

AILSA-CRAIG.

PART III.

Hearken, thou craggy ocean-pyramid!
Give answer from thy voice—the seafowl's screams!
When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams?
When from the sun was thy broad forehead hid?
How long is't since the mighty power bid
Thee heave from airy sleep, from fathom dreams?
Sleep in the lap of thunder, or sun-beams,
Or when grey clouds are thy cold coverlid?
Thou answerest not, for thou art dead asleep!
Thy life is but two dead eternities,—
The last in air—the former in the deep;
First with the whales—last in the eagle-skies.
Drowned wert thou till an earthquake made thee steep;
Another cannot wake thy giant size.

KEATS.

As many of those who spend a month or more in Arran, in summer, are persons who seek refreshing recreation after being engaged during the rest of the year in the exciting and exhausting bustle of business in town, they are open to the enjoyment of a pleasure trip. Arran itself affords very ample scope for little excursions, so that there is not the same temptation

to wander from it for the sake of variety, as in many places of more limited bounds. Some forty years ago, it would have required no little courage to undertake a pleasure trip to Ailsa, which is about twenty miles from the south end of Arran. It might have been reached in a short time with a fair wind; but who could tell but an adverse wind might have kept the voyagers on the Craig for several days, and ere they got away, they might, in their musings on the rocky shore, begin to think that they were more nearly allied to the solan geese, lodged in the cliffs, than they had before suspected. Now, however, owing to the facilities afforded by good steamers, the trip to and fro may be accomplished in a few hours.

When Dr Macculloch wrote his "Description of the Western Islands," between thirty and forty years ago, Ailsa was little known, except as an interesting object from a distance. Macculloch, on visiting it, seems to have been greatly struck with it, and writes respecting it with somewhat of the enthusiasm of those who first discovered the wonders of Staffa. "Of the various objects," says he, "which cause the scenery of the Clyde to rank among the most enticing tracts in Scotland, Ailsa stands foremost. Yet it has not hitherto excited that attention to which it is entitled, having been little visited, even by those to whom its vicinity renders it so easily accessible. To those whose pursuit is picturesque beauty alone, it has almost remained unknown. He who may hereafter profit by this hint, will not regret the time he

may appropriate to this voyage. He will be amply repaid by the sight of scenery not surpassed, and rarely equalled, among the remoter Scottish isles."

"In the distant horizon, it forms an object peculiarly striking, from its unexpected magnitude in the blue haze, and from the decided and sudden manner in which it rises from the sea. In this respect it presents a solitary feature in Scotland, rather reminding the spectator of the volcanic islands of the Pacific Ocean. The effect is often much increased by the position of the clouds which so frequently involve its summit, adding indefinite and ideal dimensions to its altitude. When viewed near at hand, Ailsa produces that peculiar effect which is the result of greatness of dimension, combined with simplicity in the leading form, and variety in the arrangement of the parts. In this respect its chief advantage is owing to the steepness of the acclivity, which enables the eye to comprehend the whole of its bulk, even from a very short distance, thus giving it a mountainous effect, often lost in the vicinity of much larger masses, in consequence of the foreshortening resulting from the lowness of their angles. While by its magnitude it thus fills the eye, the commodious distance at which it may be examined, enables the sight to comprehend the variety and distribution of its parts, and to distinguish that delicacy of local colouring for which a certain degree of proximity is always required. It is partly owing to the beauty of the local colour, the mild tones of grey interspersed with greens of every tint, that the columnar ranges of Ailsa produce an

effect so far superior to those of Staffa, of the Shiant Islands, or of Skye,—the uniform dark hue of these, without variety or contrast, often confounding the whole in indiscriminate gloom.”

Ailsa is situated in the Frith of Clyde, about ten miles distant from the nearest part of the coast of Ayrshire, and about twice as far from the Island of Arran in the county of Bute, and from Kintyre in the county of Argyle. It rises abruptly from the sea in a conical form to the height of about 1100 feet. As from the perpendicular nature of the acclivity, it cannot be circumambulated, it is not so easy accurately to tell its length and breadth; but Dr Macculloch estimated its length at 3300 feet, and its breadth at 2200 feet. In many places the water is so deep at a small distance from the shore, that vessels may approach it with safety, though in other places there are sunken rocks on which they might run aground. There is one point, however, on the east side, where the meeting of contending tides has brought together a great quantity of rolled pebbles, forming a convenient landing-place for boats and larger vessels. At every other place the rocks are so perpendicular, or so rugged, that there can be no landing with safety. “The shores, if shores they may be called, that are found at the foot of the rocks, are formed of the stones and rubbish that fall from the summit, and are, with the exception of the landing-place above mentioned, so narrow, that though it is possible to land on them in fine weather, they afford no view of the magnificent scenery which towers above. For

this purpose it is necessary to make the circuit in a boat, the summit of the island being not only difficult to traverse, but presenting, even when the laborious task has been executed, no sight of the perpendicular faces which constitute its most striking features."

The perpendicular rock where it commences is only about forty feet in height, and slightly columnar. As it increases in height, the pillars are more distinctly marked, and at last it presents a perpendicular range of columns of about 400 feet in height—an elevation before which the columns of Staffa,—sixty or seventy feet in height,—sink into comparative insignificance. In regularity of form, however, they are inferior to the columns at Staffa. At the Giant's Causeway also, which I lately visited, the columns, though generally less than two feet in diameter, instead of six feet as at Ailsa, are much more distinct, can be easily separated from each other, and divided at the joints. For each joint those who act as guides at the Causeway charge two guineas. Ailsa and what is properly the Giant's Causeway do not admit of being compared, for they are quite different in character,—Ailsa towering in columnar grandeur hundreds of feet above you, and the Causeway lying in tessellated beauty under your feet, as you walk on the smooth and level tops of the pillars till they gradually slope down into the sea. A person is filled with astonishment, in walking on this wonderful pavement, at seeing how beautifully the columns on which he is treading are compacted together—no empty space

being left—all piecing as well as if each one had been chiselled out for its place; and yet, amidst this great regularity, there is great difference of form,—some being pentangular, others hexagonal, and others again forming fine octagons. What a wonderful Causeway! we exclaim. “Who made it?” said a foreigner, after he had looked at it with admiration. “Who made it?” said he, in his broken English. “God made it,” said the Irish gossoon who was acting as his guide. God made it, indeed, and nothing but the hand of God could have produced such wonderful work. Still more evident is it, however, that God made the magnificent columnar work at Ailsa, and dreadful would be the convulsion when it was upheaved from the bottom of the sea, to remain for ages a monument of His almighty power. The broken summits of these columns, 400 feet above the sea, form the safest possible resting-places for the various kinds of seafowl that there, in their season, build their nests. Gannets or solan geese particularly abound, “forming,” says Macculloch, “with the various tribes of gulls, puffins, awks, and other seafowl, a feathered population scarcely exceeded by St Kilda or the Flannan Isles. As the alarm occasioned by the arrival of a boat spreads itself, the whole of the noisy multitude takes wing, forming a cloud in the atmosphere which bears a striking resemblance to a fall of snow, or to the scattering of autumnal leaves in a storm. To prevent interference in their courses, each cloud of birds occupies a distinct stratum in the air, circulating in one direction, and in a perpetual wheeling flight.”

