



View of Whiten Head.

CHAPTER VI.

Ferry from Tongue—Difficulties of our Start—Seals—Shepherds, etc.—Emigration—Heilam Inn—Storm—River Hope—Drive to Durness—Cave—Rock Pigeons—Inn at Rhiconnich—Search for Osprey's Nest—Swimming to Nest—Loch of the Eagle Fisher—Stalking the Osprey—Row up the Bay—Loss of Fishing Line—Scowrie—Island of Handa—Innumerable Birds, etc.

OUR start from Tongue for Durness was amusing, though not without difficulty. We had to cross a ferry immediately below the inn ; but on going to the ferry-house and raising the flag that signified the want of a large ferry-boat (the boats being on the opposite side of the bay), we after some delay were answered by the arrival of a small sailing-boat, far too narrow to take over either horse or carriage. On making inquiry of the ferryman, he told us that *the* large boat was at present out of the water and under repair, but that if we could wait ten days or a fortnight it might be ready. This did not sound promising ; but I settled the difficulty by sending the horse to a point, from which a boy was to bring him across a part of the sands fordable at low water. We then took the boat off the wheels, which we managed to stow

away in the small ferry-boat, and taking our own boat in tow, we sailed across with a good breeze, which carried us well over the bay. In one part the current of the ebbing tide is very strong.

While waiting for the horse's arrival I amused myself by watching through my glass the singular and awkward-looking antics and gambols of a large herd of seals, who were playing and resting upon a sandbank in the middle of the bay. It is curious to see with what activity these unwieldy-looking fellows move themselves about on the sand, ill adapted as they appear for locomotion on the land. The cry of the seal is wild and mournful, difficult to describe, but something between the mew of a cat and the howl of a dog; a most unpleasant sound it is, though it sometimes harmonises sufficiently well with the wild scenery surrounding them.

Some thirty miles out at sea opposite this part of the coast is an island, or range of rocks. Exposed to all the violence of the breakers of the Northern Sea, it is difficult to land on; but once or twice a year a crew of fishermen go off to it in a strong boat, and usually manage to get about a hundred seals, the oil and skins of which repay them well for their labour.

Blue rock pigeons live in all the caves on this coast, and are to be seen flitting to and fro from morning to night.

For some distance after crossing the Tongue ferry the road is dreary and bleak, passing over a brown and wet tract of mossy ground, and for several miles we continued ascending. The wind and rain were incessant and very heavy. Having surmounted the highest ridge, we descended the hill to the Hope river, which is crossed by what is called a chain-boat; that is, we drive upon a wooden platform without taking the horse out of the carriage. The platform then, with all upon it, is hauled across the river by means of a chain and windlass. The glen through which the river Hope runs is very beautifully shut in by its wooded banks; and the gray mountains offering a new point of interest at every turn of the road, give never-ceasing pleasure and excitement. Here we continually saw eagles and other rare birds. A shepherd told us that the lambs were killed every day by eagles; but he seemed to know little, and to care less, about the breeding-place of the birds. It is nearly impossible to get a direct or truthlike answer from many of the Highlanders; for though intelligent enough, they seem to have a kind of suspicious dislike to giving information.

One thing particularly struck me in this part of the country. Depending on the Duke of Sutherland's well-known kindness and liberality, the lower

class of inhabitants take but little trouble towards earning their own livelihood. At whatever hour of the day you go into a cottage you find the whole family idling at home over the peat-fire. The husband appears never to employ himself in any way beyond smoking, taking snuff, or chewing tobacco ; the women doing the same, or at the utmost watching the boiling of a pot of potatoes ; while the children are nine times out of ten crawling listlessly about or playing with the ashes of the fire.

