

NOTES TO SHETLAND FIRESIDE TALES.

Note A, page 1. TROSSWICKNESS.

Trosswickness is a small promontory on the east side of the mainland of Shetland, about 5 miles north of Sumburgh Head, and 4 miles east of Fitful Head. With the exception of a narrow margin of green pasture skirting the irregular outline of the precipitous cliffs which guard the eastern extremity of the Ness, the whole region is wild and barren in the extreme, and no hermit could desire a more befitting emblem of his state than that presented by the sterile and stony wilderness which everywhere meets the eye.

On the highest elevation of this headland, and within a hundred yards of the edge of the cliff, are the ruins of an ancient "Brough" or "Peight's" house (as such structures are named by the natives). That so many similar structures in Shetland are found along the coast-line, and occupying positions where the widest range of view can be obtained, points distinctly to the inference that the primitive builders of those erections must have intended them for watch towers as well as places of habitation—the necessity for their former use arising from the frequent and unwelcome visits of the Vikings or sea-robbers from the coast of Scandinavia, or other hostile approaches. The name Trosswickness applies to both sides of the bight or creek of Trosswick; but it is on the southern headland, lying between Trosswick and Voe, that the scene of the story is laid.

Note B, page 2. SHETLAND MANNERS AND CUSTOMS.

It is characteristic of a primitive people that they cling fondly to old manners and customs, and thus a century may pass over them and leave little or no change in their ideas or mode of life. This fact has enabled the author to place the time of his story about the middle of last century, and yet draw many of its incidents from the experiences of his own boyhood. Old people then living could carry their recollection back to the middle of the previous century; and thus by his own observation, together with the testimony of others, he has had the means of comparing the manners and customs of the Shetland peasantry for a period of more than 120 years.

Note C, page 4. PECULIARITIES OF THE SHETLAND DIALECT.

That the old Norse or Icelandic language of the present day was once the language spoken by the natives of Shetland there can be no doubt, for the evidence of this is still to be found in the Norse derivation of names of places throughout the islands, every creek and headland, every village and croft, bearing names only slightly modified by the dominant influence of the later Scottish element. As additional evidence of this, we have the direct testimony of George Buchanan, the historian; the Rev. Mr Brand, who wrote in 1700; and also Sir Robert Sibbald, in 1711.

With the arrival of the early Scotch settlers, their language was gradually introduced, and hence the origin of what we now find, viz.—a mixed dialect with a Norse idiom. How very early this change took place, seems to be indicated by the remarkable circumstance that some words found only in the works

of the rhyming chroniclers of the 14th and 15th centuries, and long since ceased to be spoken in other parts of Great Britain, are still used by the natives of Shetland. But, early as the Scottish dialect began to incorporate itself with the Norse language, it is remarkable how distinctly the Norse idiom has been retained by the entire exclusion of the lisping sound of *th* at the beginning of words.

The English sound of this double consonant is almost peculiar to the English language.

A foreigner either cannot or will not pronounce it, and the Shetlander of the present day follows the example of his ancestors by substituting *d* for the hated *th*. Thus, for *this, that, then, they, them, thou*, he says *dis, dat, den, dey, dem, du*, and so of all the words beginning with *th*. This and other peculiarities lead to considerable confusion both in sense and grammar: thus the English noun *den* is to the Shetlander an adverb; and the word *clash*, a verb, is in the Shetland dialect a noun, meaning gossip or scandal, and so of numerous other examples which might be given. But notwithstanding those defects, the Shetland dialect possesses, in common with many other dialects, what is often lost when they become the vehicle of written communication and of the higher kinds of oral address, viz., richness of inflection, friendly familiarity, and naturalness; and it is on this account that the author has made use of the dialect where he found it an advantage to do so, there being numerous instances where the full meaning of Shetland words and phrases finds no proper equivalent in English.

Note D, page 7. FAIRIES.

The belief in fairies has been among the superstitions common to perhaps all European nations, and can be traced back to the early ages to the Indo-European race. The name "fairy" does not admit of any distinct definition except in a local sense, because the general character and disposition of those imaginary beings have been ever found to vary, and to take their colouring from the social habits of the people amongst whom they were supposed to dwell, as well as from the geographical features of the country which those people inhabited. Thus, in a flat pastoral country such as England, the fairy was gentle and loving, useful in domestic affairs, and ever ready to perform generous and praiseworthy actions; while, in a mountainous country, such as Scandinavia or the Highlands of Scotland, the fairy was cruel, mischievous, and so destitute of any sort of virtue as to fully justify the opinion of its demoniacal origin.