When I visited Ailsa some twenty years ago, steamboat-excursions were not so common as they now are, and a trip to Ailsa was worth speaking of. We sailed from Ardrossan at eight o'clock, A.M., with a goodly number on board; called at Brodick and Lamash, taking in additional passengers, and then started for Ailsa, which we reached after a pleasant passage on a delightful day. We landed at the spot of ground mentioned by Macculloch, and were told that an hour would be allowed us, during which we might amuse ourselves on the shore, or ascend to the summit of the conical crag. About fifteen of the party set out to scale the hill. I went up along with them as far as the old castle on the east side of the hill, where there is a kind of rough stair opposite to the landing-place. It is no easy matter to make one's way even so far, for the path is rather rough and deceitful. It is greatly cumbered with ponderous stones, that have rolled down from the higher parts of the hill. Were they bare, a person might contrive to thread his way among them, or to clamber over them; but placing his foot on what seems loose herbage, he finds that it gives way under him, and he sinks down to the middle betwixt two large stones, and finds it no easy matter to make his way through the rank vegetation which conceals the rugged inequality of his steep path. Every naturalist who has visited Ailsa has been struck with the luxuriance of the vegetation, of which, like ourselves, we doubt not, they felt the practical effects. *Silene inflata* and *Lychnis dioica* were as luxuriant as if they had been growing in the

garden of the Hesperides. The nettle, which dogs the foot of man, was flourishing in gigantic size and vigour, when the human beings whose habitation it marked were slumbering in the dust. The grass also seemed to bid defiance to the nibbling power of the numerous rabbits that burrowed there, and to the stronger teeth of a few goats that we were told might still be seen as the remnant of a larger flock. Those that have ascended farther up, tell us that there are two springs of water producing marshes, in which *Helosciadium inundatum* abounds, as enormous in size as the other plants found in the island. To what are we to ascribe this prodigious luxuriance? Chiefly to two causes. As no part of the island is far removed from the waves, all the plants that grow on it are kept almost constantly moist by the spray, which, though often invisible in its ascent, descends with a fertilizing influence on the soil, and on all the herbaceous plants that spring from it. To shrubs and trees this would be unfavourable, especially when they rise so high as to feel the influence of the sea-blast. To evergreen shrubs, and to the pine tribe in general, I know from experience that the spray and sea-breeze are particularly injurious. But herbaceous plants, that die down in winter, seem to thrive under the marine aspersions, which come in a milder form during summer. But there is another and a still more powerful cause of this great luxuriance, namely, the guano produced by the sea-fowls that in numbers numberless congregate in the island. True it is, that much of it must be swept into the sea, from their

breeding-places being on the tops of the columns. But they rest at times in immense flocks on various parts of the island, and many of them, we doubt not, find their graves there. We do not often see a dead bird, even in hard winters, when so many of them perish ; but it is because, when they feel the approach of the all-subduing enemy, they instinctively seek a grave for themselves, creeping into some crevice, or burying themselves in some thicket, where death comes upon them, and where they gradually moulder into dust, which every year becomes richer and richer also by the decay of that luxuriant herbage with which in summer it is covered.

Having forced my way through the vegetable entanglements and over the obstructing stones, and reached the castle at the height of about 250 feet, and having no intention of ascending to the summit, we thought this a good place to come to a halt. It did not command the same extensive view as the top of the hill, but nevertheless it was very good. I remember being surprised to find that I had got so near to Ireland. We had a fine view of Lochryan on the Galloway coast, but we were much pleased to find that we had almost as distinct a view of Belfast Loch as of the Scottish one. Having enjoyed the distant prospect, I turned my eyes to what was at hand, and especially to the ancient square tower of strength by which I stood, of which only the walls and some vaulted chambers now remain. Having examined the ruins, and considered how impregnable it would long be thought by those who inha-

bited it, as bows and javelins, the missile weapons of those days, would have had no effect on its massive walls, I remembered that these, high and thick as they were, had proved altogether insufficient for the defence of the inhabitants, as there was one enemy who was himself a host, who had not only looked in at their narrow windows and narrower arrow-slits, but had forced their barred gates and invaded their apartments, and had carried them all off, not in a body, but at his pleasure one by one, to consign them to a darksome prison-house, from which there was no possibility of escape. That enemy was Death, and that prison-house was the grave; and neither the governor of the castle, nor one of the proud defenders of the stronghold, nor even the meanest menial within the walls, has been allowed to escape to tell the various ways by which all the rest in their successive generations were forced to yield to the king of terrors.

I was led also to remember that what was a tower of strength against human power to its ancient occupants, would have afforded little protection to them now, when more formidable weapons of offence are in use than arrows, however well barbed, or well aimed, or well guided by the feathers of the grey-goose wing; as a few broadsides from a man-of-war in the offing would have caused the proudest battlements of the fortress to crumble to the dust.

After some such musings, I descended leisurely without observing any rare plants. I would have been well pleased to fall in with *Lavatera arborea*, which I understand has been found in Ailsa, as it has

also in a corresponding habitat, the Bass Rock on the East coast. I regretted less my not finding it, as I have found it in a wild state at Arneill on the coast of Ayrshire. It thrives remarkably well at Ardrossan, where I have seen it eight feet in height, with a stem almost as thick as a man's arm, well-deserving the name of *Tree Mallow*. On reaching the beach, I sauntered along the shore in hopes of finding some shell worth taking home as a memorial of my visit to Ailsa; but in this I was disappointed, for those that are driven ashore are dashed with such violence on the rocks, that nothing but fragments can be picked up. Seeing that the given hour was nearly expired, I was returning from my solitary ramble on the shore, when the sound of the steamer's warning-bell made me quicken my pace. When I reached the steamer, many crowded round me, and said, "It was well that you were not here, for we have got a terrible fright with your sons." These dear boys, of ten and twelve years of age (who have now been many years in Australia), had accompanied me in the excursion, and were of course among those who started for the pinnacle of the Craig, and were two of the five who succeeded in reaching it. They had been particularly gratified by having so good a view of the North of Ireland, and had been amused by finding that the puffins, or Ailsa cocks as they are called in the West, had built their nests in the rabbit-holes, and that the young birds were very fierce, hissing and biting with their little sharp bills when they attempted to handle them. When, however, they began to

