THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES.

URING the long period of oppression by the Scottish earls, the state of our islands had been indeed deplorable, and recovery was slow. The spirit was crushed out of the people. Industry was vain when plunder was sure to follow. Agriculture could not advance when the alien landlord claimed all the profit. An Orkney writer of the eighteenth century gives a sad picture of the condition of the country in his day:—

"The inhabitants, in general, are very polite, hospitable, and kind to strangers; but I am sorry to say that so little is industry encouraged in our country that no means can be assigned by which the lower class of people can get their bread. By reason of having no employment they must live very wretchedly; they become indolent and lazy to the last degree, insomuch that rather than raise cabbage for their own use they will steal from others; and instead of being at pains to prepare the turf, which they have for the mere trouble of cutting up and drying, yet, rather than do so, they will steal it from those who are

richer or more industrious than themselves..... Every Saturday, which day they are privileged to beg, a troop of miserable, ragged creatures are seen going from door to door, almost numerous enough to plunder the whole town were they to exert themselves against it in an hostile manner—at least, if their valour was in proportion to their distress."

The dawn of a brighter day came slowly, and it is difficult now to trace the steps by which the prosperity of the islands was restored. Agriculture remained in a very primitive state till the nineteenth century had well begun. An Orkney "township" had a very different appearance in those days from what we now see. The farms were not divided from one another; each patch of cultivated ground belonged to all the farmers in the township, who shared it on the "run-rig" system, each "rig" being worked by a different owner.

The only pasture was the natural grass of meadow and hill, and this also was common property. A "hill-dyke," usually of turf, surrounded the corn-land, and formed a somewhat indifferent protection against the flocks of sheep, cattle, horses, and pigs which found their summer food on the "hill." The names "Slap" and "Grind," borne by farmhouses in many districts, remind us of the gateways in these old hill dykes.

With the corn-land subdivided in this way, and the pasture-land undivided, there was no inducement for any farmer to improve his methods of agriculture. Farm implements were of the rudest kind. The soil was scratched rather than tilled by means of wooden ploughs with only one stilt or handle, a model of

which may be seen in the museum in Stromness. There were no carts; loads were carried pannier-fashion on the backs of horses, along the rough tracks or bridle-paths which served for roads.

Of the old style of farmhouse scarcely a relic now remains. One entrance usually served the farmer and his cattle, who lived under the same roof, though in separate apartments. In the kitchen, or "but-end," the fireplace was simply a raised hearth in the centre of the room, with a low wall or "back" against which the peat-fire was built. There was no chimney, but a large opening in the roof allowed the smoke to escape in a leisurely fashion. Behind the "back" there was often accommodation for poultry, calves, and other domestic animals. The better class of houses had beyond the kitchen a parlour, or "ben-end," which was used only on great occasions.

Rough and primitive as was their manner of life, yet at the beginning of last century the Orcadians had already made a very considerable advance in prosperity. A writer of the time tells us that the small farmers had more money among them than could be found among people of similar station in any other part of the British Isles.

It was not till the second quarter of the century that the land was divided up into separate farms, and modern methods of agriculture began to be employed, with rotation of crops and improved implements. A little later the beginning was made of the system of roads which now spreads in a network over the islands.

While agriculture was yet in its infancy, the islands were much benefited by various forms of industry

and occupation which have now mostly fallen into disuse, as the need for their help has passed away. One of these industries, introduced towards the end of the eighteenth century, was the spinning of flax and the weaving of linen. Flax was largely grown in the islands at one time, and the dressing, spinning, and weaving of it was a common occupation.

About the beginning of the nineteenth century the manufacture of straw-plait was introduced, and soon took the place of the linen industry. It is said that over six thousand women and girls were at one time employed in straw-plaiting. Though the workers were paid but little, and that usually not in money but in goods, the straw-plaiting increased considerably the wealth and the trade of the county.

The manufacture of kelp was introduced early in the eighteenth century, and gave occupation to many of the inhabitants. Large profits were made in this business, not so much, of course, by the actual workers as by the landlords and other agents who exported the kelp. At one time, indeed, it seemed as if the attention given to this industry was to prove a hindrance to the advance of agriculture, which is the only foundation of true prosperity in these islands; and when other substances began to take the place of kelp, the decline of this trade was really a benefit to the islands.

Fishing has always been an important industry in Orkney, but it was not till near the middle of the nineteenth century that the improvements in boats and in gear made the fisheries a really valuable asset to the islanders. Fishing, however, cannot be called one of those temporary industries which we men-

tioned. The herring fishery and the white fishing, as well as other branches of this industry, have continued to increase, and next to agriculture, fishing is the great natural source of wealth for the people.

During the centuries now under our notice, Orkney had a closer connection with the seafaring life than it has to-day. When all trade was carried on by sailing ships, and when westerly winds were quite as common as they now are, vessels passing through the Pentland Firth for America or elsewhere found Stromness a convenient port of call, and its harbour was often crowded with shipping. This was especially the case during the French wars of the eighteenth century, when the English Channel was avoided by shipping as being too near the enemy's shores. Fleets of trading ships used to gather at Stromness while waiting a convoy of men-of-war to accompany them across the Atlantic.

An interesting relic of those busy times in Stromness is the old Warehouse and Warehouse Pier at the north end of that town. This store was built about the middle of the eighteenth century for the convenience of the rice ships from America, as being the safest place for them to discharge their cargoes. Before the end of the century, however, the Stromness Warehouse was deserted in favour of Cowes in the Isle of Wight. A writer of the time makes out a strong case in favour of Stromness and against the English Channel, but the fact that Cowes is nearer to London seems to have settled the matter in favour of that port.

