

## ORNITHOLOGICAL REMINISCENCES.

BY SHIRLEY.

I AM writing in Scotland, but you would hardly believe, if you had come here under cloud of night, that only a few meadows lie between us and a great city with its two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. Such utter seclusion as we enjoy within ear-shot of the roar of a mighty multitude is impossible in any other country. But Scotland has deep ravines and wooded hollows and ivied nooks where you may hide yourself quietly out of the way at any moment, and listen to the murmur of the burns and the spring chorus of the woodland. It is no wonder that such a land should abound in botanists and bird-fanciers, that it should turn out poets and poachers, and that 'game' should form a standard dish at every general election. Mr. Gray's elaborate volume on *The Birds of the West of Scotland* is a very good text to this sermon. Mr. Gray lives in Glasgow, which, of all places in the world, is, at first sight, the most unpromising that a naturalist could

select; yet one half-hour takes him away on the one hand to the muir-land, and on the other to the sea; and in the course of eight-and-forty hours he can rifle the nest of the black guillemot which builds on Ailsa Craig, of the stalwart red-grouse which struts on Goatfell, and of the shy ptarmigan which haunts the comb of the Cobler.

I wish we could manage to teach our boys Natural History, that is the history of the laws of God as seen in the instinctive ways of beasts, and birds, and fishes—as well as Unnatural History, that is the history of the laws of the devil, as seen in the destructive ways of kings, and priests, and men in general. Years ago Mr. Disraeli, with his usual long-sighted temerity, advised us to include music and drawing in our national schools for the people, and was of course ridiculed by Liberal journalists for his pains. Couldn't we have a class for Natural History as well?<sup>1</sup> The business of a true legislator is to give the

---

<sup>1</sup> Since the text was written I rejoice to see that the idea has been taken up, with a somewhat different object indeed, by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who have resolved to adopt measures for the purpose of providing such classes in our public schools. In supporting the resolution, that altogether admirable man and divine, Dr. Hanna, is reported to have said: 'It has been the growing conviction of the most enlightened friends of education that among the physical sciences natural history, in one or other of its departments, is the one that should be first introduced into the common teaching of the school. Nowhere can materials be found more fitted to interest youth. How easy to turn such fine materials to the moral purpose of impressing upon the tender heart of childhood the duty and the benefit and the exceeding happiness of a wise and tender treatment of animals, and birds, and insects! Their varied instincts, their wonderful organic endowments, their singular method of operation, the place they fill in the great economy of nature, the services they render, and the ties so strong and tender by which so many of them are bound to us, their lords and masters—these teem with what could be turned at once to good account. And there is this specially to correspond, their being so timed. The great difficulty that every right-hearted teacher feels in impressing moral truths or precepts is, that when delivered in a mere abstract form they take but a slight hold—make but a slight impression on the spirit of childhood. It is when embodied in some attractive piece of information, or illustrated by some lively or pathetic story, that they get easiest reliance and sink deepest into the heart. But where could happier blendings of the informational, the scientific, the moral, and the emotional be effected than here, where an almost exhaustless fund of fact and incident and anecdote lies close at hand and all around to draw upon! I cannot doubt

working-classes interests; and it is not an exaggeration to say that at the present time the average labouring man, apart from his trade and the public-house, is incapable of rationally occupying, or even irrationally amusing himself for a single day. If Mr. Gray, instead of this stately volume, would prepare a cheap treatise on what a Glasgow working-man with eyes in his head may see within half-an-hour's ride of Glasgow—wild birds, and eggs, and insects, and flowers, and forest trees—he would earn a debt of gratitude from a community which is beginning to find that no amount of Reform Bills, Ballot Boxes, and similar painful contrivances, can teach it the secret of content, far less of happiness. It is wonderful what a deal of unsuspected wild life still lurks about this densely populated country of ours, known only to gamekeepers, gipsy tramps, and the like. The corn fields and hedge rows, which during the day appear silent and deserted, are populous at night with strange shy creatures, whose sharp ears and bright eyes are ever on the watch, and who disappear with the morning mists, their places being taken at dawn by others, scarcely less strange, and scarcely less shy, who in turn make themselves more or less invisible before we are out of bed.

I once knew a man who told me seriously that he considered the country dull, and there are numbers of people who frankly admit that it *is* dull in winter. I do not believe that these persons are positively untruthful, they are simply ignorant. Though many of them live in the country all their lives, they get up a distant bowing acquaintance with Nature, and that is all.

Red-ploughed lands

O'er which a crow flies heavy in the rain—

leafless trees, muddy footpaths, a leaden sky, a drooping barometer—what can be more cheerless and uninviting? This is the vague, general, outside aspect of things: but if you will only take the trouble to look a little closer, you will be absolutely astonished by the multiplicity of interests. No wonder that old-fashioned naturalists like ourselves should find the winter day too short! I live, as I have said, within half of the city, and am only one-half a rustic: but even amid my suburban trees and flowers I can realise the passion of the chase, and understand the absorption of the pursuit. The little family of beggars who assemble each morning at the breakfast-room window—chaffinches, blue and black tits, robins, sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, wrens—are a study in themselves. To say nothing of the sparrows and the blackbirds—both voracious, but voracity assuming in each a distinctive character; in the one perky and impudent, in the other irascible, vehement and domineering—the blue tits alone are worth many more crusts than they consume. It is the drollest little creature, a mere joke of a bird. There is one particular tit I know by headmark—he is the very image of the little man who stares solemnly at him through the window. Then there is a mystery about them that I can never quite solve. The thick woods and mossy banks round about us are admirably adapted for nests, and might coax even a restless nomad of a cuckoo into building, but the tits leave us regularly in spring, and do not show face again till the November days are darkening. What puts it into their heads to leave us? and what brings them back? They are not migratory birds, observe,—there is no general emigration law which applies to

---

that out of this limitless store a lesson-book for schools upon the proper treatment of the inferior creation could be drawn that in interest for the scholars, as well as in power over them for good, would outrival every lesson-book that is now in use.'

them; is it immemorial custom and venerable tradition only that sends them to the shady coverts where they hide themselves through the summer-tide? Of course, the robin is never very far away; and if it were only for the poet's dainty lines,—

Robin, Robin Red-breast, O Robin dear!  
Robin sings so sweetly in the falling of the  
year—

not to speak of innumerable other rhymes and roundelays going far back into the antiquity of childhood, Robin is one of those familiar figures which even a scientific society will not willingly let die. When after breakfast we smoke a meditative pipe among the leafless gooseberry bushes, he accompanies us in our perambulations, looking at us sagely from the corner of his eye, and wagging his head with the gravity of a Burleigh. Then there are a pair of water ousels, who fish in the burn below the window, and walk about on the bottom as if they were crabs, or divers searching for pearls or shipwrecked gold. They built their nest last year in the mouth of the waste-water pipe directly under the waterfall, and in this somewhat moist neighbourhood contrived to hatch an incredible number of eggs—not less than ten or a dozen, if I recollect aright. A long-legged, long-necked heron used to stalk down the burnside in the dim winter twilight: but as he has not been seen very lately in his accustomed haunts, I am afraid he must have fallen a victim to one of our amateur naturalists.<sup>2</sup> The gaunt watchfulness of the solitary heron, as he stands up to his knees in some

unfrequented pool, might be regarded as an almost maliciously grotesque travestie of certain unlovely human traits—the wary greed and covetousness of the forlorn misers that Rembrandt and Gustave Doré have painted—were it not for a certain dignity and simplicity of carriage which the featherless bipeds do not possess.