descend, they found that their companions had got greatly ahead of them, and saw that the steamer was preparing to sail. In a little, they heard the bell which was intended to assemble the stragglers, and they began to quicken their pace, and seeing the party hurrying aboard, some rising fears of being left in an uninhabited island put more mettle into their heels, and the nimble step was quickened into a race. They were observed by the party aboard, who saw, what they did not see, that they were advancing to the brink of a tremendous precipice, from which, if they should be dashed, ruin would be inevitable, and a loud simultaneous shout was raised by all aboard to warn them of their danger. The shout was heard by them, but as they imagined that this was intended to warn them that they might soon be too late for the boat, they pushed on with increased velocity, till they were on the very brink of the cliff. All on board thought that they were hastening to destruction, and the ladies covered their eyes that they might not see the fatal plunge; but the light-hearted, nimble-footed boys, a moment ere it was too late, observing the precipice when they were on its very brink, were able in some degree to check their speed, and to skim along the ledge of the rock till they reached a place where they could descend with safety, and they had reached the vessel before I arrived at it. Many, as I said, crowded around me, congratulating me on the escape of my sons, and also on being so distant at the time as to escape the fright.

Though I was thankful to a kind Providence for

preserving them, it was not till some years afterwards that I was fully aware of the greatness of the danger. Passing at that time from Ayr to Ballantrae in a steamer, we came very near Ailsa; and when we were alongside of the mighty rock, I thought of those who were then far away, and mentioned to a stranger, with whom I had been conversing, the dangerous circumstances in which my sons had on that occasion been placed. He seemed more affected by what I told him than I expected, and I saw that he had good reason to be so, when he told me that a year or two after the period to which I have alluded, he had been on Ailsa as one of a happy marriage-party from Stranraer; that having landed, they had ascended to the summit, and after spending some time there, they began to descend in great glee, all of them, both male and female, being in the heyday of youth and health. As there had been a tight race for the honour of being first up, they began again to strive who should be first down, and a young man, who had got the start of the rest, running unexpectedly on this very precipice, being unable to check his speed, in spite of every effort rushed over, and was afterwards found by his companions dead, and greatly mangled by the dreadful fall. This cast a deep cloud over the whole party, and they who in the morning left Stranraer full of joy, returned in the evening laden with sorrow, bearing the dead body of their companion, and bringing the mournful tidings to the afflicted friends of the deceased.

How true is it that in the midst of life we are in

death, and that in the most joyous circumstances there may be but a step between us and death ! And what a lesson does this teach us of the importance of living in a state of preparation for eternity,—of joining trembling with our mirth, fearing the Lord and his goodness, cultivating such a reverential sense of his presence as will restrain us, even in our most joyous moments, from doing any thing to offend Him whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life !

But we must now return to our own expedition. The day hitherto had been very favourable. Before we left the island, the steamer was brought close to that part of the Craig where there is the range of colossal columns rising from the sea, as we have said, to the height of about 400 feet. The spectacle was by far the grandest of the kind I had ever seen. On ledges at different heights, where part of the column had been broken off, there were multitudes of sea-fowl ; and when a musket was fired, immediately the air was filled with the winged inhabitants, and our ears assailed by the noise they raised, as if reproaching us for our unpolite conduct. I was very much annoyed by the wanton cruelty of one of our party, and I am sorry to say that he was a preacher. He had a musket, and his delight was to shoot the poor birds in their flight. There was no trial of skill, for the difficulty would have been to miss in such a flock ; and then when he did kill, he had only the cruel satisfaction of seeing that he had taken away life, for the poor bird falling into the sea could not

be reached by him, and might be sadly missed by the young brood left behind. I wish the noble proprietor, the Marquis of Ailsa, would use some means of preventing such culpable conduct. It would be an honour to be an informer in such cases.

So far as we had gone, all had been prosperous; but when the vessel was brought near to the cliff before sailing, that we might have a good view of the loftiest range of the magnificent columns, ere we were aware, she ran on a ledge of sunken rock, and became so completely grounded, that all the power of steam could not remove her from this perilous predicament. The captain was soon at his wits' end. He had proposed that we should form a close phalanx on the deck, and run from bow to stern, in order, if possible, to move her, but we had repeatedly done this, and all was in vain. The afternoon had as yet been good, but there were by this time some appearances of an unfavourable change, and in these circumstances our condition was far from being enviable. One surly blast might have rendered us a wreck, and I know not if there was even a boat aboard, so that if we had been cast into the sea, there the greater part of us must have remained, for the very thought of scaling the precipitous rock, though it was so close to us, was altogether out of the question. Some strong swimmers might have succeeded in reaching the landing-place, where the shore was accessible, but many men, women, and children must soon have found a watery grave. There was one thing greatly in our favour, and in that, under God, our hope lay. The

tide was making ; and we fondly hoped that ere long the rising tide would raise the vessel from the sunken rock. The tide seemed in these circumstances to flow moré slowly than usual, but with all the patience we could muster, we had to abide the result. Many a countenance had increased greatly in length, and many a tongue that lately had been very glibe and nimble had become quite silent. No jokes were passed. Our cruel sportsman no longer plied his gun, though the birds were hovering over our heads, uttering loud cries, most of them, we doubt not, in wrath, though some notes were more in the tone of pity. At all events, we were beginning to think ourselves objects of pity. More than once the power of the steam had been tried, but the vessel stuck fast, as if she had become a part of the rock on which she rested. Many a time was the question put to the captain, especially by the ladies of the party, "Are you sure the tide is rising?" And, "Do you think that it will really float us?" The captain had his own fears, I believe, but he put the best face he could on it. When he thought that it was about highwater, he proposed that we should make another effort. We were all directed to crowd together on a particular part of the deck, and all the steam the boiler could yield was put in requisition, and, thank God, it was successful. She glided silently off the rock ; we found that we were afloat, and, while a loud shout of joy was raised by all, I trust there were many silent aspirations of gratitude to Him who had granted deliverance.

Pleasure-sails do not always terminate pleasantly.

Very soon after we left Ailsa, the afternoon became very wet and windy, and the wind besides was ahead, so that, with a bad sea-boat, and cold, wet, squally weather, our progress was very slow, and our condition very uncomfortable. Not a few had come aboard at Brodick and Lamlash in the expectation of making the trip in a few hours, and of being landed at Brodick or Lamlash before sundown; but ere we reached either Lamlash or Brodick, it had become quite dark, and so stormy that the captain could not venture to land his passengers in Arran, so that they had to be carried on to Ardrossan. We reached Ardrossan at a late hour, and, after a walk of three miles, we arrived at the Manse of Stevenston in safety, well pleased that we had been on Ailsa, but hoping, if we ever visited it again, that the trip might end more agreeably.