During these prolonged naval wars, it is said that

as many as twelve thousand Orkneymen served in the navy. Many of them went as volunteers, but probably most of them served against their will, as the pressgang was very active among the islands. Many a young sailor who began his voyage on a peaceful trader was soon transferred to one of His Majesty's ships. Traditions of those troublous times are still preserved among many families in the islands. Hundreds of these men were never heard of again, for those were not the days of telegraphs and war correspondents. The years passed, and the son or the brother did not return, but when or how he fell his friends never knew. It was a heavy war-tax the islands paid; the full extent of it has never been disclosed.

About 1740 the ships of the Hudson's Bay Company began to visit the islands, not only to wait for a wind to start them on their annual voyage, but to engage labourers and tradesmen to carry on the fur trade among the Indians of the west and north of Canada. The connection thus begun is not yet quite extinct, but in the earlier part of the nineteenth century there was a constant stream of young men flowing to the Far West. At one time from fifty to a hundred men left Stromness for Hudson Bay every summer. Some remained as pioneers and colonists; some returned after a sojourn of five years or more, with a tidy sum of money to start them as farmers or tradesmen at home. Many of them who settled in the Great Lone Land rose to high positions in the Company's service. The most famous of this band of empire-builders was Dr. John Rae, the discoverer of the fate of the ill-starred Franklin

Expedition, and a noted Arctic explorer, whose monument may be seen in the nave of St. Magnus Cathedral.

The Company then ruled over the greater portion of what is now the Dominion of Canada. The names of Fort York, Moose Factory, and Red River were as familiar to the Orkney boys of those days as Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen are to us to-day. But Canada changed even more than Orkney during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the great Hudson's Bay Company have now handed over their vast territories to the rule of the Dominion. The fur trade still exists in the North-West, and there are Orkneymen still in the employment of the Company; but the days have gone by when this was one of the chief industries of the wander-loving sons of our islands.

After the "Nor'-Wast," as the Hudson Bay service was called, the "Straits" had the next claim on our youth. The Davis Strait whale-fishing fleet made an annual visit to our islands to complete their crews. This was in the spring or "vore," when the crops were in the ground, and many men, both young and middle-aged, looked to the annual whaling trip to the north as a means of gain, just as their Norse ancestors did to the annual "vore-viking" raid on the richer shores of the South. This also has passed away; the harpoon and whale-lance are rarely seen in the islands; whales and whaling fleet alike have almost become extinct. But while agriculture was still in its infancy in Orkney, the "Straits" gave much-needed employment and modest gains to many of our hardy forefathers.

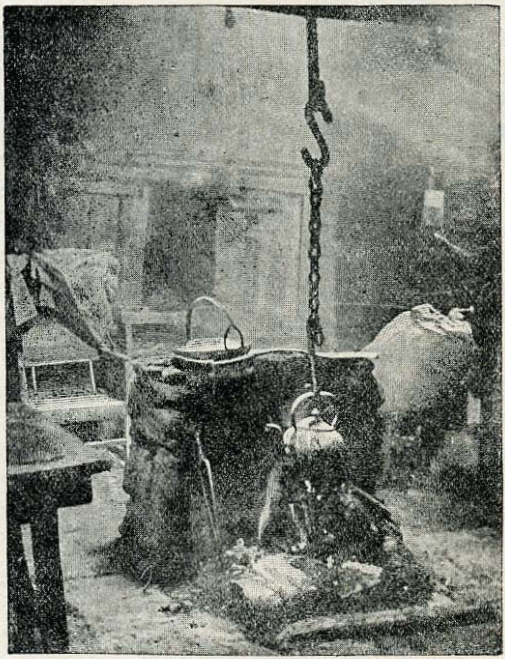
The general tendency of life in Orkney has been away from dependence upon the sea for a living, and towards agriculture and the trade and commerce which it brings with it. In its methods of farming and in its general prosperity the county now compares well with any other part of the kingdom. But most of this progress has been made during the last half century or so.

It was in 1833 that the Aberdeen, Leith, and Clyde Shipping Company, now the North of Scotland and Orkney and Shetland Navigation Company, first decided to send one of their steamers—the *Velocity*—to call at Kirkwall. The call was made once a fortnight, and only during the months of June, July, and August. The mails were then carried across the Pentland Firth in a small boat. The growth in traffic since that time is indicated by the fact that the trade and commerce of the islands now requires the weekly call of two steamers at Kirkwall and three at Stromness, with a daily mail steamer to both towns, in addition to numerous occasional trips of other steamers and sailing vessels, especially during the fishing season, while four smaller steamers maintain communication between the various islands.

The Orkney farmer still has a somewhat niggardly soil and a stormy climate to contend with. His acres are few, and his boys will often turn to richer lands to seek their fortune. But life in these islands to-day is easy and comfortable compared with what it was during any of the ten centuries whose history we have passed in brief review.

The boys and girls who aim at seeking wealth and fame in other lands, though by other means than

those of their Viking ancestors, may now set forth on their voyage as well equipped by education and otherwise as the youth of any country in the world. Those who remain at home will still find a worthy task in carrying on the improvement of the home-land, as their fathers have done; for whatever stage of progress we may attain, it is never merely an end but also a beginning.



Old-fashioned Fireplace.