The fox, however, is the central figure of our play. He cantered past the house the other morning right under the windows: and I must confess that the rascal was in splendid condition, and looked every inch a gentleman. His condition, no doubt, was easily accounted for—he had been making free with our poultry for the previous fortnight, and a permanent panic had been established in the hen-house. No weak scruples would have prevented us from executing justice upon the robber; but he was as crafty as a weasel, and as difficult to catch asleep; and he has finally left us, I believe, without leaving even the tip of his brush behind him.<sup>3</sup>

When you have bagged your fox, and otherwise exhausted the more feverish excitements of rural life, I would advise you to turn to wood-cutting. There is no fire like a wood-fire, and the manufacture of logs may be made vastly entertaining to a man whose tastes have not been entirely corrupted by luxury. We cut our logs in an open glade in the glen, where the rabbits peep out of their holes at us, where the cushat rises with a startled flutter from the wood, and the bushy-tailed squirrel leaps from branch to branch among the trees overhead. The solemn winter stillness would

<sup>2</sup> He has reappeared—January 5, 1874. Since then three water-hens have come to us, a pair and an odd one; and curiously enough the odd one (a very odd one) has abandoned the water, and taken to consorting with the poultry, roosting with them in the hen-house at night; an altogether unprecedented arrangement, I should fancy.

<sup>3</sup> It is all over with our sleek friend now. A neighbouring farmer sent word to the Master that he would feel obliged if he would give his pack a cast across the hillside, and poor Reynard (who had somehow lost his head that morning—having been up all night, perhaps) was worried by the hounds in a gorse covert before he had run a dozen yards.

become almost unbearable if we were not hard at work. Behold how the goodly pile rises under our hand! How many 'back-log studies' does that stack contain? What a cheerful glow they will shed as the winter days draw in—what grotesque fancies will grow among the embers, what weird figures will flash upon the wall! The snow drift may rise round the doors; the frost may harden the ponds into granite and fringe the waterfall with icicles; the wind may howl among the chimneys, and tear away the branches as a cannon ball tears away the limbs of a man; but the cheery blaze and crackle of our gallant logs will lighten the gloom, and drive away the blue devils which it raises for many a day to come.

Though one is always more or less sorry when winter retires, the interests of the spring are so engrossing that there is little leisure for pensive regrets. No spring day passes without an excitement of its own. That wonderful awakening of the earth touches the imagination of the dullest clown, and drives those of us who are more excitable into strange ecstasies of happiness. After all, the sleep has not been unto death! The first morning that I hear the cuckoo is upon the whole the most memorable day of the year to me. There are some scattered plantations along the base of the Pentlands (above Dreghorn) where this happiness has been more than once vouchsafed to me, and I have come to regard these tangled thickets with a sort of religious reverence as the very temple and sanctuary of the spirit of the spring. Then the spring flowers—violets, celandine, cowslips, periwinkle, campion, wood sorrel, saxifrage, primrose, hyacinth, woodroof, anemone!—this vestal band, this sweet and fair procession of virginal flowers, is invested with a charm of simplicity and sacredness which is peculiar to the dawning year. And there are other young

creatures who now begin to open their eyes and look abroad. Tiny rabbits venture out of their burrows. In that overhanging bush of ivy a pair of young cushats have sat as solemn and silent and motionless as sphinxes ever since they were born. Ridiculous little morsels of owls tumble out of their nests, and blink woefully in the unfamiliar sunlight, while their parents scream at them dubiously from neighbouring branches. The starling is a black-bird who lost his tail on some remote Darwinian anniversary; and, as they have come down upon us in great force this year, their stumpy figures are to be seen, and their shrill remonstrances are to be heard, on every hand, to the detriment of the woodland music, but to the multiplication of the woodland gaiety.

Such are the notes that a naturalist may make 'within a mile o' Edinboro' town' (as the old ballad says): and they are very pleasant in their way. But every naturalist is instinctively a rover, and ever and again the Bohemian spirit takes possession of him, and carries him off, like John the Baptist, to the wilderness. Society may fancy that he has been reclaimed from his savage ways; he may be made a husband, a father, a ruling elder, a deacon, a bishop (and *our* bishop is the most preternaturally respectable man I ever beheld—in his broad-brimmed beaver and grandmotherly apron not a bit like John the Baptist); but the gipsy nature is ineradicable, and breaks out in spite of the strictest environment. Though the *vie de Bohême* may be perilous and unproductive, it has a gay, sportive, unmechanical charm of its own which is terribly seductive. There is all the difference in the world between the sleek decorum of the domestic pigeon and the joyful freedom of the cushat; and (according to the poet's judgment at least) the difference is all in favour of the latter.

The white domestic pigeon pairs secure ;  
 Nay, does mere duty by bestowing eggs  
 In authorised compartments, warm and  
 safe,  
 Boarding about, and gilded spire above,  
 Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair ;  
 But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs  
 On tree top, every straw a thievery.  
 Where the wild dove—despite the fowler's  
 snare,  
 The sportsman's shot, the urchin's stone—  
 crooned gay,  
 And solely gave her heart to what she  
 hatched,  
 Nor minded a malignant world below.

The evil spirit asserts itself often at the most unlikely moment. The merest trifle may rouse the dormant craving. Till the other day I had been grinding steadily for months at my statutory work without experiencing the least desire to run away. For anything I cared there might not have been moor, nor mere, nor grouse, nor sea-trout in broad Scotland. But one November evening, returning from the city while the radiance of the winter sunset still lingered in the west, I heard the rapid beat of wings through the clear frosty air overhead, and looking up saw a wedge-like column of wild fowl bearing down upon the Pentland mosses. It was all over with me from that hour. Alexander Smith's rather fanciful lines—

On midnights blue and cold,  
 Long strings of geese come clanging from  
 the stars—

came back upon me with something of the old fascination ; and I knew that there would be no rest for me thereafter until I had stalked a cock-grouse upon the stubbles, or sent a brace of cartridges into a flock of pintails. So I yielded to fate, and here I am in my own particular corner of the wilderness.