The Duke, having tried every plan that philanthropy and reason could suggest, has now succeeded in opening their eyes to the advantage of emigrating, and at a great expense sends numbers yearly to Canada, where these very people, who at home, in spite of every effort and encouragement, drag on a life useless to themselves and burthensome to others, when once settled in their new country, put their shoulder to the wheel, and rapidly become most independent and comfortable ; and instead of seeing their children grow up in the midst of self-imposed squalid misery, they see them become daily more prosperous and thriving. Certainly, in this rocky and sterile part of the country, it *is* difficult for a cottager to advance himself. The soil is not adapted for a numerous population ; there is nothing to feed mankind on : all or the greatest part of the

necessary grain must be imported from the low land; and the low-land farmers, finding a better price and better customers elsewhere, naturally send their produce to the best market. This mountainous country is only fit for sheep, and sheep-farming is by far the best use to put it to. The bays are certainly full of fish; but it seems nearly impossible to make good fishermen of hill-men, often as it has been tried. The north-west Highlanders, having found out from their friends the great advantages derived from emigration, are now anxious to take advantage of the Duke's liberal system of sending them out.

To continue our journey. We were obliged at last to make for a small inn called Heilam, on the shore of Loch Erriboll; and glad enough were we to get there, for it blew a perfect gale, and the rain was unceasing. Though the outside of the house looked unpromising, we found the interior clean enough, the people respectable, and plenty of fresh herrings and new-laid eggs. So, the storm not abating, we determined to take up our quarters there for the night.

Loch Erriboll is an excellent harbour of refuge during gales from the north and north-east. The anchorage is good and the water deep; so that no storm comes on from that quarter without some vessels coming in for shelter. I went out to the

leeward of the rocks of the peninsula on which the inn is built, and, accompanied by Fred, sat some time watching several vessels come in, driving like leaves before the storm ; and it was a relief to my mind as each vessel in her turn swung round to her anchor, having weathered the head of the peninsula and entered the sheltered bay formed by the land on which the inn stands, where they rode in perfect safety in tolerably smooth water. Notwithstanding a stream which I found in the morning running through my bedroom, I slept soundly enough. The wind and rain had somewhat abated, and I walked across the country towards a fine headland, some six or eight miles off, called Whiten Head. The rain coming on again obliged me to return without quite reaching it. The entire coast here is very grand and steep, exposed to the whole force of the ocean : the rocks are cut up and weather-beaten to a degree unknown in more southern or more sheltered countries.

In the course of my walk I came to the mouth of the river Hope, which runs into the sea halfway between Heilam and Whiten Head. The course of the river is very picturesque, forming as it does a green glen covered with grass and foliage in the midst of the dreary gray country which surrounds it. I am told that a great number of salmon ascend

into Loch Hope when the river is tolerably high. In a corner sheltered by rocks and birch-covered banks is a solitary hut, where Mr. Hogarth's fishermen live during the fishing season, to be at hand to attend to the nets laid in the sea at the mouth of the river. This hut was on the other side of the stream, which was then much swollen; but a fisherman immediately came out and crossed in a boat to where I was standing: it seeming quite an agreeable surprise to him to have a human being to speak to in that lonely spot. He complained of the mischief done to his nets by seals; and also said that great numbers of otters were living about the rocks near the river. The number of cormorants was very great; on firing off my gun on the top of the rocks along the coast they flew out from beneath my feet in scores. These birds and rock-pigeons seemed the principal inhabitants of the cliffs, with the exception of some pairs of ravens and hooded crows. On Whiten Head different sea-fowl and a pair of eagles breed every year. The people say that the nest of the latter is quite inaccessible. The grouse seem nearly extinct about this district, owing to the number of their enemies, in the shape of winged and ground vermin. I was delighted, however, with the song of the ring-ousel, which was to be heard from every grove and clump

of birch. Notwithstanding the peregrines and crows too, the golden plover is in great abundance.

I found on the little promontory of Heilam a number of wild-flowers growing amongst the short grass, one or two of which were new to me. Though I am sorry to say that I am no botanist, I seldom pass a wild-flower without making its acquaintance.

The next day our drive was to Durness. The mountains at the head of Loch Erriboll are as wild as can well be imagined; consisting of irregular piles of gray rocks, thrown together in every kind of confusion. On the west of the loch there is a long slope of brown hill, down the side of which run innumerable small streams of the brightest water. The rain of the day before made them appear to great advantage, as they were all seen conspicuously from the opposite side of the bay, glittering in the gleams of sunshine, which occasionally broke through the remains of the storm. I was glad to get back to Durness after three or four weeks' absence, as the scenery is magnificent, the inn comfortable, and the landlady, Mrs. Ross, and her servants, most attentive, kind, and obliging. A pleasanter sojourn for botanist, naturalist, or lover of romantic scenery I do not know.