In Shetland, as might be expected, fairies were of the Scandinavian type. Their origin was traced to the Fall, when the angels who joined in Satan's rebellion were cast out, and those who fell in the sea became mermaids and mermen; and those on the land became fairies or "hillfolk," which is evidently a corruption of the Danish "Ellefolk."

They were composed of males and females of very diminutive stature, something like human dwarfs. Their clothing was always green in colour, fitting close to the limbs, as became beings capable of performing such sprightly and agile feats as they indulged in. They walked barefoot, and both sexes wore a sugar-loaf hat of extraordinary altitude. They were capable of rendering themselves invisible to the human eye, and of seeing as mortals could not. This power was obtained by anointing the eyes of the baby fairy at birth with an eye-salve prepared by fairy art. Their dwelling-places were fairy "knowes," or *tumuli*, in which were plain homely places of abode, and nothing of that gorgeous splendour and enchanting grandeur which eastern fiction has described. The northern fairy, however, knew how to enjoy life, and revelled in noisy mirth, and on the "light fantastic toe" tripped to the merry music of the fiddle as only a fairy could. These carousals generally took place after some successful raid upon the property of mortals above ground, for, like the clan M'Gregor,

the fraternity had a strong *penchant* for black cattle. Though fond of music, they had no genius for the art; as on the occasion of a wedding or at Yule rejoicings, they were under the necessity of charming away some expert fiddler from the upper regions, who was, however, always sent safely back, but suffered from a certain jumble or confusion of intellect for some days after the event. Though deficient in the art of instrumental music, their vocal performances were of a high order, and on calm summer evenings the soft strains which sometimes fell upon mortal ears in the neighbourhood of fairy dwellings were such as could only come from Fairyland.

The author remembers, when a boy, an old woman telling, as a "winter fireside tale," her experience of fairies or hillfolk, and that in her youth it was customary to sit near "hillfolk's knowes" in the summer evenings, and listen to the sweet music which proceeded from them.

Those fairies followed no honest calling, but were a kind of respectable banditti, helping themselves to human or animal subject as occasion required, but doing it in such a way as to give as little offence as possible. If they wanted a cow, they did not flourish their dirks in the air and yell like a lot of wild, hungry M'Gregors; they went invisibly to work, and aimed an elf-arrow as near "Crummie's" heart as possible. As soon as the shaft was felt, the wounded animal showed symptoms of distress by rolling her eyes wildly and "brülin," as if in a death-struggle. If the shot was a good one, the effigy, which was prepared beforehand, was now left as the dead animal in the room of the real one, which was quietly transported to their subterranean dwelling to garnish the fleshpots of Fairyland. If the elf-arrow was blunt, as very often happened, it did not penetrate the hide of the animal, but left an indentation or vacuum below the skin, which in time became equally fatal; but here the village cow doctress interposed with her Archangel tar, gunpowder, steel, and incantations, and by means of such weapons, offensive and defensive, fairly beat the enemy off the field. The author has witnessed several such cases, and carefully examined the supposed wound, as well as watched the efficacy of the supposed means of cure.

When it suited their purposes to carry off a human subject, their procedure differed to the extent of sometimes leaving a *living* substitute, but the imposture was generally detected by the quality of the article; for example, for a fair plump healthy child the substitute was a dwarfish ill-thriven creature, which was a burden to itself and a trouble to everybody. In order to recover the proper child, it was necessary to sweep the substitute out of the cottage door along with ashes or other refuse. This operation was generally performed by the child's mother, who thereafter sat by the fireside and watched the door until her own child, in all its health and beauty, walked in, when she at once rushed to the door, and, shutting it, described a circle round the child, and then ejaculated, "God save my bairn!" On one occasion the fairies were so incensed at being outwitted in this way, that they formed a ring outside the consecrated circle, and blew their breaths upon those inside it, until their skins were covered with huge blisters.

Other characteristics and peculiarities of fairies will be found in the different fairy tales given in the work, and which are rendered as nearly as possible in the exact words of the native storyteller.

Note E, page 9. SHETLAND SURNAMES.