A railway passes within a dozen miles ; but hardly a passenger, I believe, except myself, alights at the rotten platform and rickety shed where the mail-bags for Ury are deposited. It is quite dark by the

time the train arrives at the wayside station ; and I have some difficulty in discovering the musty old omnibus, with its lean and lanky white horse, into which the station-master has already bundled, along with her Majesty's mails, my gun-case and portmanteau. We stagger away at the rate of four miles an hour, Jehu descending occasionally at casual public-houses to 'water his horse,' as he informs me (he himself takes his tiple undiluted), and to exchange a gruff good night with the rustics, who still lounge about the doors. The stars are sparkling vigorously, and a faint tinge of aurora suffuses the northern sky. The thermometer being some ten degrees below the freezing point, a continuous supply of tobacco is required to preserve the circulation ; and I am not sorry when, after rattling through the main street of the old-fashioned village, I find myself deposited, in a blaze of warm light, at my landlady's hospitable door. 'The Mermaid' is much resorted to by anglers during the season ; but rod-fishing ceased a month ago, and there are no guests except myself ; and I gladly agree to the good-natured proposal that I should sup in the kitchen along with the mistress and her daughter, the kitchen being the cosiest room in the house, and Alice Ross (who is to be married in May) the prettiest lass in all the countryside.

The next morning is Sunday ; the frost is sharp as a diamond ; its filagree work on the window-panes is wonderfully perfect ; as I look out the pictures begin to fade, and I see the brown pier, and the white sandhills, and the blue water sparkling in a blaze of winter sunshine. I like to arrive at Ury on a Saturday night ; for one needs a day's rest to steady the hand and to drive away the cob-webs ; and Sandy and Donald and John and the rest of them are sure to be at

morning service, and after the sermon is concluded the arrangements for the week can be discussed and determined upon. So it is decided that Sandy Steeven and John Park will accompany me in my excursions after sea fowl, and that Donald Cameron, Alice's smart young lover, will drive me up to the moss, which marches with his moorland farm, and help me to circumvent some of the grouse, black cock, and wild duck which are to be found thereabouts in fair numbers for what is truly a low country shooting. Then I wander away for a solitary stroll among the great sandhills through which the river winds. Our village, you comprehend, stands, not on the sea-shore, but upon the banks of a tidal river, which rises and falls with the tide.

The salt sea water passes by,  
And makes a silence in the hills,

and covers the whole intervening space with what at high water might readily be mistaken for a great fresh-water lake. After a pleasant scramble, I reach the top of the highest of the sandhills (a whole village is underneath it, they say), from which a noble view, landward and seaward, is to be had, and seat myself among the prickly grass. The Past renews its visionary life as I sit there in the silence of the winter Sabbath. How many years have come and gone since we first shot rabbits among these bents? O, Posthumus, Posthumus, the fleeting years slip noiselessly away, and carry us along with them to oblivion. The men I knew have undergone the earth, have gone down to darkness, down even unto Hades, and the dark dominion of Pluto. If I ask about X or Y or Z, I get the same monotonous reply; yet, perched on this coigne of vantage, I can see as on a map the places where we shot and fished and talked together, and it does not

VOL. IX.—NO. LIV. NEW SERIES.

somehow seem credible that they are dead, and quite removed from me for ever. That is the spire of the church where Dr. Goodman, who might have been a bishop had he chosen, preached his harmless old sermons for half a century. The dear old man was not given to millinery, either in his church or out of it; the pastoral simplicity of his dress, indeed, savouring more of the Puritan Methodist than of the High Church Doctor. Yet he looked the gentleman through it all, and, better still, the kindly, abstruse, big-hearted enthusiast that he was. He was succeeded by Dean Gommerill, a foreign dandified ecclesiastic with silver buckles in his shoes, and a silk apron (I won't swear to the apron); but the church does not flourish now as it did in old Goodman's day. Dr. Goodman was the lineal legitimate representative of the Episcopalian divines who had suffered along with their flocks for what they held to be the truth of God. Thus he knew all the traditions of the country-side. He was the local historian. His rusty, thread-bare, black suit was to be seen in the peasant's cottage and in the peer's castle, and in both its owner was equally at home and equally welcome. He was too poor to keep a horse (they gave him 50*l.* a year, I think, which for his fifty years' service would amount altogether to 2,500*l.*—his total money value in this world), but he was a sturdy walker, who could manage his ten miles before breakfast; and the stalwart figure of the stout old man was familiar on every road and by-road in the country. There is no doubt that, in spite of poverty and hard trials, his simple, homely, unostentatious, innocent life was a happy one; and when it was over, and he had finished his own and his Master's work, he fell asleep like a little child. I don't believe that many tears are shed by grown-up men; but when I think to-day

3 D

of all the grotesque goodness in my old friend's heart, I am vastly more inclined, I confess, to weep than to laugh.

Do you see that ring of yellow sand to the south, which encloses the blue bay of Ury? I have good reason to remember it, I can assure you. We went down to bathe there one stormy autumn afternoon—my friend Alexander and myself. He was the prince of swimmers, and I was fairly good. The waves were breaking in long lines along the beach, while the centre of the bay was white with driven foam. It was not exactly the sea which a great gale brings in, but it was a highly respectable storm. A friendly fisherman who was cutting rushes among the bents, when he saw us begin to undress, dissuaded us from going in. But we were wilful. We ran down the sloping beach into the waves, and were off our legs in a moment. It was great fun at first, though the necessity of diving like ducks into the waves that had burst before they reached us, and which came rushing at us like cavalry at the gallop, soon rendered us breathless. We had no time to recover before the next breaker was upon us. And so it went on till we found ourselves beside an old mast (it is still standing, I can see) which had been driven into a rock some thirty or forty yards from the shore. The fishermen moor their boats to it in calm weather. We threw our arms round it, and tried to steady ourselves against it. Then we learned the truth. We were dragged from it instantaneously as by a mighty arm, but not towards the land. *The back run of the tide was taking us out to sea.* Then we turned our faces, and swam with all the strength of desperation towards the land. But we made no way—we were powerless to return—the waves broke over us, and choked and blinded us as we struggled. I shall never forget the helpless agony of

that moment. Still we struggled on, and at length, of a sudden, we discovered that there was after all a chance of escape. It was no use trying to regain the shore by the line we had come, but we found that the tide was running to the north, and it seemed just possible if our strength held out, that by making a sort of side-long advance with the current, we might gain the beach before we were carried past the northern headland of the bay. Our spirits revived, and after ten minutes of steady, silent, intense exertion, our feet touched the bottom, and we were safe again on *terra firma*.