There is a very remarkable cavern close to Durness: a burn of good size disappears underground,

and is seen again issuing from the rocks within this cavern, through which it runs for a short distance till it empties itself into the sea.

Numbers of the common house martin were flying about the cave, and building their nests in the niches of the rocks. In some of the dark, damp corners, where there seems to be a constant dripping from the roof, were clusters of bright green ferns, and other plants, in great variety. On some parts of the shore the rocks are quite perpendicular for a great height—I should say about three hundred feet; in others they are worn into numerous fantastic shapes and caverns by the action of the waves.

Although the wind had now fallen, the swell was tremendous, dashing the spray half-way up the rocks. It was a curious sight to see the rock-pigeons flying rapidly into the caves, sometimes dashing like lightning through the very spray of the breakers, scarcely topping the crests of the waves, which roared and raged through the narrow caverns where these beautiful birds breed. The rock-pigeons were very numerous here, and constantly flying between their wild but secure breeding-places and the small fields about Durness. I shot a few of them, and found their crops full of green food, such as clover, the leaves of the oat, etc.; a number of small shells were also in the

crop of every bird. The rock-pigeon is a very beautifully-shaped little bird, rather smaller and shorter than the common house-pigeon, of which it is plainly the original stock. They seem very restless, seldom remaining long in one field, but constantly rising and flitting away to some other feeding ground, with an uncertain kind of flight; but when alarmed, or going straight home, they fly with very great rapidity. They are easily tamed when caught young. The eggs seem very difficult to get at; nothing but a ladder will enable a person to reach them, and it is almost impossible either to procure such a ladder, or, if procured, to carry it to the caverns where they breed.

There were two or three beautiful wild-flowers near Durness which I had not seen before. They grew on the short grass that covers the summit of the cliffs. I picked up, while wandering about there, some of the small land shells with yellow and black stripes (*Helix nemoralis*), exactly similar to those which, when a child, I used to find on the South Downs, near Brighton. The rocky headlands jutting into the sea near Durness are very bold and abrupt. While looking for rock-pigeons I saw a few of the red-legged crow, or Cornish chough, passing from rock to rock, and busily employed about the broken stones searching for food.

From Durness to Rhiconnich is about fourteen miles of hilly road, passing through the same description of rocky country, abounding in wild-cats, martens, and other animals of prey. There is a loch about two miles from Durness where I was told that char are very plentiful. All the lochs abound in excellent trout.

We reached Rhiconnich, a tolerable inn, but certainly not so well kept as many others in Sutherlandshire, at eleven o'clock, and immediately started for a lake some two or three miles off, where the osprey was said to build. The way to it was far too rocky and steep to take the boat, so we only took my swimming belt, as Dunbar offered to swim out to the nest, if not too far from the shore. We had a very rough walk of the longest two miles that I ever met with. Our route was over a continuous range of rocky ground—so broken that we seldom found a flat place to put our feet on. We did not find the right lake immediately, but at last saw from a height a larger piece of water than any we had hitherto passed, and at some two hundred yards from the shore there was the conical-shaped rock, which the osprey always seems to choose for her nesting place.

On examining the rock with the glass we immediately saw the nest, and the white head of the

bird in the middle of it. Our troubles were instantly forgotten, and although rather fagged before, we made our way over the rocks with new-found vigour. The unwillingness of the old bird to leave the nest showed that she had young ones. While Dunbar prepared to take the water I went round to watch for a shot at the old bird. I presently saw nothing but my fellow-traveller's head, as he swam gallantly out to the rock: the old osprey flew in wide circles round and round, at a considerable height, screaming loudly at the unexpected intrusion on her domain; sometimes she swooped half-way down to the water, but still cautiously keeping at a safe distance. Before many minutes had elapsed we saw the male bird sailing high in the air, straight to the loch; on hearing the cries of his mate he seemed to quicken his flight, and soon joined her, carrying a trout in his talons. The two birds then sailed round and round the water with loud cries. When they saw Dunbar perched on their hitherto unassailed rock, and looking like a statue on a pedestal, their excitement became greater and greater; the male dropped his trout, and they both dashed wildly to and fro, sometimes at a great height, and sometimes taking a rapid circuit of the lake, within half a gunshot of the water. The next thing I saw was my

adventurous companion striking out for the shore, with his cap in his teeth. In the nest he found a half-grown young bird and an unhatched egg, both of which he brought safely to land. He remained on the spot to try to shoot one of the old birds, while I fished for an hour down a stream that ran from the loch towards the inn. I think it was the most rugged and rocky that I ever threw a fly on, but though it was difficult to imagine where trout could lie in it, I managed to half fill my basket with very nice-looking fish.