Though we have left Ailsa, we have a good deal yet to say respecting it. It is in the West spoken of by way of eminence as *the* Craig; but what kind of craig or rock is it? We answer this by quoting Macculloch:—"Ailsa is composed of a single rock, no difference being perceived between the amorphous and the columnar parts. The whole mass must be considered as one of the numerous modifications of the agents of the trap family. It consists of an almost uniform basis of greyish compact felspar, occasionally tinged with a brownish or reddish hue, having small grains of quartz interspersed throughout. Together with that it contains black spots, formed of very minute particles of hornblende, collected in

small groups, and condensed towards a central point. It adds another variety to the list of those rocks, which, like basalt, are capable of assuming a columnar form. Numerous trap veins traverse this rock. They are of considerable dimensions, and, from the abrupt forms of the cliffs, expose their courses for a great space, presenting this geological fact in a very interesting point of view. The greater number are vertical, or at least highly erect, and they are attended with no disturbance or derangement of the surrounding rocks beyond that of simple separation; nor is there any alteration of either rock visible at the places of contact."

And is it uninhabited? It is now uninhabited by man. Not long ago an attempt was made to make it a fishing-station, and houses were built, and fishermen located in them for a time; but whether they found it too dreary or too stormy, we know not; at all events, we saw the cottages deserted. Were we to attempt to describe the fish of the sea around it—the living creatures that might be found on it—and the fowls of the air that are seen flying in such flocks above it—we might prepare to write many volumes. We shall limit ourselves to short notices of a few of the birds that are known to frequent this conical island, making free use, by the kind permission of the author, of the rich store of information in the "Natural History of Ireland, by William Thompson, Esq." I shall begin with the puffin (*Fratercula arctica*, Linn.), which breeds abundantly in Ailsa, and in the west of Scotland goes under the name of

the Ailsa Cock. This bird rejoices in many names, such as Coulter-neb, Sea-Parrot, and in the north of Scotland it is called Tammie Norrie. Two of the names, Coulter-neb and Sea-Parrot, are evidently from the peculiar shape of the bill. They are migratory, arriving in March and departing in August. They are represented by some as forming their nests in rabbits' burrows, from which, no doubt, they can easily dislodge the timid and "feeble folks" who were the rightful proprietors. But though they may at times do this, it has been ascertained that they are in the habit of forming burrows for themselves. On the island of Rathlin, off the Giant's Causeway, where puffins breed in great numbers, it is stated, on good authority, that their burrows must be of their own making, as many of them are in places that rabbits could not reach. They burrow in the mould among the rocks to the depth of two or three feet, and at the end of the excavation the egg, which is white, and about the size of a hen's, is deposited on the bare earth. Dr Macculloch, in his description of the Flannan Isles, remarks, "Various sea-fowl have here established their colonies, but the most numerous is the puffin. These literally cover the ground; so that when, on the arrival of a boat, they all come out of their holes, the green surface of the island appears like a meadow richly enamelled with daisies. The soil is so perforated with their burrows, that it is scarcely possible to take a step on solid ground!"

Mr Thompson, after an eloquent description of Horn, in Donegal, says—"Immense numbers of

puffins breed here, and they afford me an excellent and near opportunity of observing them, as, within a yard of the summit, many appear on the flat ledges of rock, while others come flying up from the sea, alighting beside them, quite regardless of my presence. A few yards down, others are seen at the entrance of holes, like rabbit-burrows, though really their own perforations. An immense bank of loose sandy earth, shooting down almost perpendicularly towards the sea, was drilled by them so as to resemble a gigantic dove-cot." They are excellent foragers for their young, having the bountiful sea always at hand richly stored with provision. "A puffin shot here yesterday," says Mr Thompson, "was bearing to its mate or young six fish, five of which were young *Clupeæ*, nearly six inches in length, and the other a sand-eel of large size. Several more were remarked to be similarly well-laden; and one bird had hold of a fish nearly the size of a full-grown herring." Little wonder is it that the little puffins thrive, and become very plump, when constantly enjoying such abundant cheer. It is a prevalent opinion in Rathlin, in Ireland, and in the island of Eigg, in Scotland, as Mr Hugh Miller states, that the nestlings become so fat that they would be unable to leave their burrows, were it not that the old puffins feed them, when their wings are grown, on sorrel leaves to reduce their size, that they may be able to escape from their burrows. As they lay two eggs, they have generally two of a brood to provide for. Pennant states that "they show vast affection towards

their young, and seem totally insensible of danger in the breeding season. If a parent is taken at that time and suspended by the wings, it will in a sort of despair treat itself most cruelly, by biting every part it can reach ; and the moment it is loosed, will never offer to escape, but instantly resort to its unfledged young." Audubon, who gives a most interesting account of the puffin, mentions the extraordinary affection manifested by these birds to each other, for whenever one fell dead or wounded on the water, its mate, or a stranger, immediately alighted by its side, swam round it, pushed it with its bill, as if to urge it to fly or dive, and seldom would leave it till an oar was raised to knock it on the head, when at last, aware of the danger, it would plunge below in an instant. Affectionate as they are to their young and to each other, they experience no mercy from man. Willoughby, nearly two hundred years ago, remarks that the marksmen in the Isle of Man take the puffins, when they are sitting on their eggs, with snares fastened to the top of long poles, and so put about their necks ; and Mr John M'Gillivray mentions, that in St Kilda, where they abound, they are captured in a similar manner, 300 in the course of a day being thus snared by an expert birdcatcher. Mr James Wilson, in his very interesting " Voyage Round the Coast of Scotland and the Isles," says, " These birds are caught by stretching a piece of cord along the stony places where they chiefly congregate. To this cord are fastened, at intervals of a few inches, numerous hair-nooses, and from time to time, when the

countless puffins are paddling upon the surface, in go their little web feet, they get noosed round the ankle, and no sooner begin to flap and flutter, than down rushes a ruthless widow woman and twists their necks." The widow alluded to lived chiefly on the puffin in its season. After the breeding season, they are very numerous about Ailsa and Arran. They have rather a pert appearance; and when an attempt is made to frighten them, instead of taking to flight, they dive under water, and bolt upright again at some distance. They find difficulty, indeed, in taking wing, though they can fly pretty well when once up. As they are not good in braving the storm, in tempestuous weather they take shelter in creeks or on the shore. When suddenly overtaken by a storm at sea, they are often drowned; and after a squall, we have occasionally found them dead on the shore.