Mine old companion in many a pleasant ramble, how fares it with thee on that wider sea on which thou hast adventured? Hast thou rejoined that bright and pure intelligence whose loss we together deplored, or, in the dim and shoreless immensity that stretches away into remotest night, does no favouring gale waft the wandering souls together?

So the hours of the brief winter day wore noiselessly away, and when I reached the ferry on my way back the tide had risen, and I was obliged to have recourse to the ferryman—another weather-beaten old friend—who paddled me across. Duncan assured me that the sea-trout fishing is not what it used to be. It used to be very good certainly—one was fairly certain of filling one's basket with white salmon trout, running from half a pound to four or five—comely creatures in their gleaming silver armour, racy with the raciness of the sea from which they had newly come. It was necessary to wade, as the river was wide, and even at ebb-tide the choice spots could not be otherwise reached. The water in the bigger pools, before the tide was fairly out, often reached our armpits, and I recollect how on one occasion, in very wantonness of enjoyment, we all took to swimming—rod in hand

and baskets floating behind us. No wonder that some of us who remain ('the gleanings of hostile spears') have grown rheumatic in old age, and that a twinge in the back as I write reminds me that youthful folly (if it was folly—perhaps the neuralgia would have come all the same) must be paid for sooner or later.

There is a noble fire burning in the parlour when I return: the table-cloth and napkins are snowy and aromatic; the fish is fried to a turn; the pancake might have been made by a Frenchwoman; the whisky is 'undeniable,' as they say hereabouts, meaning, I suppose, 'not to be denied;' the arm-chair is wheeled close to the hearth-rug; my half-dozen books are piled on

the table beside me. Gray's book of birds,<sup>4</sup> the laborious and faithful record of a life devoted to the pursuit; that last and greatest of the funny little volumes which are occupied with the fortunes of Middlemarch; Mrs. Oliphant's charming *May*; and one of those extraordinary jumbles of sense and nonsense, philosophy and fiddling, Shakespeare and the musical glasses, through which the fire of an incomparable imagination still burns with virgin force:

The Idalian shape,  
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!

The stars were still shining next morning when I sallied out of the inn, and found Cameron's White-chapel cart in readiness at the door. We had a stiff eight or ten miles to

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Gray's book is one that will take a permanent place in the naturalist's library. There is in it a great deal of thoroughly good work, both by himself and others (especially by a Mr. Graham, on the birds of Iona and Mull); and besides its more strictly technical excellence, there is evidence of much loving observation of nature, and delight in natural beauty: as, for instance, in this description of the Grey-lag goose among the Western Lochs:

'Nothing can be more desolate looking than some of the haunts of the Grey-lag in the Outer Hebrides. In North Uist especially, where it breeds away from the cultivated tracts on the west side of the island, the nests are usually found on the most barren part of the moor, out of sight and hearing of all that tells of civilised life. In Benbecula and South Uist there is perhaps less of that feeling of desolation to picture; in one or two spots, indeed, such as the neighbourhood of Nunton in the one island, and Howmore and Grogary in the other, the nursery scenes are comparatively bright and fair; still the very cries of the birds as they cross the path of the wearied traveller on the Hebridean highways are so full of lament and disquietude that when, at the close of day especially, the disturbed groups rise one after another in alarm from their dreary repose, the blending of voices becomes, perhaps, one of the most memorable sounds that the ornithologist can listen to. . . . I recollect some years ago experiencing a somewhat rough passage of three days and nights to Lochmaddy, during which but little bodily rest could be obtained, and finding on my arrival that in order to save a delay of some hours I should be compelled, instead of enjoying a night's sleep at the inn, to face the darkness and travel twenty miles southwards. On the road I found myself exposed to a succession of showers of rain like split peas, which even at this distance of time force the conviction upon me that the most amiable temper could not long survive the full blast of a Hebridean storm. "Does it always rain in this furious fashion?" I asked of the guide who accompanied me. "Oh no, sir," he promptly answered, "it was warse yesterday." On we travelled, and as we neared the ford—three miles in breadth—which separated the islands of North Uist and Benbecula, we found a comparatively clear track indicated by stone beacons, just becoming visible in the morning light. About half-way across, where the sand was dry and firm, we came upon a large flock of Grey-lags resting themselves. There were altogether from eighty to a hundred birds, and they took but little notice of us as we wheeled round a rocky point in full view of the assemblage. Wishing to know how near we could approach without exciting their suspicions, we diverged from our course, and bore noiselessly down upon them, the little Highland pony pricking his ears in wonderment at the apparent obstruction of stones in the way; and when at last the gander in chief sounded his warning and rose, followed by the entire gang, we were near enough to tempt me to take from my pocket a lump of granite, which I had picked up as a cabinet specimen, and hurl it into their midst.'



cover, and it was necessary to start with the first glimpse of dawn. The tide was out, and we were able to cross at the ford. The spaces of yellow sand and brown sea-weed and tangle on either side of the channel were populous with birds, whose wild cries sounded with piercing shrillness through the keen morning air. We could only dimly discern them in the twilight as they stalked about the sand, or wheeled in troops along the bends of the river. There were one or two great black-backed gulls, a whole flock of herons, a few magnificent shell-drakes, multitudes of sand-pipers, curlew, and oyster-catchers—a dish for a king. On leaving the river-side the road lies through the bents, and then again by the sea, near which it is carried for many miles. The rabbits were scurrying about the sand-hills; but there is always a great silence in these great solitudes, which is never broken at this season, save by the melancholy wail of the curlew. It is a positive relief to us when we once more reach the sea, on whose gently rippled surface the first beams of sunlight are just breaking. We skirt two or three sleepy-looking, secluded fishing villages, the ruins of an old keep crowning a precipitous bluff, and see far off on the opposite side of the bay a long line of towers and turrets,—the modern mansion which fills the place of the grand old castle which was wrecked by King Robert when he ‘harried’ the country of the Comyns. You will hardly find a Comyn in this country now—such of them as escaped dropped the famous and fatal patronymic, and became obscure Browns and Smiths (or whatever was the commonest surname in those days) to avoid recognition. That pretty mansion house among the trees yonder belongs to a pleasant, kindly, elderly gentleman, whose charters take him and his kin back, without a break in the descent, to

the days of the great king who planted the first of them on this Northern seaboard. The long stretch of sand is succeeded by a noble range of rocks,—the breeding place of innumerable razor-bills, and marrots, and sea-parrots, and cormorants, and hawks, and hooded crows, and ravens. I knew every foot of these rocks once on a time, having scrambled and sketched and shot among them ever since I can remember. A grand school in which to be bred! How solemn is the life of Nature in these her sanctuaries!—only the dirge of the wave or the complaint of the sea-mew disturbing the tremendous solitariness. On the dizzy ledge at the mouth of the Bloody Hole, a pair of peregrines have built since (let us say) the invasion of the Danes. The oldest inhabitant, at least, can only affirm that they were there when he was a boy, and that they were as fiercely petulant, when driven from their nest, then as now. So likewise with these ancient ravens, who have croaked at all intruders year after year from that smooth inaccessible pinnacle of granite, which has never been scaled by mortal man or boy or anything heavier than a bird. But we must not linger by the way; for the days are short at this season, and we have a long tramp before us.

