay.

THE VIKING'S GRAVE.

AMONG various relics of the olden time, such as crosses, stone circles, standing stones, and fortified

hill-tops, a discovery has been recently (1882 and 1884) made which exceeds them all in antiquarian interest. This was the bringing to light of the skeleton of a warrior and of his horse in a sandhill at Killoran Bay. The man lay within an enclosure of rough stones. The horse lay outside. All round were the rivets which had fastened the planks of a vessel. Beside the horse lay part of the animal's trappings, the metal part of which was in wonderful preservation and the bronze still gilded. Besides these bones, there was found in the enclosure a sword, a spear head, a battle axe, two shield bosses, two small knife-blades cemented together by rust, fragments of a pot and some smaller objects, all of iron. More interesting than these was a balance, with weights of lead, deeply chased with a Runic pattern and also gilded. There were likewise two small copper coins of Anglo-Saxon times and mintage. These curious remains, which I have myself seen, and which are now in the Museum of Science and Art, Edinburgh, must surely have belonged to some viking, who, landing on the island long ago to plunder and destroy the poor inhabitants, left his good steed's bones and his own to whiten among the bents of Killoran, never more to return to far "Lochlin," in his galley, across the seas.

SHEEP EATING THEIR WOOL.

STRANGE as the story on page 28 may seem, I am informed that sheep often exist for some time upon their wool. The following paragraph from the *Glasgow Herald* bears upon the subject:—"A Long Fast for a Sheep.—Last week a blackfaced ewe, belonging to Mr. John Campbell, Arachill, Aberfeldy, was dug out of the snow alive, after being buried for five weeks and three days. It had eaten all the wool off its left side, and the stones among which it lay were completely denuded of every vestige of moss and lichen. The animal has apparently only suffered in condition."

THE SANCTUARY STONE.

I RECENTLY visited the island of Lismore where there was a Sanctuary Stone, similar to that at Oronsay, mentioned at page 8. The following description by "Nether Lochaber," Rev. Alexander Stewart, LL.D., will be found interesting:—

"Near the church may still be traced the outlines of an enclosure which a well-established tradition declares to have been a sanctuary; and occupying the centre of the area thus indicated is, deep imbedded in the earth, the broken stump of what was originally a monolith of large size, and which was known as 'Clach-na-H-eala,' the 'Swan's Stone,' or 'Stone of the Swan,' why so called nobody can tell! Malefactors of every description, except those guilty of murder in its worst form—*malice prepense*—if they managed to reach this sanctuary, and, first placing their hand in the name of the Trinity on the 'horn of the altar'—Clach-na-H-eala remained within the sacred enclosure for a year and a day—were absolved of their crime, and, returning to their proper residences and occupations, were no longer liable to prosecution or punishment because of it. We were told by the late venerable incumbent, the Rev. Gregor Macgregor, who had then been minister of the parish for upwards of forty years, that there was a very old man living on the island during the earlier years of his incumbency, who remembered the sanctuary when most of the walls were still standing, and according to his description it would seem to have been a low-roofed cloistered square, containing something like a score of small chambers or cells, and enclosing an open space or garth, in the centre of which was *Clach-na-H-eala*, or

Stone of the Swan. Mr. Macgregor was of opinion that the Clach-na-H-eala monolith was one of the uprights of an ancient cromleac, leading far back into Pagan times, and that the place was in a sense hallowed and sacred long before the introduction of Christianity into the island.

"Of the old Church sanctuaries in the Highlands, that of Lismore was probably the very last whose privileges were claimed, and, strange to say, instantly acknowledged without a word of protest, in the case of a homicide who fled thither from the vengeance that would otherwise very assuredly have overtaken him on the part of the friends of the man whose death he had caused."

AN ISLAND VIEW OF SHIPWRECK.

As illustrative of what is said upon page 29 regarding wrecks, I may perhaps quote the following passage from a letter I recently received from the island:—

"An old ratch [wretch] of a schooner came on the Seal Island on Friday morning, in ballast;

seven of a crew got all safe on the island—on the north-west side of the island. She is sitting with all her sails up as yet. She is for no use to the place except firewood."

But cottars and crofters are not the only persons in the world who have an eye to a shipwreck, for in 1650 the Marquis of Argyll had a warrant from the Earl of Angus, as Vice-Admiral of Scotland, "to intromit with a French bark of the burden of 40 tons, lately cast away on the west of the island of Colonsay, belonging to the Marquis, haill ornaments, apparelling and pertinents thereof, with the haill goods and gear therein, and to sell, use, and dispose thereupon at his pleasure, and to do everything necessary for his intromissions with the said bark and goods, and disposing thereof to his own use as he shall think expedient."[1]

[1] Historical MSS. Commission, 6th Report, p. 625.

THE LAIRD OF COLONSAY AND THE WITCH OF JURA.

CHAILEACH BHEINE MHORE lived in Jura, at Largie Breac, and had a ball of thread by which

she could draw towards her any person or thing, if she could throw the ball beyond them.

She got Mac Phie of Colonsay into her toils, and would not part with him. Every time he attempted to leave her, she used to intercept him; and even after he got into his Biorlinn, or barge, and got off from the shore, she would get him ashore again by throwing the ball into the boat. (The giant in the story of Black White-red had a like magic clue.) At last he pretended perfect contentment in his bondage, and got the secret from her that she had a hatchet which would cut the thread on the enchanted clue. He watched an opportunity and stole the hatchet, having previously ordered his boat to be in waiting at Cnoc Breac, at the foot of Bean a Chaolis. He set out by the dawn of day, and was seated in his boat before the Caileach got to the top of the hill, which she had climbed with speed as soon as she missed him. When she saw him in the boat she cried out most piteously:—

A Mhic a Phie,
A Ghaoils' thasgaidh,
'An d'fhag thu air a chladach mi.

Oh! Mac Phie,
My love and treasure,
Hast thou left me on the strand?

And this she often repeated, throwing at the same time the Cearsla druidheachd, magic clue,

into the boat, and drawing it towards the shore. But when she saw the thread cut, and the boat rowing off beyond her reach, she got desperate, and slid down what is called Sgriob na Cailich, crying out:—

A Mhic a Phie,
Charrich granda,
'An d'fhag thu air a chladach mi.

Oh! Mac Phie,
Rough-skinned and foul,
Hast thou left me on the strand?

Sgriob na Cailich is a very curious and conspicuous mark on the north-western side of the highest of the Jura hills. Two rocky gorges begin at the very top of the hill, which were made by the carlin's heels, and two strips of bare grey boulders extend across the side of lower hills almost to the sea. Unless these last are the marks of lightning I cannot account for them. This is the place where Dewar's fox threw the big woman over the rock.

In her time the Island of Jura was under the sway of Mac Donald of Islay; but this carlin was so powerful that she would not allow the Islay post to pass through Jura, for she killed him as soon as he crossed the ferry.[1]

[1] Taken from Campbell's "Tales of the West Highlands," vol. ii, p. 350.

ORONSAY BURYING GROUND.

I HAVE mentioned at page 7 that bodies were brought from all quarters to be buried in Oronsay. They were ferried from the mainland to Jura, carried across that island, and thence ferried to Oronsay. In Jura there are two caves called *corpachs*, that is, places where the dead bodies were deposited until an opportunity occurred for taking them away. One of these *corpachs* is in Rhuintalen, opposite Colonsay, and was used for funerals going to Oronsay. The other, called the *corpach* of Icolumkill, is several miles to the north-east along the coast.[1]

[1] See "New Statistical Account," Argyll, p. 535.

BOUND FOR KILCHATTAN.