The curious practice existed in Shetland amongst the peasant class till about the beginning of the present century, of the Christian name of the father of a family being used as the surname of his children. Thus, a son of Jaarm (Jeremiah) Edemson would be Eddie (Adam) Jaarmson; or, a son of Laurence Robertson might be Hans Laurenceson, and in the same way the daughter of

Erasmus Ollason would be known as Osla Rasmuson. This of course rendered tracing the genealogy of families beyond a generation or two a matter of much difficulty.

Note F, page 17. CALVINISM.

There can be no doubt that Calvinism, as a system of religious doctrine, and as it was taught by the early reformers, has stood in closer relationship to human progress and general enlightenment than any other creed since the world began; but while this is true in a general sense, it does not hold true with the same force in particular cases. Shetland has shown but little progress under the influence of its teaching, because its effect upon the native mind was rather to confirm than uproot the remnant of that Pagan belief in Fatalism which was common to almost all the nations of antiquity, and, like all other superstitions, lingered longer in those remote islands than in most other places. Calvinism, as embodied in the standards of the Church and taught by old divines, was not the kind of axe to lay to the root of this Upas tree, but in its ultimate conclusions rather affirmed than denied the Pagan belief.

"God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass" was the fundamental principle of Calvinistic doctrine—a doctrine true in itself when viewed by the eye of intelligence, and in connection with God's sovereign will as the Great First Cause working through the operation of law, and recognising human agency as a necessary factor, but pernicious and derogatory to the Divine character when viewed through the mists of ignorance and superstition, which obliterated any proper line of demarcation, and made Divine providence little else than a household deity of Greek or Roman mythology, and, as such, superintending and determining the most trivial affairs of human life.

The rude, unlettered islander, with his mind still biased by the lingering influence of this Pagan belief of Fatalism, was further taught the doctrines of election and predestination. How was he against this to balance the human element of freewill and responsibility? If every event with all its varied circumstances and most remote influences upon human life and destiny, were known and determined beforehand, human action could not alter what was so decreed; such action could only be the *effect* but never the *cause* of anything.

So truly does this represent the case, that even in the present day the Shetland peasant could not utter a dozen sentences on any subject connected with human effort or enterprise, without showing the influence of his Calvinistic teaching. No doubt this has fostered, as it still does, devout feeling and submission under difficulties and trials, but it has also proved a formidable obstacle in the path of individual enterprise and general progress.

Note G, page 36. NORWAY WITCHES AND WIZARDS.

History proves that the influence of any system of religious belief lingers amongst a people long after that belief has ceased to be recognised as a national faith, and thus it is that traces of Scandinavian mythology exist even in our own time, faint and distorted no doubt, but still sufficiently marked to identify them with the more elaborate originals which they represent.

The belief that witches and wizards came from the coast of Norway disguised as seals, was entertained by many of the Shetland peasantry even so late as the beginning of the present century; and it is worthy of note that the supposed object of those unwelcome relations of the *Phocidæ* family was plunder, evidently showing that the seal-wizard was just the Viking or sea-robber of former ages. The terrors which those marauders once inspired still existed in the native mind by tradition and impression, though the real danger had passed away. Time and superstition had changed the form, and the supernatural had gradually assumed the form of the natural. It was not, however, supposed that those familiar spirits, in their sea-dress, actually carried off the

goods and chattels of the natives, but they accomplished the same purpose by a much easier process. They charmed away whatever they set their minds on—such as fish, cattle, sheep, farm-produce, &c., just as the house-wife versed in black art charmed away her neighbour's butter—"profit." It is highly probable that the ancient belief in mermaids and mermen, which can be traced to the Arab seamen and Greeks, tended to connect the seal with those supposed diabolical adventures of Norwegian wizards. Again, there was the difficulty of shooting the seal while swimming, owing to his singular capacity of diving on the fire, *i.e.*, diving as the powder flashed in the pan of a flintlock, and before the shot could reach him. Besides these, many incidents might occur in the experience of the seal-hunter, which were perplexing to his untutored mind, and which he could not refer to any natural or mechanical principle known to him. These thoughts are suggested by an incident which occurred in the author's own experience of seal-shooting, which was as follows:—