The farm-house where we stable our steed is built on the edge of the muirland, and may be looked upon as one of the outposts of that agricultural army which is gradually taking possession of the wilderness. Donald’s father was a simple crofter, who sat rent free for many years, on condition that he would devote his spare hours to clearing away the heather round his cottage, and bringing the land into some sort of cultivation. The oats were terribly scrubby at first, and the turnips were hardly bigger than indifferent potatoes. How these crofters, living on the borders of agricultural civi-

lisation, contrived to keep body and soul together on their patches of oats and turnips, has often been to me a matter for wonderment. Yet they struggle on in an obstinate tenacious way—the bare stony patches being gradually transformed into rich fields and smiling pastures; the sons go out into the world, and grow into lawyers, doctors, and merchants, Australian sheep farmers and Presbyterian ministers—Robertson of Ellon, for instance, one of the most massive and robust intellectual forces in the Church of Scotland in our time, coming, I think, of such parentage; and the old people stick like limpets to the land which they have reclaimed, and discourse largely of the patriarchal times, when the heather came down to the sea, and it was possible any day to stalk a black-cock on the very spot where Keelboro' town-house stands.

Shouldering the game-bag, I leave Donald to attend to certain farming operations which demand attention, and start over ground well known to myself. Even here, close to the sea-shore, the frost has lasted for some days, and the open ditches are swarming with snipe which have been driven down from the interior. I bag one or two couple as they rise at my feet—Oscar, who has a taste for snipe unusual in a pointer, always giving me fair warning of their proximity. Then a covey or two of partridges make off the moment I reach the bare stubble where they are feeding, wild as hawks. As I enter the moor, a couple of splendid old cocks, who have been sunning themselves on the gravelly hill-side, give me a chance, and I am lucky enough to secure one. He won't need his wraps any more, poor fellow!—but see how provident he has been, how thick and warm his socks are, and how he is furred and feathered up to the eyes. The *whaups*, whose wail is heard from the other side of the moss, are sure to keep at a re-

spectful distance; yet we may, perhaps, stalk one or two before the day is over. That is the teal-moss which lies between us—a sure find for wild ducks of various kinds. It is nasty walking—only one or two slippery paths, known to poachers and ourselves, running through it. If you miss one or other of these narrow little 'dykes,' the chance is that you find yourself up to the shoulders in bog and water, with no very firm footing even at that depth. You must make up your mind to fire neither at snipe, nor teal, nor grouse, although they should rise under your nose, for, if you have patience, you are sure, among the warm springs about the centre, to surprise a flock of wild duck. On the present occasion, I follow a well-known path, and, at the very place where I look for them, half a dozen noble birds rise out of the bog, and a brace of glossy purple-brown mallards are added to the contents of the bag. Farther up I come upon some pretty little teal that are sporting innocently in a piece of open water; then I get a long cartridge shot at another old cock grouse; and finally, in the little glen fringed with alder and birch that runs from the moss up the hill-side, first a woodcock, and then a black cock, are knocked over upon the heather. The black cock mounts higher and higher after the shot is fired, until suddenly his flight is arrested in mid-air, and he falls like an arrow to the ground. What a fall was there! There is no worthier bird in this world than an old black cock early in December, and the ecstasy one experiences over one's first black cock is never forgotten. One forgets much in this world—early friends, first love, the Greek and Latin grammars, and many other good things; but the remembrance of that moment of pure enjoyment never quits us.

And now I have reached at last the highest comb of the low ridge of mainland hill (a notable land-

mark to sailors at sea), beside the sparkling spring where, in the old days, we invariably ate our frugal lunch and smoked our meditative pipe—a custom which this day shall be religiously observed by Oscar and myself. There is a wide bird's-eye view of blue sea and white sail, and the long line of coast indented with sunny bays. Yonder to the right is Keelboro', a port renowned for its fresh herrings and kippered salmon; the light veil of smoke along the southern horizon hangs over Aberhaddy, the grey capital of the northern counties. Ai! ai! (After all that has been said against it, 'Alas!' remains a convenient interjection.) How many a time have I sat here with other companions than Oscar! Does Frank, I wonder, yet remember, as he listens to the long wash of Australian seas, and breathes in converse seasons, how we parted beside this very stone (enormous boulder deposited by the Deluge or other primeval force), and how he repeated to me the words of St. John (*Jane Eyre* had been newly published), in which an austere patriot's passion for his fatherland finds memorable utterance? 'And I shall see it again,' he said, aloud, 'in dreams, when I sleep by the Ganges; and again, in a more remote hour, when another slumber overcomes me, on the shore of a darker stream.' But with even more tragic directness is thine honest, kindly, sagacious face—trustiest of servants, and steadiest of friends—revived by the associations of the spot. In all my wanderings in this world I have never met a man so finely simple, so utterly unselfish, so unostentatious in the manifestation, yet so constant in the fidelity of his friendship. The old family servant is now rarely met with; the nervous anxiety to 'move on' has affected those who serve as well as those they serve, and the old feudal relationship, with its kindly pieties,

has given place to the fierce jealousies between employers and employed, which are growing every day more bitter and less capable of peaceful appeasement. Charles came to us when a boy, and left us only when death took him away. During these thirty years he had passed into our life and grown one of ourselves. He had taught us lads to ride, and shoot, and tell the truth; he had helped to send us away into the great world that lay behind his peaceful hills; he had been the first to welcome us back when we returned in triumph or defeat, as the case might be; and he was always the same—homely, upright, ingenuous, candid, incorruptible. When I think of him now I involuntarily recall some antique heroic model; the petty tumults of modern life, the complex passions of modern civilisation, had not affected the large simplicity of his nature. There was that lofty repose about this plain, honest, homely, awkward, parish-bred man which makes statues of the Apollo and the Antinous inimitable. He was one of nature's noblemen—one of the men in whom she has secretly implanted the fine instinct of good-breeding, and the native sweetness and gentleness, which cannot be bought with money, and which even culture does not always secure. For it is an art beyond art—

The art itself is nature.