After resting ourselves for an hour or so, we again left the inn to look for another osprey's nest in the contrary direction. We could get but very vague information as to the exact point of the compass we had to make for; one person telling us that the lake was only a mile and a bit off; another that it was two miles and a bit, and so on. However, it was only about half-past five, and, with the long summer's evening before us, we cared little where the lake was, as long as we could find it at all. There were a few scattered houses along the banks of the sea-loch at the end of which Rhiconnich is situated, and we made sundry inquiries at these respecting the lake, but got such very different answers from each person, that we were almost giving it up in despair; I should not say that *we*

“inquired,” as the whole talking was in Gaelic, and therefore carried on by Dunbar. At last we met with an old woman, who told him that there was a loch some two miles off, which had always gone by the name of the Loch of the Fishing Eagle; her Gaelic name for it being “Loch n’ allan-yasker.” I probably write the Gaelic incorrectly, but that was as near as I could make out what the name sounded like; Dunbar interpreted it to me as meaning literally, the “Loch of the Eagle-fisher.”

This revived our spirits, and we set our shoulders to the hill again with fresh confidence, and a steep, rough hill it was. We struck into the country in a north-west direction, keeping separate heights, in order to have a better chance of finding the lake. Having passed several lochs without observing the object of our search, I began almost to despair, and to think that we must have mistaken the whole matter—the more so, as from the aspect of the rocks and the feel of the air from the north, I was confident that the ocean must be at no great distance from us; and, indeed, that it must be washing the other side of the very next range of rocks to that on which we were. There is a certain look and feel of the atmosphere when approaching the sea, which is quite unmistakable. We had already walked an hour and a half straight north-west, thus making

the two miles into at least five, when we came within view of a larger loch, which seemed to wind round the hills to nearly where the sea was. In this we again descried the peculiar-shaped rock on which the osprey builds. Although we were too far off to distinguish either nest or bird, we at once, without hesitation, made for the loch, over the rocks and swamps of which the whole line of country seemed to consist, and our perseverance was rewarded by presently making out that one osprey was on the nest, and the other soaring above her.

Dunbar again swam off to the rock, which was about the same distance from the shore as the last one was, and found three young birds in the nest, which he brought to land in his cap. I saw the male osprey perch on a rock on the opposite side of the loch, where he sat lazily, and apparently not inclined to join the female in her rapid flight round Dunbar's head; on looking at him attentively, through the glass, I saw, or fancied that I saw, his crop much distended with food. Knowing that if this was the case he would probably remain on his perch for some time, I started off round the loch, taking a long circuit in order to approach him from behind and from above. I had not calculated on the rocks I had to climb and the passes I had to take to get at him, or I do not think that I should

have undertaken the task. I had frequently to lift my dog up the steep rocks over which I had to climb. At last I came to a point from which I could get a look at the bird, and with as much care as if he had been a stag, I crept to a convenient place, and looking over, saw him still perched on the pinnacle of a rock, but quite out of reach. I found that I must still make another long circuit, or that I could not get unperceived within reach of him.