In the Shetland Islands, the home and breeding-place of the seal is in some wave-worn cave, guarded from the approach of man by inaccessible cliffs. He also has the sagacity, when fishing near frequented places, to keep beyond gun reach of the shore; but this rule was departed from in the case of an aged patriarch of unusual size for a common seal (*Phoca Vitulina*), which evidently wished to enjoy a little quiet during the declining years of his life, and for this purpose selected for his home a deep pool formed by two natural jetties of rock in the neighbourhood of the author's birthplace. This pool was overlooked on the north side by a high turreted rock, forming by its rugged pinnacles an excellent place of concealment for the sportsman. During the day this venerable denizen of the deep fished quietly along the shore north or south of his pool, but always returned thither in the evening, where he amused himself by frequently diving and rising to the surface at short intervals. This continued for several years, till at last the author became possessed of the much-prized gift of a gun, and after proving himself a good sportsman with smaller game, he resolved on the more daring exploit of bagging the old gentleman of the pool. Putting in therefore a double charge of swan-post and some heavy slugs (similar to those used for shooting Irish landlords), he climbed the rock on the north side, and concealing himself behind two sharp natural turrets, waited for a chance. In a few minutes the old wizard broke the surface, rising to his flippers, shaking the water from his grizzly beard, and snorting loudly as if his extreme corpulency had put him out of breath even by the little exercise he was indulging in.

"Now, mind yourself, old fellow," was whispered, as the gun was levelled at the occipital region of his cranium. The trigger pulled, but missed fire. The piece was now drawn back, priming examined, flint touched up, frizzel scraped, and all made ready for his next rise. Gun again levelled, trigger pulled, but not a spark would the flint strike. For two long hours was the process repeated, at intervals of about ten minutes, but with the same result—the gun would not go off. Amazed and perplexed, the author now determined to examine the lock carefully, as he believed some spring had gone wrong. He therefore shook the powder clean out of the pan, and cleared it from the touch-hole as far in as the chamber. With the piece now lying across his knees, and pointing away from the seal, he pulled the trigger just to see the action of the frizzel-spring, when lo! the gun went off with a loud report, reverberating along the rocky steep which stretched away in the distance.

Now, here was a case of an excellent fowling-piece, which was never known to miss fire, when it is pointed towards the seal no amount of human ingenuity and perseverance can make it go off; but no sooner is it pointed in the opposite direction than off it goes, though under conditions which rendered such an occurrence almost an impossibility. Was it not therefore natural and excusable to conclude that the cause lay in the seal and not in the gun? and ever since

that occurrence took place, the author has felt it a necessity that we should first require to know all that our forefathers experienced before we condemn their beliefs as the offspring of ignorance and stupidity.

Note H, page 43. SUPERSTITION OF THE EVIL EYE.

The belief that any housewife versed in the black arts of Necromancy can, by charms and incantations, increase the supply of butter in her own churn in proportion as she has the power to diminish that of her neighbours, has long prevailed in Shetland, as well as in some other parts of Scotland.

This superstition is one form of the ancient and general belief in an *Evil Eye*, which belief has not been confined to the nations of Northern Europe, but existed even amongst the enlightened Greeks and Romans. The Greeks called it *Ophthalmos Baskanos*, and the Romans used the verb *Fascinare* to express the same idea.

How this and similar beliefs, now looked upon as childish and absurd, and all but vanished before the light of science and general intelligence, should once have been so firmly believed in by men of all ranks and conditions of life, and by nations socially and geographically widely separated, is one of those interesting and perplexing questions to which modern inquiry is directed. How, for example, did the belief arise that the human eye possessed the power of charming or bewitching in an evil sense? Is it not possible that an answer to this may be found in the fact, that the mesmeric power of the eye was known to the ancients, not as a physiological phenomenon connected with psychology, but as a mysterious, unnatural, and demoniacal power exercised on the willing subjects of the Prince of Darkness?

If we can suppose a case where the ancient mesmerist accidentally, and unknown to himself, made this power felt by gazing in the countenance of another person, nothing was more natural than to connect the innocent and unconscious operator with any misfortunes which might afterwards befall the individual who had thus felt the power of his mysterious gaze; and, once a foundation laid, human invention and exaggeration could do the rest. Whether this may be the true explanation or not, certain it is that the belief of an evil eye has had a common origin, and was connected with the exercise of some remarkable power or faculty not common to men.