The winter sun had set before my last shot was fired, and by the time I reached my friend's farm the crescent moon was up, and the stars were strewn thickly across the blue-black vault. I have ever prized that walk home through the winter twilight. Shooting, as presently pursued, is, it must be confessed, a somewhat barbarous sport, though to say gravely that all who practise it are as vile as the vilest of Roman emperors is a little bit of an exaggeration. To assist at a battue

of pheasants is hardly so criminal as to assist at a battue of Christians: but, even when practised moderately and wisely, the excitement of the chase is apt to render one insensible for the time being to the finer influences of nature. The walk home puts all this right. As you stroll quietly back, you have leisure to note whatever is going on around you, at an hour well suited for observation. Though it is too dark to shoot, the frosty brightness of the air reflects itself upon the heather. A hare starts from a furrow over which you had walked in the morning. The partridges you had scattered are calling to each other before they settle to roost. A pack of grouse whirr past on their way from the stubbles, and numberless ducks whistle overhead. In the frosty stillness the faintest sound becomes distinct, so that you can hear the voices of the fishermen among the cottages at the foot of the rocks, and even of sailors out at sea. And as in your lonely walk you look up at those mighty constellations which march across the heaven, thoughts of a wider compass cannot fail to visit you. Whither are they, whither are we, bound? Who has sent us out upon this unknown tract? What does it all mean? Is it indeed true that incalculable myriads of men similar to ourselves have already passed out of this life in which we find ourselves, and that we are destined to follow them?—But the stars will not answer our bewildered ‘whithers’ and ‘wherefores’—their steely diamond-like glitter only mocking our curiosity. To me at least that sharp cold light discloses no sympathy and discovers no compassion; and the cheerful sights and sounds of this eligible piece of solid land on which we have been cast by Supreme Wisdom or Supreme Caprice are far more reassuring

than any amount of star-gazing. We may trust ourselves—may we not?—with reasonable confidence to the power which has taught children to laugh and prattle and win their way to the flintiest hearts among us?

As next day was market day at Peelboro’, Donald proposed that I should accompany him to that odoriferous burgh, which was then—to add to its other attractions—vehemently engaged in selecting a Member to represent it in the Parliament of the country. Good old Sir Andrew, whose convivial qualities had recommended him for half a century to the continued confidence of the electors, had gone over to a majority greater even than that which supports Mr. Gladstone.<sup>5</sup> Young Sir Andrew was in the field; but he was not to be allowed to walk the course; a middle-aged Radical Professor, addicted to snuff and spectacles, had come down from the Metropolis, and gone to the front in really gallant style. He was ready to introduce any number of Bills into the House: a Bill to assist the consumption of excisable liquors; a Bill to permit the tenant of land to break any contract into which he might have entered, if he found it convenient or profitable to do so; a Bill for the abolition of the game laws and the extinction of game; a Bill to compel landlords to turn sheep-runs into arable farms, and deer-forests into parks for the people; and so on. These revolutionary propositions had excited much enthusiasm in the community, and Duncan informed me that his brother farmers had actually adopted the Professor as an eminently eligible candidate before it was accidentally discovered that he had never heard of ‘hypothec.’ The fall of an explosive rocket could not have caused more panic among his supporters than when, in answer to Dirty

<sup>5</sup> This was written before the General Election.

Davie's familiar enquiry (Dirty Davie was a local politician of note), 'Fat think ye of hypôthec, man?' the candidate incautiously admitted that he had no thoughts whatever. An effort was made to silence Davie, who was advised to 'go to bed,' 'to wash his face,' and to undertake various other unusual and unpalatable operations; but Davie stuck to his text, and by-and-by the meeting came round to Davie's stand-point, and then adjourned amid profound agitation, as they do in France.

Donald was on his way to attend a gathering of farmers which had been specially convened to meet that morning in the Exchange at Peelboro'. Donald in his heart was in favour of the young Laird. A bit of a sportsman himself, he had no notion of allowing grouse and partridges to be cleared out of the country. But the rest, he admitted, were mad as March hares. There was a good deal of method in their madness, however. I could not help being struck by the complete and profound selfishness which appeared to animate a class which had been newly roused to the value of its political privileges,—no imperial interest, no conceptions of national duty, seeming to have any place in the minds of electors, who were ready to return any candidate, whatever his politics might be, who would promise to vote against hypothec and the game laws. A somewhat portentous political phenomenon truly.

But on all that happened at Peelboro' on that day, and on many other days before the election came off, this is not the place to enlarge. Suffice it to say that we witnessed some very lively scenes, that we dined with my genial friend the Provost, who had with characteristic impartiality presided at the meetings of both candidates with the electors, and candidly admitted that a great deal could be said for either;

and that on our way home we arrived at the opinion that it was unnecessary to encourage by artificial means the consumption of excisable liquors in Peelboro' and its vicinity.

Donald was anxious that I should stay another day with him. There was a hill-loch haunted by wild geese and swans, where a shot might be got of a moonlight night; but my fisher-friends had engaged to meet me on the Thursday, and I had undertaken to secure some skins of sea-birds for old Tom Purdie, the taxidermist, so I drove back to my comfortable quarters at 'The Mermaid,' where I was welcomed by my comely landlady and her comelier daughter—*mater pulchra, filia pulchrior*. John and Peter came up to the inn in the course of the evening to tell me that the boat was in readiness for our expedition, and to get some charges of powder and shot for Peter's old duck-gun, a tremendously 'hard-hitter,' as I once learned from painful experience. It nearly knocked me down, and my shoulder was blue for a month. But Peter knows how to humour the monster, and in his hands it has killed its bird at a hundred yards.

Peter and John are waiting for me at the pier, and we push off, and row leisurely down the middle channel of the stream. Nothing can rival the clear crisp transparent charm of the atmosphere on such a morning. The thermometer was a great many degrees below the freezing point during the night, and even now it marks two or three degrees of frost. But there is not the faintest breath of wind; every twig, every blade of grass might have been cut out of stone; they are all as statuesque as the inmates of the enchanted palace before the prince came. That speechless, motionless, spell-bound creation, lighted up with such a flood of winter sunshine, might become really 'un-

canny' to us, were it not for the birds, who, in spite of the cold, are as lively as ever. As we drift down the stream we hear the sparrows chirping boisterously in the leafless hedges along the banks; and quietly as we move, immense flocks of ducks are constantly rising ahead of us, out of shot; rising and circling overhead, and making the upper air vocal with their wings. Now we reach the bar of the river, where even on this preternaturally calm morning there is a line of white breakers, among which black scoters are diving with a zest which makes us (or at least one of us, for my fisher-friends, though sea-bred and seafaring people, curiously enough cannot swim) jealous of their thick feathers and waterproof coats, and we have to steer the boat with some caution through the surf. This noble bay, whose grand curve, like a bent bow at its utmost tension, attracts the admiration of the dullest, is the hunting ground for which we are bound. The day is too still to enable us to do much among the ducks; the numerous parties of mallards, widgeon, teal, and long-tailed ducks, which are scattered about in every direction, invariably rising before we are within shot. The prime weather for duck-shooting is the weather

when, with a good stiff frost, such as we have to-day, a strong breeze blows from the land, rippling the surface of the water, and whitening the ridges of the swell. Then running back and forward along the coast, under a mere scrap of brown sail, we fall upon the ducks unexpectedly, and as they commonly rise into the wind (that is, in the direction of the boat, which of course has the wind more or less behind it), there is leisure for a deliberate shot; and I have often seen a great number of various kinds killed on such a morning. But it is no use to complain; and for most of the birds I want (and no sportsman will kill birds that he does not want) this is as good a day as any.