This time, on looking carefully over, I saw that he must be within shot of me, but the place I was perched on was so high and steep that it almost made me giddy to look down from it. I was completely out of breath, too; so lying down on my back, I waited a minute or two, and then scrambled down to within forty yards of the bird, and immediately above him. As my gun was loaded with a cartridge, I knew that he could scarcely escape; so standing up, I took a good look at him, expecting that he would see me and fly off the stone, and intending to shoot him flying. Whether from the earnestness with which he was watching the movements of Dunbar, who was far below him, or from the manner in which his head-feathers projected, he did not appear to see me at all. After waiting a short time without his moving, I am sorry to say

that I shot him deliberately in cold blood as he sat. He fell down the face of the rock, and lay at the bottom perfectly dead. I then had to consider how to get at him, and Fred seemed to be considering the same thing, as, peering over the edge of the precipice, he looked first at the dead bird and then at me, with a countenance expressive of "There is your bird now, but how are we to get at him?" This question, however, was soon settled by my marking the place, and then, having made a considerable *détour*, I managed to reach the spot. In the meantime, Dunbar having shot both barrels at the hen bird, she took her flight straight off to the sea. After a short time she returned, but kept at a wary distance, occasionally perching on the rocks, but never remaining long in one place. It was a curious sight from the high rocks, several hundred yards above the loch, to watch the whole scene that was acting below, and to see the long-winged bird sailing to and fro almost immediately below my feet, and yet far out of reach of shot.

The sun began to sink below the seaward rocks, lighting up only the highest summits of the hills to the south of the lake. On the very highest pinnacle of the rocks I saw several goats lying in different picturesque attitudes, to catch the last sunbeams, one old white fellow with venerable beard and long

horns being on the topmost point of all. Whom they could belong to it was difficult to say—they seemed as wild as red-deer. Dogs who are accustomed to roe seem invariably to hunt goats. Returning homewards, Fred began to snuff the air as if he smelt something he was used to hunt. Expecting it to be a wild-cat or some vermin, I answered his appealing look by allowing him to go off in pursuit of whatever it might be. Off he went, scrambling over the rocks in a state of furious eagerness. After a short time, however, a small flock of goats rushed past me, with Mr. Fred in hot pursuit on their scent. Nothing would stop him, notwithstanding his usual obedience, so I left him to his chase, and some time afterwards he came up with us again, looking heartily ashamed, and having run himself well out of wind, the goats having probably got to some steep rock of refuge where no dog could follow them.

About ten o'clock, it being still quite light, we found ourselves above the sea, with our inn apparently some miles off, probably about three, and three miles of such walking as, after our hard day's work since three in the morning, we did not much fancy. Just then, however, we saw a boat going up the glassy loch towards our inn; so, hailing it as loud as we could, we managed to make the rowers hear us, and they having come to the shore, we with

some difficulty scrambled down the rocks and got aboard. In the boat was what is here called a messenger-at-arms, which, I fancy, answers somewhat to a superior kind of constable. He had been on a strange and fruitless errand to arrest a girl of fourteen or fifteen, who had for some time been in the habit of driving the sheep in the neighbourhood on to a narrow point of land that reached into the sea, and having caught them one by one, she robbed them of as much wool as she could manage to strip off. Having carried on this system for some time, she at last became a perfect bugbear to the farmers, and here, luckily for us, was a well-dressed, rather dandy messenger-at-arms returning from his chase, and going straight to Rhiconnich, to which place he kindly gave us a lift, for which we were very grateful to him.

We had a beautiful row up the loch ; but the cold air, after the great heat of the afternoon while climbing the rocks, joined to sitting for an hour in the boat wet through above my knees, gave me an attack of illness which eventually cut short my rambles in Sutherland.

Between Rhiconnich and Scowrie I lost my only fishing-line in a ridiculous manner. In the course of our drive we passed over a very good-looking stream, the Laxford. Thinking to catch a couple

of trout for breakfast, I put my rod together, and leaving the horse and boat standing by the roadside, I determined to take a quarter of an hour's fishing, and if the trout did not rise, to continue our journey. At the very first cast that I made, however, a large salmon took the fly, rather to my annoyance, knowing, as I did, that no salmon were allowed to be killed in the Sutherland rivers this season. But being once hooked, he might as well be killed, so the fight commenced by the fish running clear out of the stream in which he was first hooked, and going down like a stone to the bottom of a deep black-looking pool below. Having only single line and trout-tackle, I could not force him much, but after waiting patiently with a gentle but constant strain on the fish, in order that he might still feel some weight upon his jaws, I at last, in despair, gave him such a tug that he was dislodged from his resting-place in spite of himself. Off he went, sometimes across the stream, with nearly the whole of my line out, the next moment right under my feet in the deep pool under the rock on which I was standing, and from which it was not easy to move. There I could see him shaking his head and trying to rub the hook out against the gravel; at another time he would take a sudden dart to the right and left, and again shake his head