Against this view may be urged what has been advanced by some writers on the subject of mesmerism, viz., that the operator has no power except what is permitted by the will of his subject; no doubt, in many cases, the power of the operator may be equally balanced by the existing will of the subject; but as no resistance can be offered by an unconscious subject, it surely follows that a highly susceptible individual, ignorant of the subject of mesmerism, may be influenced by one possessing enormous mesmeric power, even although that power may be only accidentally put forth.

Note I, page 46. CUP DIVINATION.

It was a maxim with the nations of antiquity, that if there are gods, they care for men, and if they care for men they must be desirous to impart a knowledge of future events, because, by this means, man would know how to obtain the good and avoid the evil; but the great difficulty lay in the question, how to find suitable vehicles of communication by which the gods might be propitiated to vouchsafe to men this needed knowledge.

The ancient Chaldeans sought in the starry heavens to know the fate of nations and of individuals; and the middle ages, for the same purpose, looked in Auguries and Auspices.

There was *Axinomancy*, the art of discovering the perpetration of a crime, by poisoning an axe on the top of a pole, and judging of guilt or innocence by the

direction in which it fell. *Belomancy*, shooting with arrows. *Bibliomancy*, opening the Bible and observing the first passage which occurred. *Botanomancy*, divination by plants and flowers. *Capnomancy*, divination by smoke. *Cheiromany*, reading the lineaments of the hand. *Cosinomancy*, divination by using a sieve and pair of shears. *Crystallomancy*, divination by crystals or precious stones. Cup divination, cup reading. *Geomancy*, divination by pebbles. *Hydromancy*, divination by water, or by a mirror. *Lithomancy*, divination by stones. *Oneiromancy*, divination by dreams. *Pyromancy*, divination by fire. *Rabdomancy*, divination by the divining rod, &c. A strange list of delusions indeed, we may now say; and equally strange it is that so many of them have come down to our own day, it being within the author's memory when Bibliomancy, Cheiromancy, Batanomancy, Cosinomancy, Cup divination, Oneiromancy, and Pyromancy were all practised in the Shetland Islands, at least to such an extent as renders it easy to identify each particular superstition with its more elaborate prototype.

Cup divination by the ancients was a more aristocratic performance than its more modern disciples could attain to. The former placed precious stones, with inscriptions on them, upon gold leaf, and dropped them into water contained in a glass cup, and read the signs on its surface; while the latter used a stoneware cup and a few tea grounds, forming pictures by the fortuitous arrangement of stalks and broken leaf. The author has often had these pointed out and explained to him by an expert; and by a little help of the imagination, wonderful pictures they make of things both animate and inanimate. In foretelling events by the aid of those pictures, the order of time is reckoned from the brim of the cup downwards, the brim being the present, the bottom the distant future, and the scale being days, months, or years, according as the nature of the case requires. The author is bound to say that he has known many wonderful predictions by cup diviners followed by as wonderful fulfillments.

Note K, page 52. SHETLAND BALLADS AND MUSIC.

Shetland now possesses no ancient songs or ballads known to have been written by native authors, and it is extremely doubtful if any such have ever existed; nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider that the bulk of the native population were for centuries the objects of severe oppression, and that education or higher culture scarcely existed.

The petty tyrants who ruled them as with a rod of iron, took care also to keep them in ignorance as the most likely means to reconcile them to their lot; besides, in the doubtful possession of ignoble peace, they knew nothing of the "pomp and circumstance of war," and little of the thrilling theme of romantic love—themes to which the national airs, songs, and ballads of all nations owe their origin.

There was evidently only one path in which the ancient Shetlanders cared to seek artistic distinction, and that was as a musician and composer of reel music; and in this he has certainly excelled, for Shetland reel music, so far as it goes, is equal to anything of the kind to be found in Scotland, or perhaps in any other country.

The Shetlander of the olden time knew little enjoyment but such as the domestic circle and the social gathering afforded. His toilsome occupation and frequent absence from home during nine months of the year, made the return of winter especially grateful to him. Then his fare was best, his leisure most; his courtships, marriages, and merry-makings made him forget for a time both tyrant and toil, and revel in the enjoyment of that "gaytime" which every Martinmas brought with it.

His fiddle—the only instrument of music known to him—was the centre of attraction in every social gathering, and never failed to call forth that wild

athletic exercise and those powers of endurance which he could so well exhibit in the native dance or "foursome reel," when the home-brewed ale went round in flowing "cogs," or the smuggled keg of Dutch gin was broached to honour some "rant" or wedding.