The birds that I am seeking for my taxidermist friend belong to the noble and ancient family of *divers*. The Great Auk, I presume, has been finally hunted out of this evil world. Nothing is left of him except his skin, and of skins it appears that only about seventy in all have been preserved. Mr. Gray's really pathetic account (pathetic on account of its anxious exactness) of all that remains to us of the Great Auk, will be found in a foot-note.<sup>6</sup> The extermination of the Red Indian of the sea, as

SKINS.					
Germany .....	20	Norway .....	1	Belgium.....	2
Denmark .....	2	Sweden .....	2	Portugal .....	1
France.....	7 (or 8?)	United Kingdom .....	22	United States .....	3
Holland.....	2	Russia .....	1		
Italy .....	5	Switzerland .....	3	Total .....	71 (or 72?)
SKELETONS.					
Germany .....	1	Italy .....	1	United States .....	2
France .....	1	United Kingdom.....	4	Total .....	9
DETACHED BONES.					
Denmark .....	10 (or 11?)	individuals	United States .....	7	individuals
Norway .....	8 (or 10?)	"	Total .....	38	(or 41?)
United Kingdom .....	13	"			
EGGS.					
Germany .....	8	France .....	7	Switzerland .....	2
Belgium.....	2	Holland.....	2	United States .....	2
Denmark .....	1	United Kingdom .....	41	Total .....	65

we may call him, is certainly a curious fact, and one that perhaps justifies the almost excessive interest that has been felt in the fortunes and misfortunes of this ungainly bird by naturalists and others. But the Black-throated, the Great Northern, and the Red-throated Divers are still common on our coasts, although their numbers of late years have shown a sensible diminution. The loon is beyond question a noble bird. There is a magnificent energy and force of movement about him which impress the imagination. He moves through the water as the eagle moves through the air. I never tried to eat one, but I fancy that he must be nearly all muscle. There is not an ounce of superfluous fat upon him. He is an athlete who is always in training. His speed under water is almost incredible. He sinks quite leisurely as you approach within shot; a minute

elapses, and then he reappears at the other side of the bay, having changed his course moreover when out of sight, with the view of putting you off the scent. This is true more particularly of the Great Northern Diver; the Red-throated is a less powerful bird, and is more easily circumvented.<sup>7</sup>

The bay of Ury is a favourite resort of the loon; but to-day it does not seem at first as if we were to succeed in sighting him. As we row leisurely along the coast, I scan the whole breadth of the bay with my glass. That is a brown skua in the midst of a shrieking assemblage of gulls; that is a cormorant hard at work among the whiting; that is a black guillemot in its winter plumage; these are parties of the graceful Northern harelk who are feeding greedily upon the tiny bivalves at the bottom;<sup>8</sup> and that is—why, that is an Eider drake, and one of the

<sup>7</sup> Mr. Gray picturesquely describes the peculiar cry of the Red-throated Diver:—  
‘Among rustic people, the ordinary note of the Red-throated Diver is said to portend rain; in some districts, indeed, the bird is known by the name of *rain goose*. I have oftener than once had an opportunity of hearing the birds calling at nightfall in the Outer Hebrides. On the 1st of August, 1870, I witnessed a curious scene at Lochmaddy, in the island of North Uist, about nine o'clock in the evening. The air was remarkably still and sultry, and frequent peals of thunder in the distance were the only sounds that for a time broke upon the irksome quiet that otherwise prevailed. At length the thunder, on becoming louder, seemed to waken up the divers on various lochs within sight of where I stood, and first one pair, then another, rose high into the air, and flew round in circles, until there must have been twenty or thirty in all. After a time, they settled in one of the salt creeks about half a mile to the eastward, and then there arose a wild and unearthly noise from the birds, which I cannot describe. It is, in fact, a sound which no one can ever forget after once hearing it, especially in these Hebridean solitudes, where it acquires its full emphasis. Next morning, about four o'clock, while bowling along towards the Sound of Benbecula in the face of a rain-cloud such as I wish never to see again, several of the birds passed us overhead at a considerable height, uttering the same cries, which might be likened to a person in despair making a last shout for help when no help is near.’

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Graham (he must really be got to print his *Birds of Iona and Mull*; it would be as great a success as St. John's *Wild Sports of the Highlands*) has a delightful account of the Northern Harelk at page 389 of Mr. Gray's volume: ‘The Long-tailed Duck comes to Iona in the early part of November, when there appears a small flock of a dozen or so which takes up its station off the northern coast of the island. These are generally reinforced during the frosts and severe weather of December and January by fresh arrivals which are driven in from the sea, and from their more unsheltered haunts, till at last very great numbers are assembled in the bay. Towards the end of March this large flock begins to break up into pairs and small parties; many go away; and when the weather keeps fine they make long excursions, and for days the bay is quite deserted. A change of weather, however, will still bring them back, and a smart gale would assemble a considerable flock of them, and this as late as the second week in April; but after this time you see them no more. Thus we have them with us about four months:

birds that Tom has specially commissioned me to secure. He is floating calmly and majestically on the surface; there are one or two attendant grey-brown eider ducks beside him; he has come from the far North, where it is high treason to molest him, and it goes against the grain to shoot the great handsome simple bird now, when he has trusted himself to our hospitality. So I hand him over to Peter, who has no scruples on the subject, and who quickly gets him on board. Just as we are examining his plumage (lying quietly on our oars), a long shapely neck rises out of the water beside the boat, and a grave, steady eye is fixed enquiringly upon us. Before the guns can be pointed at him, he has disappeared as silently