like a dog worrying a rat : but knowing that he was well hooked, and, indeed, not caring much whether I lost him or not, I kept so tight a rein on him as prevented his either slacking the line or rubbing off the hook, small as it was. Suddenly a new idea seemed to seize him, and shooting straight upwards, he leaped several times out of the water immediately below me. But this would not do ; so finding that he could not get rid of the hook, he again rushed across the river, making the handle of the reel spin at a railway pace. He then made down the stream as fast as he could. I had scarcely any line left on my reel, so had to take a leap off the rock and follow him along the bank of the river. Presently we came to a rather rapid but not high fall, full of broken stones, and altogether a place where he would be sure to break my line if he once got into it, which he seemed determined to do, so here I halted and made a stand against all his pulling. The fish began to feel beat, and ran in again almost under my feet.

Not succeeding in slacking the line, he again rushed right across and took the fall, in spite of all I could do to prevent him. He did not cut my line as I expected, but it gave way close to the end, within a few inches of the reel, and before I could catch hold of it I had the pleasure of seeing the

line floating away, but gradually sinking as the fish carried it off towards the wider pools near the sea, Dunbar jumped gallantly into the water, but was too late to catch it, so the salmon went off with about forty yards of line and a couple of sea-trout flies hanging to his mouth. I scarcely knew whether to be angry or amused, but considering that the former would be of no use, and perhaps spoil my appetite for breakfast, I undid my rod, got into the boat, and drove off to Scowrie to breakfast, with a philosophy that rather astonished my companion.

Having called on Mr. M'Ivor, the manager of this part of Sutherland, that gentleman offered me his boat and other facilities to enable me to go to see the island of Handa, which is situated some four miles from Scowrie, and is famous as the breeding-place of an immense number of sea-fowl. After an hour's easy row and sail over the beautiful bay of Scowrie, and skirting a range of most rugged rocks, we approached the island. On the south side, where we landed, it has the appearance of a fine green slope, with only a range of low rocks immediately adjoining, and reaching in long points into the sea. About these rocks we saw thousands of sea-gulls and cormorants, and on the point that projected farthest into the water sat a large white

cat, looking wistfully towards the mainland. As all the inhabitants had left the island early in the spring for America, this cat had probably remained behind, and had made her living as she best might out of small birds, dead fish, etc. I could not help being struck with the attitude of the poor creature, as she sat there looking at the sea, and having as disconsolate an air as any deserted damsel. "She is wanting the ferry," was the quaint and not incorrect suggestion of one of our boatmen. Having run our boat into a small sandy creek, we landed. Here, as everywhere round the coast, is a fishing-station of Mr. Hogarth's, if a hut, the summer residence of two forlorn fishermen, can be called a fishing-station. We borrowed another coil of ropes from these men, and proceeded to the northern side of the island, where the perpendicular rocks form the breeding-places of the sea-fowl. The distance across the island I should reckon at nearly two miles, and it is a continued slope of green pasture. I passed several huts, the former inhabitants of which had all left the place a few weeks before; and, notwithstanding the shortness of the time, the turf walls were already tenanted and completely honeycombed by countless starlings, who seemed not the least shy, but, on the contrary, kept their ground, and chattered away as if they looked

on me as an intruder on what they had already established their right to.

Leaving them in undisturbed possession, I continued my way on to the north side, and in due time arrived on the summit of the cliffs which stretch the whole length of the island; and there was a sight which would alone repay many a weary mile of travel. Every crevice and every ledge of the rock was literally full of guillemots and razor-bills, while hundreds of puffins came out of their holes under the stones near the summit of the cliffs to examine and wonder at us. The guillemots stood in long lines along the shelves of the rocks, frequently within a few feet of the top whence we were looking at them. With a kind of foolish expression these birds looked at us, but did not take the trouble to move. The razor-bills, though equally tame, seemed more ready to take flight, if we had been inclined to assail them. When I fired off my gun, not *at*, but over, the birds, the guillemots only ducked their heads, and then looked up at us; whereas most of the razor-bills took a short flight out to sea, but quickly returned again to their perch on the rocks.