Here, then, according to the universal law of supply and demand, reel music was supplied because it was wanted; to play the fiddle was an accomplishment eagerly sought after by all lads having a musical ear; and those of them who possessed a genius in this way were able, through the course of time, to add original compositions, and all such compositions exhibit the same characteristics, being light, stirring, and expressive of feelings of exuberant mirth and rollicking jollity.

Note L, page 70. TRADE WITH NORWAY.

It is within the author's recollection when only two small sailing vessels were employed in the trade with Scotland. Then, and more especially in earlier times, the principal trade of the islands was carried on with the Norwegians and Dutch.

Shetland was entirely dependent on Norway for her supply of wood, and to a large extent for that of fishing boats, which were brought over just as they were finished in the builder's yard. They were put together chiefly by "treenails" or wooden pins; but as these were not considered by the Shetland fishermen to be sufficiently safe, the boards were farther fastened by iron rivets. Like everything else which came from Norway, these boats were looked upon with suspicion, and unlucky or "misforn" knots had to be searched for by some aged son of Neptune, expert in such matters, before the boat was allowed to float.

Note M, page 75. PYROMANCY.

Pyromancy, or divination by fire, was common amongst the Greeks and Romans. In offering sacrifices to the gods, the manner in which the victim was consumed was held to prognosticate good or evil. If the sacrifice burned clear of smoke and did not crackle, the omen was favourable, but otherwise it was not.

In Shetland, pyromancy was closely allied to cup reading—half consumed brands taking the place of tea grounds. When a peat fire is nearly consumed, some of the brands often remain standing in an upright position in the light white ashes by which they are surrounded. And it was the fancied resemblance which those brands bore to persons, animals, ships, &c., which furnished the fire reader with the means of foretelling events. One solitary upright brand, resembling a man or woman, was always called a "guest," *i.e.*, a stranger or visitor from a distance. If it could be guessed who the person might be, and if welcome, the brand was lifted in the tongs and placed in the centre of the fire, and other brands heaped around it; but if the person was looked upon as an intruder, the brand was dipped in a tub of water, so that the individual represented might get a drenching of rain if he or she attempted the journey.

Note N, page 76. BAWBY OF BRIGSTANES.

The original of Bawby o' Brigstanes was a well-known village gossip bearing the same Christian name, in whose cottage the author spent many happy evenings when a boy.

Note O, page 92. SUPERSTITIONS OF FISHERMEN.

Shetland fishermen, in common with many of their brethren elsewhere, believe that in going to the fishing if they meet certain persons they will have

luck, and if they meet others, the very reverse will happen; hence all their acquaintance come to be divided into lucky and unlucky people.

So far as those persons are themselves concerned, they may be lucky or fortunate, though the baleful influence they exercise on the calling of others may be of the most marked description. The author has known fishermen on going to the fishing take a different road, in order to avoid meeting with certain individuals whom they saw approaching, or do what is alluded to in the verse—send a member of their own family out to meet them purposely, as a protection from the evil influence of a bad foot when on the way to the boat.

Note P. page 174. SAILORS' SUPERSTITIONS.

The allusion here is to a well-known sailor's yarn, which is told as follows:—

Jack and Bill were messmates. Jack made his money "spin" as fast as he got it, but Bill was saving and penurious, and hoarded his money, which he kept in a bag concealed in his hammock. Jack coming to know this conceived the horrible design to murder his shipmate, in order to get possession of the money; and to accomplish this without the deed being discovered, he one night approached Bill's hammock, where he was sleeping, and pierced him behind the ear with a sail needle, which, while it penetrated the brain, left almost no perceptible external wound. In the morning the man was found dead in his hammock, and the captain, believing he had died a natural death, ordered the body to be sewed up in a hammock, and committed to the deep, with the usual formalities of a burial at sea. The same night the watch on duty were startled by hearing a voice from the foretop give the usual warning-call, "Stand from under," which sailors always do before sending anything down on deck. The watch knowing that no one was aloft, were so terror-stricken that none of them had the courage to give the response, "Let go;" but as the voice still continued the call, and waxing louder and more stern each time, it broke the stillness of the night. At last, one more courageous than the rest answered, "Let go," and down fell with a heavy thud on the deck the murdered man's body, sewed in the hammock just as it was put overboard. The captain was then called, and all hands summoned on deck, when each of the crew was put through the ordeal of touching the body. When it came to the murderer's turn he stepped forward trembling, and with horror depicted in his countenance, and for a moment hesitated; but the stern voice of the captain quickened his movements, and he touched the corpse, when at once from behind the murdered man's ear spurted out a stream of blood. The murderer was at once seized, put in irons, and soon after paid the penalty of his crime, when the vessel arrived at her port of destination.