The COMMON, or FOOLISH GUILLEMOT—*Uria troile*, Linn.—Guillemot is the French name given to it by Buffon. It has several provincial names, such as Willock, Skout, Sea-hen, Strany. It has been called the Foolish Guillemot, because some of them appear to be very stupid, not becoming cautious from experience, but suffering themselves to be repeatedly shot at, as if they did not know the danger; for notwithstanding they have seen their associates drop at every fire, they continue to whirl about in the same circle, and to alight again in the same place where they were first disturbed. Others, however, are sufficiently alert.* The Craig of Ailsa is one of their breeding

* Bewick.

places. The female lays only one egg, which is large in proportion to her size, being about 3 inches in length. The bird itself weighs about 24 oz., and measures 17 inches in length, by 27 in breadth. The bill is about $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, both mandibles slightly notched near their points. They use their wings under water. They can use them also in the air, but they generally prefer swimming to flying. They seem incapable of taking flight except from the water. The Rev. G. M. Black, writing from the coast of Down to Mr Thompson, remarks: "A guillemot was brought to me a short time since, which I at first thought had been wounded, as, when put down on the ground, it made no attempt either to walk or fly, but was very bold, striking hard with its bill. When I afterwards took it to the beach, within a few paces of the sea, the eager attempt to get into its proper element was very amusing, as, aided both by legs and wings, it shoved itself along in a most awkward way. On reaching the sea it at once dived, rose fifty yards off, flapped its wings, and seemed well and happy." A friend of Mr Thompson's, fishing in Belfast Bay, expresses himself as much entertained by observing the habits of these birds and their young. "The young were about one-third less than their parents, and uttered a shrill, squeaking note, while that of the old one was hoarse and guttural, like a croak. They admitted of a very close approach. The old birds dived several times, and on each occasion brought up a fish, which was always given to the young. The latter rested quietly on the surface of the water, and

never attempted to fish for themselves, but hurried forward rapidly to their parents when they brought up any prey." After tempestuous weather, these birds are occasionally found washed ashore on the Irish shore, as they are also on the coast of Ayrshire.

The RAZOR-BILL—*Alca Torda* and *Alca Pica*, Linn.—This bird, like the guillemot, abounds at Ailsa, one of its breeding-places. Early in May they take possession of the highest cliffs, where they deposit their single large egg on the bare rock. The birds sit closely together, and, though congregated in great numbers, each knows its own egg, and hatches it. Bewick says, "It has often excited wonder, that as the eggs have no nest or bedding to rest upon, they are not rolled into the sea by gales of wind, or on being touched by the birds; it is also said, that if they are removed by the human hand, it is extremely difficult to replace them in their former steady situation." They are three inches long, and are gathered for food in great numbers from the rocks. The cry of the razor-bill is a kind of croak, harsh and disagreeable; and by an imitation of it, the birds are drawn out from their lurking-places by the fowlers.

The LITTLE AUK—*Alca alle*, Linn.—Though rare in Britain, has been seen at Ailsa. It is a small, plump, round-shaped bird, measuring only nine inches. The bill is black, and so is the flat crown of the head. The upper parts of the plumage are of the same colour, except a white bar across the wings. The under parts are white. These birds are inhabitants of Spitzbergen, Greenland, and Newfoundland, where

they are called ice-birds. Mr Thompson mentions (vol. iii., page 220) "that Mr Darragh (of the Belfast Museum), when paying an ornithological visit to the Craig of Ailsa, on the 19th May 1849, saw four little auks. One of them remained on the water at the base of the craig until approached by the boat within about eight yards, when it flew off in the direction which its three companions had taken a minute before." Their being seen, adds Mr Thompson, at this fine breeding-haunt of "rock-birds," inclusive of the gannet, in the middle of May, suggests the probability of their nesting there. Captain Beechy, in his account of the Voyage towards the North Pole in 1815, remarks: "At the head of the bay there is a high pyramidal mountain of granite termed Rotge (*i. e.*, Little Auk) Hill, from the myriads of small birds of that name which frequent its base. They are so numerous, that we have frequently seen an uninterrupted line of them extending full half-way over the bay, or to a distance of more than three miles, and so close together that thirty have fallen at a shot. This living column on an average might have been about six yards broad, and as many deep. There must have been nearly four millions of birds on wing at one time."

The KITTIWAKE.—*Larus tridactylus*, Linn.—*L. rissa*, Brunn.—Though gulls of various kinds abound in Ailsa, rejoicing in it as their fatherland, we shall allow them to pass undisturbed, noticing only the gentle little kittiwake; and we are led to select it in consequence of some personal acquaintance with one

of this family. It is a small bird, measuring only about 16 inches in length, and weighing about 14 oz. The bill is greenish yellow, the head, neck, tail, and other parts of the body, white. The legs are dusky, and the hinder toe not bigger than a small wart, hence the Linnean name *L. tridactylus*, or three-toed gull. It frequents rocky promontories and islets in the sea, preferring those where there are cliffs and precipices. Dr J. D. Marshall writes thus respecting them :—" This is by far the most common species of gull in Rathlin ; and when I was there in June 1834, they were in such countless multitudes as to darken the air over our heads. The nests were formed of dried grass, &c. When I looked down from a height on these nests, it appeared wonderful how the birds found room to sit and hatch their eggs or tend their young, for they were placed on the shelf of a rock so near to each other that the birds sat in contact." Mr Thompson (vol. iii., p. 341) says: " In June 1832, I saw kittiwakes in immense numbers about their nesting-places in the range of magnificent cliffs westward of Horn Head. Looking eastward I saw at one view thousands sitting on their nests, which are all placed on narrow horizontal shelves for about half-way up the rocks from the water, and in depth only sufficient to contain a single row of them. They are placed close together, and the birds are then as near to each other as they can sit. The nests are very thick, fully three inches, composed of the grass *Elymus arenarius*, and exhibit no lining of feathers. Some of the old birds exhibited the pretty and grace-

ful gestures of the dove when cooing, and looked consummately happy." Such a spectacle is fitted to give great delight to a benevolent mind, in contemplating the amount of happiness which, in a wild place, God is giving to so many of his beautiful creatures. Mr Thompson informs us that there is quite a line of demarcation betwixt the nesting-places of the kittiwake and the herring-gull, the former occupying the lower, and the latter the upper half of the same cliffs. Mr G. C. Hyndman mentions, that when he was sailing, on 24th June 1844, some miles from Ailsa, kittiwakes, which breed in quantities on that majestic pyramidal rock, were attracted by the bait that was out for mackerel. Perceiving this, he threw out pieces of fat meat to them, when about twenty gathered round the vessel, and followed it for two or three miles.