Being provided with plenty of rope, two stout boatmen, and also a slender-looking lad, who had volunteered to accompany us, having the repute of

a good cragsman, we lowered the latter over the top in order to procure a few eggs. I was amazed at the confidence and ease with which the lad made his way from shelf to shelf, and crevice to crevice of the precipices. From habit and custom he seemed to be as much at his ease as if he had been on fair *terra firma*. As for the birds, they would scarcely move, but just stepped out of reach, croaking at him with their peculiar note.

Each bird has a single egg of a size so large as to appear quite disproportioned. The eggs are of all colours, and marked in a thousand fantastic manners, sometimes with large blotches of deep brown or black, sometimes speckled slightly all over, and others having exactly the appearance of being covered with Arabic characters. The prevailing groundwork of the eggs is greenish blue, but they vary in different shades from that colour to nearly white. The egg is placed on the bare rock, with no attempt at a nest; and it was very amusing to see the careful but awkward-looking manner in which the old bird, on her return from the sea, got astride, as it were, of her egg, spreading her wings over it, and croaking gently all the time. Occasionally an egg would get knocked off by some bird in taking flight from the rock, to the great indignation of its owner.

Leaving Dunbar to collect his eggs, I strolled off alone along the summit of the cliffs, sitting down here and there to watch the different proceedings of the birds; and it was a most curious sight. On lying down to look over the most perpendicular parts, the constant and countless clouds of birds that were flying to and fro suggested the idea of a heavy snow-storm more than anything else, so crowded was their flight, and so high was the cliff. The guillemots seldom came to the top, but the razor-bills and puffins, particularly the latter, came fearlessly close to me. Indeed the puffins seemed to have the most entire confidence in my peaceable intentions, and frequently alighted so near me, that I might have knocked them down with a walking-stick. Sitting on a stone, they examined me most curiously, twisting their oddly-shaped heads to the right and left, as if to be sure of my identity. In some parts of the rocks there were great collections of kittiwakes' nests. These birds, unlike the guillemots, etc., construct a good-sized receptacle of weeds and grass for their eggs. In the midst of all this confusion and Babel of birds, a pair of peregrine falcons had their nests, and on my approach they dashed about amongst the other birds, uttering loud cries of alarm and anger. Towards the east end of the island was the nest of

the white-tailed eagle. The old birds flew far away immediately, and I only occasionally saw them as they soared high in the air. The nest was so completely under a shelf of rock that nothing but the ends of the outer sticks could be seen. I had not time to make any decided trial to get at it, as I had promised to be with Mr. M'Ivor at six o'clock; and my intention of visiting the place the next day was frustrated.

The rocks are curiously indented by the sea; in one place the waves have cut a kind of deep crevice the whole height of the cliffs, for a good distance into the island, through the narrow entrance of which the swell was roaring with a noise like thunder. At another part there is an island, or stack, as it is called, within a stone's throw of the mainland, but quite isolated. It is in the shape of a sugar-loaf, with a flat summit of perhaps twenty yards across. The top was covered with green herbage, and swarmed with birds of different kinds. Amongst them were great numbers of black-backed sea-gulls, both the greater and the lesser.

In the quieter parts of the cliffs were rock-pigeons and cormorants; neither of these birds seemed inclined to associate much with the crowd of sea-fowl which filled the greatest part of the rocks. Their stench alone might drive away so

delicate a bird as a rock-pigeon, and bad as this was now, by the time they had hatched and reared their young it must be much worse.

The rest of the party having joined me, and the time running short, I left the island in order to fulfil my promise of partaking of Mr. M'Ivor's hospitality at six o'clock; and I must say that after living so many days at small inns *where* I could, and *how* I could, an evening spent in the agreeable society of Mr. M'Ivor and the ladies at his house was a treat, as I had begun to feel like an uncivilised being.

On leaving the island we again saw the white cat seated on the same point of rock, and still looking anxiously towards the mainland.

Limited in size as the island of Handa is, it seems to contain a fine range of rich herbage, with a gentle slope to the south, and to be capable of feeding a considerable number of sheep or cattle. I was told, however, that much loss is sustained from the animals falling over the rocks, when they are inevitably dashed to pieces.