Note Q, page 202. NATIVE COURAGE.

A young lad, who was one of the author's youthful companions, once performed a feat similar to that assigned to the Hermit of Crosswickness.

It was on a dark December day, when a fearful south-east storm raged along the coast, and strewed the shore with wreck. High waves rolled with thunderous dash against the dark precipitous cliffs, and sent the rock-beaten spray like pillars of cloud to the sky.

In one of those *gios* or creeks, with which the coast-line is here indented, this lad with a number of others lay watching the landing of wreck, which was borne in by the waves, when observing a piece of plank which had got fixed between two rocks far down the beach, he determined to get possession of it. Divesting himself therefore of his outer garments, he stood ready until the receding wave enabled him to run down the beach to the spot where the frag-

ment of wreck was ; then, just as the next wave with foaming crest rose high over his head, he threw his arms around a pinnacle of rock, and clung to it, while over him rushed the roaring flood. Soon as the wave again rolled back, he sprang to his feet, wrenched the plank from its hold, and ran for his life, chased to the top of the beach by a wild mountain wave, foaming and hissing as if in rage at being deprived of its prey.

Note R, page 204. WRECKERS.

If anything could tempt the law-abiding, peacefully-disposed Shetlander to deviate from the even tenor of his way, it would be a wreck cast upon his rugged and inhospitable shore. Then indeed the old instincts of his race appear, and the spirit of the wrecker is upon him. No fatigue or privation can discourage him, no danger can appal him, if a fragment of wreck can be secured, no matter how trifling its value. He feels a ruling passion, which he can neither resist nor explain, and it can only indeed be explained upon the principle, that the love of any pursuit peculiar to a race will live long after that pursuit has been abandoned, and that the influence of habit rests upon races as well as upon individuals.

A former generation of Shetlanders, in common with the inhabitants of every isolated place around the British coast in those times, considered that the spoils of the sea were their own, and hesitated not to appropriate such whenever an opportunity offered. Time and enlightenment have changed all that, but at least in the case of Shetlanders the old feeling remains, just as the modern sportsman with a full pocket and a well stocked larder, pursues the game with the same ardour and unwearied perseverance as did his hungry ancestor whose dinner depended on the fortunes of the chase. In both cases alike all consideration of the value of the object to be gained is lost in the intense pleasure of pursuing it. If any one objects to this comparison, the author can only ask such an individual to suspend his judgment till he has witnessed the scene of a shipwreck in a storm on the Shetland coast, with salvers at work.

Compared with a shipwreck and a whale hunt in Shetland, both of which the author has witnessed, the princely pursuit of deerstalking is tame, and grouse shooting only a childish amusement.

Note S, page 215. BRIDECAKE.

The use of bridecake can be traced back to the Romans, and amongst that ancient people consisted of a cake of wheat or barley, which was symbolical of that unity of heart and life which the married state was supposed to bring.

The practice of breaking the cake over the bride's head as she entered her new home, is evidently a usage of very remote antiquity, and was once universal in England and Scotland. In Shetland an oat cake is used, which being broken in fragments is put in a basket, and thrown over the bride's head, just as she returns after the marriage ceremony has been performed. Here then is an act of crowning or consecrating, just as ancient kings were consecrated by pouring holy oil on their heads, and there can be little doubt that the former claims as great antiquity as the latter. Bread is the staff of life, and was therefore a fitting symbol by which to consecrate or appoint the new-made wife to the duties of her office, and as guide and ruler in her own little domestic kingdom. Modern usages, and the growth of luxury, have converted bridecake into a highly ornamental piece of confectionery, and in this way shorn it of all its original, symbolic meaning; and thus it is, that for what a people sometimes gain in advanced civilization and refinement, much is lost in what is beautiful, simple, and natural.