Two years ago, I was led to take an interest in one of these pretty little kittiwakes. A boy brought it to the door, saying he had got it in the Isle of Arran, and wishing me to buy it. I gave a sixpence for it, that I might free it from his hands and set it at liberty. I was sorry, however, to find that he had clipped one of its wings, so that when let loose in the garden it attempted to escape, half running, half flying. I saw that it would have been cruelty to commit it to the sea in that state, and therefore resolved to keep it till the feathers of the wing were grown. Wishing to make it happy in its temporary confinement, I treated it with all possible kindness; and a member of the household, to whom even the wild birds in the garden got attached, and became so

tame that some of them would eat out of her hand, showed even more than her usual kindness to the poor little kittiwake—but all in vain. It never put the least trust in any of us, even when giving it food. I think it could never forget the harsh usage it had received from its captor before it came into our hands; and could it have spoken, we may suppose that it would have said, "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*" We got it in autumn and kept it all winter. Being in a walled garden, with its single wing it could not escape. We wished to make it as comfortable as possible during the cold winter nights, and for this purpose placed near it a barrel on its side littered with hay; but it would never enter it, and if put into it, it would not remain. To give it a resting-place removed from the ground, I laid a large stone in a sloping position against the garden wall, and this it constantly chose as its roosting-place by night. Even in the coldest winter nights, when one might have thought that its little toes would have been frozen, this hardy little three-fingered Jack kept to its favourite station, and was found on the stone in the morning. When spring returned, I hoped that the feathers of its wing would soon be so far grown that it might be allowed to return to its kindred in Arran or Ailsa, but it dwindled and became emaciated, and finally died, in consequence, it is probable, of injuries it had received before it came into our hands.

In describing Ailsa, it would be unjustifiable not to treat a little of the solan goose, seeing that Ailsa is the only place in the West that it honours as a breed-

ing residence. It has several names. Among the learned it is called *Sula Bassana*. Its generic name is from its Norse name, *Sule*; and its specific name is from our own Bass Rock, on the east coast of Scotland, which, from time immemorial, has been one of its favourite residences. Its Scottish name, *Solan*, is derived from its Norse name, *Sule*; and its English name, *Gannet*, is a lengthened form of its Welsh name, *Gan*. It is a great bird, three feet in length, by six feet in breadth. The greater part of the plumage is white. It is a strong, fierce-looking fowl, with a long sharp bill, which it is said to dart at the eyes of those that assail it. They form their nests in caverns or on ledges of the rock. "The male and female hatch and fish by turns; the fisher returns to the nest with five or six herrings in its gullet, all entire and undigested, which the hatcher pulls out from the throat of its provider, and swallows them, making at the same time a loud noise." Martin says that "the solan geese have always some of their number that keep watch in the night time, and if the sentinel is surprised (as it often happens) all the flock are taken, one after another. But if the sentinel be awake at the approach of the creeping fowlers, and hear a noise, he cries softly *grog, grog*, at which the flock do not move; but if the sentinel see or hear the fowler approaching, he cries softly *bir, bir*, which would seem to import danger, since, immediately after, all the tribe take wing, leaving the disappointed fowlers without any prospect of success for that night."

The depth to which gannets often dive in fishing is

proved to be very great. Mr W. Thompson, to whom we have been so much indebted, says (vol. iii., page 258): "Having heard from two friends that were grouse-shooting at Ballantrae (on the Ayrshire coast, near to Ailsa), that they had seen great numbers of gannets lying in a state of decay in holes on the beach, and that these birds had been taken at extraordinary depths in the fishermen's nets, I made particular inquiry on the subject from a worthy resident of my acquaintance (postmaster, &c., of the village), and received the following reply—'Gannets are very commonly caught about Ballantrae in the fishermen's nets, which are sunk from 9 to 20, but sometimes to the depth of 30 fathoms, or 180 feet. They are taken at all these depths, when the water is rough as well as smooth, in both the cod and turbot nets. Of the greatest quantity taken at one time, John, son of Alexander Coulter, can make oath that he took ninety-four gannets from one net at a single haul a few years ago. The net was a cod net, about sixty fathoms long. The birds brought up the net, with its sinkers and fish, to the top, where such as were not drowned made a sad struggle to escape. There were four nets in this train; but the above ninety-four were in one of the nets, and there were thirty-four additional birds in the other part of the train, being 128 gannets in all.' A scientific friend, who had watched the proceedings of the gannets on the Irish coast, remarked that, when in pursuit of prey, they invariably went down perpendicularly, remained a long time under water, and never reappeared without a

fish crosswise in their bills, which was thrown up into the air, caught by the head in its descent, and swallowed." The Rev. G. M. Black writes, "One that happened to be caught asleep was brought on board the boat and tied by the leg to one of the 'traps.' To test its appetite, some fish were thrown to it, when, without drawing breath, it swallowed four full-grown mackerel, and probably would have disposed of more, had not the fishermen thought it had enough, at least, for one meal."

We have elsewhere mentioned that gannets are taken by fastening a fish to a strong board, which is floated, and the bird coming down with great impetus from on high on its prey, has its neck dislocated. The force with which a gannet plunges on a fish is astonishingly great. Mr John Macgillivray says: "The following was related to me by more than one person both in St Kilda and Harris, and I believe it to be true. Several years ago, an open boat was returning from St Kilda to Harris, and a few herrings happened to be lying in the bottom close to the edge of the ballast. A gannet passing overhead, stopping for a moment, suddenly darted down upon the fish, and passed through the bottom of the boat, as far as the middle of the body, which, being retained in that position by one of the crew, effectually stopped the leak till they reached their destination." We have often heard of the horn of the *Monodon* or sea-unicorn having been driven through the plank of a vessel in the Eastern seas, and of the vessel being kept from sinking by the horn remaining in the per-

foration till the harbour was reached. There is a common saying, "Seeing is believing;" and in the Museum of the East India House, London, a few weeks ago, I actually saw this very plank, with the identical horn which had thoroughly pierced it still remaining in the perforation which the powerful sea-monster had made.

It may be interesting to some to learn what has been said of Ailsa by other writers besides those we have already quoted; but before doing so, I am tempted to give another passage from Mr Thompson's "Natural History of Ireland," from which I have already taken copious extracts. "Though I have not visited Ailsa," he remarks, "its noble pyramidal form, rising to the altitude of 1100 feet above the sea, has always been familiar to me, forming, as it does, so fine a feature in the scenery, when viewed from the north-east coast of Ireland. But while shooting on moors in Ayrshire, I have had the pleasure of making a nearer acquaintance with it, as thence casting the eye seaward, it was always the grandest object within view. On one occasion, it was observed from the inland mountains that intensely black clouds occupied the west and north-west, and dismally grim did Ailsa arise from the dark waters;—again that it appeared covered with snow towards the summit, so exquisitely white were the clouds resting there,—and several times, during two successive days, a dark cloud was seen rising from the apex, like smoke from a volcano, which the configuration of the island so greatly resembles."

At the season when the young gannets are about fledged, great numbers of them are caught in their nests at the Bass, and at Ailsa, and carried to Edinburgh, and Ayr, and to other places throughout the country, where they are still regarded by some as a delicacy, and eaten as a whet before dinner. It is an acquired taste, however, and we had learned in our younger days to eat them with relish by getting them in their season both in Edinburgh and Ayr. It is many years since we tasted them, and we rather suspect that their very strong fishy flavour would be more than enough for us now-a-days. It is interesting to read what Sir William Brewster, Bart., says respecting the solan geese in his journal which he kept when he travelled in Scotland in 1635, and which was published by the Chatham Society in 1844:—
“In the Isle of Elsey, which is my Lord Castle’s, there breed abundance of solenne (solan) geese, which are longer necked and bodied than ours, and so extreme fat are the young, as that when they eat them they are placed in the middle of the room, so as all may have access about it, their arms stripped up, and linnen cloths placed before their clothes to secure them from being defiled with the fat thereof which doth besprinkle and besmear all that come near unto it.” Sir William, doubtless, is here speaking of the Ayrshire epicures of 1635. In 1851, it is, we doubt not, still tasted by our gourmands as a whet, without the serious preparation of stripping the arms, and towelling the vest and nether garments. We have heard, indeed, of one with a pretty sharp-set maw, who, having been told

that they were used as a whet to quicken the appetite for dinner, set briskly to work, but by and by complained that, though he had eaten almost the whole of one, he felt not a bit more hungry than when he began. But, though they may be used as provocatives by those who can "dine satisfactionably every day," according to the Irishman's reading of the text, they are regarded as one of the richest blessings of a kind Providence by the inhabitants of St Kilda, and other islanders, and are carefully stored up to be their chief support during winter. Their eggs also are laid up for the same purpose; for, though they would not lay more than one egg if left undisturbed, the fowlers know that they will lay three if the first and second are taken away, and consequently they leave only the third to be hatched. The mass of eggs thus obtained they secure in stone receptacles built for the purpose, in which they cover the eggs with peat-ashes to exclude the air; and thus protected from rain and atmospheric influence, they continue fresh during the winter. For the sake of the eggs they visit only the nests that are most easy of access, but in robbing the nests of the young birds they are exceedingly venturesome, as their support in winter depends so much on the result. Then, says Bewick, "the adventurous fowler, trained to it from his youth, and familiarized to the danger, must first approach the brow of the fearful precipice to view and trace his progress on the broken pendant rocks beneath him: over these rocks, which (perhaps a hundred fathoms lower) are dashed by the foaming surge, he is from a prodigious height

to be suspended. After addressing himself in prayer to the Supreme Disposer of events, with a mind prepared for the arduous task, he is let down by a rope, either held fast by his comrades, or fixed into the ground on the summit." " Sometimes by swinging himself from one ledge to another, with the help of his hook he mounts upwards, and clammers from place to place ; and at other opportunities, by springing backwards he can dart himself into the hollow caverns of the projecting rock, which he commonly finds well stored with the objects of his pursuit, whence the plunder, chiefly consisting of the full-grown young birds, is drawn up to the top, or tossed down to the boat at the bottom, according to the situation of concurring circumstances of time and place. In these hollows he takes his rest, and sometimes remains during the night, especially when they happen to be at such vast and stupendous heights. To others of less magnitude the fowlers commonly climb from the bottom, with the help of three hooked poles only, by which they assist and push or pull up each other from hole to hole, and in this manner traverse the whole front of the frightful scar. To a feeling mind, the very sight of this hazardous employment, in whatever way it is pursued, is painful ; for indeed it often happens that these adventurous poor men, in this mode of obtaining their living, slip their hold, and are precipitated from one projection to another with increasing velocity, and fall mangled upon the rocks, or are for ever buried in the abyss below." We remember reading of a case in point enough to make our blood run chill. One

of these adventurous fellows had been let down from a precipice of great height till he found himself opposite to a hollow cavern in the projecting rock where nests might be expected. As the rope descended perpendicularly, he succeeded in giving to it an oscillatory motion, so that though by the swing in one direction he was carried farther from the cavern, the next oscillation brought him nearer to it, and soon by his usual dexterity he was swung into the cavern, and got firm footing on the ledge of the cliff,—but alas! he had inadvertently let go his hold not only of the rope by which he had been suspended, but also of the smaller rope attached to it by which the other is brought near when required. The rope; from the impulse it had received, continued to swing like a pendulum, and fain would he have grasped it, but at its nearest approach it was beyond his reach, and he saw to his horror that at every swing it was farther from him—that in a little it would be at rest, hanging perpendicularly from the upper projecting cliff, and of course hopelessly beyond his reach. Life and death were in the balances. Was he to give himself up as lost, and by a lingering death to perish of hunger in the cavern, or was he to make an effort to reach the rope, with the certainty, if he missed it, of being dashed on the rocks or of perishing among the waves a hundred fathoms below. After a moment's deliberation, he watched with the utmost intensity of feeling the next approach of the rope, and summoning all his strength he sprung forward to grasp it. The leap was tremendous, but it was successful. He

caught the rope, put his foot in the loop, made the signal to his companions above, and was drawn up, not knowing for a time whether he was dead or alive.

We shall now give a short extract from Donald Monro, Dean of the Isles, who published an account of the Hebrides in 1549 :—“ North-west from the ile of Man sixty myles off, layes Elsay an iyl, ane myle lange, wherein is ane grate high hill round and rough, and ane heavin (haven), and als abundance of soland geise, and ane small poynt of ane nesse whereat the fish bottes lyis, for in the same ile is very good killing, lyng, and other whyte fishes. Forenent this ile layes Carrick on the south-east pairt, Ireland on the south-west pairt, and the lands of Kintyre on the west and north-west pairt; the said Elsay being neirhand midsea betwixt the said marches.” The nests of the solan geese are composed of grass and seaweeds, occasionally intermixed with sticks; but Martin states that “ the steward of St Kilda told him that they found in their nests a red coat, a brass dial, an arrow, and some Moluca beans, no doubt all found floating in the sea. The young are spotted like a starling. At first the young are fed with pulpy matter from the stomach, and afterwards with fish which they disgorge. They were brought to the royal table of old, and so were seals and porpoises, but chiefly their tongues, as a delicacy.” We shall give another short extract from Sir William Brewster’s Journal. In his way between Glasgow and Erwin (Irvine), July 1, 1635, “ he caught sight of

Ailsa Craig." "One more remarkable isle here shows itself at forty miles' distance ; this is placed in the sea about sixteen miles from shore. It is a mighty high rock, seeming very steep and high, round at the top ; the name of it is Ellsey, and it belongs to my Lord Castle : not inhabited, but with abundance of fowl, and two eyries of goosheawks, this year stolen by some Highlanders. This rock or island was in our view three days whilst we travelled betwixt sixty and seventy miles, and when you are at a great distance it presents itself in shape like a sugar-loaf, and when you approach nearer it seems lower and flatter at the top, but it is a much-to-be-admired piece of the Lord's workmanship."

This reminds me that the first time I saw Ailsa was probably from the same place that Sir W. Brewster first saw it. In returning home after my first winter at the University of Edinburgh, another college stripling and I resolved to come by Glasgow and Ayr, both of which were new to us. The spring day was clear and fine ; and sitting down on a stone to rest, I said to my companion, "What can that sugar-loaf-like hill be which rises from the plain at a great distance ?" He was as ignorant as myself. We did not even know that that plain was the sea ; and as little did I wot that that conical hill, with the sea in which it was placed, were to be daily objects of interest to me from Stevenston Manse during the greater part of my life. Truly the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places ; and I may add, "yea, I have a goodly heritage," if I can with truth say like the Psalmist,

“The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot.”

We shall now give Pennant's description of Ailsa in 1772:—“June 25. After a very tedious calm, we reach the Craig of Ailsa, and anchor on the N.E., within fifty yards of the side, in twelve fathoms water, gravelly bottom. On this side is a small beach. All the rest is a perpendicular rock for an amazing height, but from the edges of the precipice the mountain assumes a pyramidal form. The whole circumference of the base is two miles. On the east side is a stupendous and amazing assemblage of precipitous columnar rocks of great height, rising in wild series one above the other. Beneath these, amidst the ruins that had fallen from time to time, are groves of elder trees—the only trees of the place,—the sloping surface being almost entirely covered with fern and short grass. The quadrupeds that inhabit the rock are goats and rabbits. The birds that nestle in the precipices are numerous as swarms of bees, and not unlike them in their flight to and from the Craig. On the verge of the precipice dwell the gannets and shags. Beneath are guillemots and the razor-bills; and under them the grey gulls and kittiwakes helped by their cry to fill the deafening chorus. The puffins made themselves burrows above; the sea-pies found a scanty place for their eggs near the base. Some land birds made this their haunt: among them ravens, hooded crows, pigeons, wheatears, and rocklarks; and what is wonderful, throistles exerted the same melody in this scene of horror as they do in the groves of Hertfordshire.

“ Three reptiles appeared here very unexpectedly,— the naked black snail, the common and the striped shell-snail, not volunteer inhabitants, but probably brought in the salads of some visitants from the neighbouring shores.”

“ This rock is the property of the Earl of Cassilis, who rents it for £33 per annum to people who come here to take the young gannets for the table, and the other birds for the sake of their feathers. The last are caught when the young birds are ready for their flight. The fowler ascends the rocks with great hazard, is provided with a long rod, furnished at the end with a short hairline with a running noose. This he flings round the neck of the birds, hauls it up, and repeats it till he takes ten or twelve dozen in an evening. I cannot learn where the feathers are used. On the beach we find the ruins of a chapel, and the vestiges of places inhabited by fishermen, who resort here during the season for the capture of cod, which abound here from January to April on the great bank, which begins a little south of Arran, passes this rock, and extends three leagues beyond. The fish are taken with long lines. * * * The fish are dried and then salted ; but there are seldom sufficient caught for foreign exportation. The castle is of difficult ascent. It is a square tower of three storeys, each vaulted, placed pretty high on the only accessible part of the rock. The path is narrow, over a vast slope, so very steep that it wants but little of a true precipice. The walk is horrible, for the depth is alarming. It would have been thought that no-

thing but an eagle would have fixed his habitation here, and probably it was some chieftain not less an animal of rapine. The only mark of civilization I saw in the castle was an oven, a conveniency which many parts of North Britain are yet strangers to."

"In 1597, one Barclay of Ladyland undertook the remarkable design of possessing himself of this rock, and of fortifying it for the service of the Spaniards. He arrived there with a few assistants, as he imagined undiscovered; but one day walking alone on the beach, he unexpectedly encountered Mr John Knox, who was sent to apprehend him; and the moment he saw the unfriendly party, in despair rushed into the sea and put an end to his existence."*

"We made a hearty dinner under the shade of the castle, and even at that height procured fine water from a spring within a hundred yards of the place. The view of the Bay of Girvan in Carrick, within nine miles, and that of Campbeltown in Argyleshire, about twenty-two miles off, bounded each side of the firth. The weather was so hot that we did not ascend to the summit, which is said to be broad, and to have had on it a small chapel, designed, as is frequent on the promontories of foreign shores, for the devout seaman to offer up his prayer of supplication for a safe voyage, or of gratitude for a safe return."

We cannot conclude without giving a short extract from the New Statistical Account of the parish of Dailly, contributed by the Rev. Dr Hill, now Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow:—

* Spottiswood's History of Scotland.

“ Although the extremity of this parish is nearly two miles distant from the seacoast, yet the island of Ailsa, about fifteen miles west from the town of Girvan, is considered as belonging to Dailly, being included in the barony of Knockgirvan, a part of the Marquis of Ailsa’s property which lies in this parish. It is a huge rock, perhaps two miles of circumference at the base, and about 1100 feet above the level of the sea. Seen from the south or north, its shape is very much that of a cone. Its appearance from the east is more flattened. It is precipitous on all sides, and is accessible only on the north-east, where there is a small beach. The cliffs in several places are columnar. A considerable way up the rock are remains of buildings, supposed to have been a tower or castle, and a chapel. Very fine water is found on the rock, and very near its summit. There is little pasture on it. Numberless flocks of birds frequent it, and particularly gannets or solan geese. It is chiefly from their feathers that the rent of the island is derived, and it is only during the time that the birds are sought for on account of their feathers that any one resides upon it. There was recently a plan in agitation for making Ailsa a fishing-station for the supply of Glasgow and Liverpool, by means of the steamboats which pass it regularly. Some buildings were commenced for the purpose, but the plan has not been carried into effect.”