as he had risen, and then John and Peter set themselves to their oars, for they know that they have work enough cut out for them. It is the Great Northern Diver himself, and it takes us well-nigh an hour before we again succeed in getting him within shot. Later on, we are fortunate enough to secure another Great Northern, besides two or three of the Red-throated variety; and then we hoist our sail, and running rapidly home before the evening breeze which is rippling the water, reach the pier from which we had started in the morning, just in time to see the stars come out. Our bag is not a large one; it might indeed have been indefinitely increased, had we chosen to slaughter useless, innocent birds, as I have known Christian gentlemen do; but

they arrive with the first frown of winter, and depart with the earliest blink of summer sun. The Northern Hareld brings ice and snow and storms upon its wings; but as soon as winter, with his tempestuous rage, rolls unwillingly back before the smile of advancing spring to his Polar dominions, the bird follows in his train; for no creature revels more amidst the gloom and rage and horrors of winter than the ice duck. The cry of this bird is very remarkable, and has obtained for it the Gaelic name of *Lach Bhinn*, or the musical duck, which is most appropriate: for when the voices of a number are heard in concert, rising and falling, borne along upon the breeze between the rollings of the surf, the effect is musical, wild, and startling. The united cry of a large flock sounds very like bagpipes at a distance, but the note of a single bird when heard very near is certainly not so agreeable. On one occasion I took great pains to learn the note, and the following words are the nearest approach that can be given of it in writing: it articulates them very distinctly, though in a musical bugle-like tone:—"Our, o, u, ah! our, o, u, ah!" Sometimes the note seems to break down in the middle, and the bird gets no further than *our*, or *ower*, which it runs over several times, but then, as with an effort, the whole cry is completed loud and clear, and repeated several times, as if in triumph. At this time they were busily feeding, diving in very deep water on a sand bottom, and calling to one another when they rose to the surface. I never saw these ducks come very near the shore; perhaps this is partly owing to the bay which they frequent having shores which they could not approach easily, as there is usually a heavy surf breaking upon them. I have frequently watched them at night, to see if they would come into any of the creeks, but they never did; on the contrary, after dusk they would often leave the bay; the whole of them would fly off simultaneously in the direction of the mainland of Mull, as if they were bound for some well-known feeding ground. I have often seen them actively feeding in the day-time, though more generally they are floating about at rest or diverting themselves. They are of a very lively and restless disposition, continually rising on the wing, flying round and round in circles, chasing one another, hurrying along the surface, half-flying, half-swimming, and accompanying all these gambols with their curious cries. When the storms are at their loudest, and the waves running mountains high, then their glee seems to reach its highest pitch, and they appear thoroughly to enjoy the confusion. When watching them on one of these occasions, I had to take shelter under a rock from a dreadful blast, accompanied by very heavy snow, which in a moment blotted out the whole landscape; everything was enveloped in a shroud of mist and driving sleet; but from the midst of the intense gloom there arose the triumphant song of these wild creatures rising above the uproar of the elements; and when the mist lifted, I beheld the whole flock careering about the bay as if mad with delight.



a bag which contains a Northern Diver and an Eider drake will not be sneered at by any honest naturalist.

The post-bag has arrived during my absence, and the table is littered with the accumulated letters and papers of the past week. Having recovered from the pleasant drowsiness which after a winter day spent on the sea is apt to overtake one at an early period of the evening, I read my letters, glance at the newspapers, and finally settle myself to the perusal of a privately printed translation of the recently discovered or recently reconstructed Lap epic, *Peivash Parneh*, which the author has forwarded to me through that unique institution of our age—the book-post.\* As a rule the Sagas are rather dry reading; but this episode of the wooing and winning of Kalla is as seductive as a romance. Whether it is the merit of the story itself, or of the peculiar metre which Mr. Weatherly has adopted, or of the circumstances in which I am privileged to read it, I do not exactly know; but the fascination of the narrative is undeniable. The environment certainly may have something to do with it. The book is keen with the keenness of that Northern Sea from which I have newly returned, and which at this moment is lying in a flood of moonlight outside the window. It is all about the north wind, and the aurora, and the long-haired Vikings, who came down upon these shores in their handy little craft, and helped to make us the hardy sailors we have grown. It belongs characteristically to the *Mare Tenebrosum*, and yet it is reminiscent (if there be such a word in the dictionary) of earlier story—of stories that wandering tribes had listened to as they sat round the watch-fires

they had kindled on the shores of the Hellespont and the Ægean. How the hero seeks his bride; how he finds her, like Nausicaa, at the washing-tub; how he woos her with soft speeches and honeyed words; how she, till that moment fancy free, blushes and falters, and will not bid him to leave her; how the craft of love proves stronger than the craft of age;—all this we had heard before, in language which none of us, the busiest or the laziest, ever quite forget. But somehow the narrative of the old story-teller does not lose its charm when transplanted to a more barren soil, and translated into a harsher tongue. Nay, it is brought even nearer to us when we find that it has all happened over again in that 'North country' to which we belong, and to that race which is akin to our own. Have you time (ere I put away my pen) to listen to some lines from Mr. Weatherly's really admirable version of the wooing of Kalla by the Son of the Sun-god? This is how it happened.

Peiwar, the Son of the Sun-god,  
while following the reindeer and the  
white bear to their haunts in the  
North, hears of the land of Kale-  
wala, and of the beautiful maiden  
Kalla:

A tale is told of the maiden,  
A saga is sung in his ears:  
That far from the Waal-star, westward,  
Apart from the sun's orb eastward,  
There lies the glittering glimmer  
Of sea shores silverly shining;  
And peaks that gleam as with gold,  
Cliffs that sparkle with copper,  
Heavenward rising, their edges  
Twinkling with tin.

And friendly is Kalewa's fireside,  
Fishful is Kalewa's sea-stream;  
Never, in vain, to the sea-depth  
Sinketh the net-stone.

And bright in the mirror-like sea were  
The lighted sea cliffs glow,  
With the fiery flames of the sunlight,

\* *Peivash Parneh: the Sons of the Sun-God*. Translated by Frederick E. Weatherly, B.A., Author of 'Muriel, and other Poems,' 1873.

With the coloured rain of the sun-rays,  
Gleaming above and below ;  
—A second world in the waters,  
A reflex of joy and of light ;  
And the maiden in wimpling fountains  
Seeth her image.

So he summons the chivalry of  
the Sunland around him, and sails  
away to the North :

And the voyagers watch the hours  
Move up, pass on, go by,  
Till a year is marked to the dead ;  
While ever with tidings his  
Birds to the southland.

At length they arrive at Kale-  
wala :

What see the Sons of the Sunland ?  
They behold the beautiful maiden  
On shore ; on a lovely height  
She stands in the sleeping forest,  
Mighty, gentle, divine,  
A mystic beautiful maiden.  
Nearer they sail and nearer ;  
Full two heads taller they found her,  
Than all the many fair daughters  
Of man's generations.

Through the glare of a crackling fire  
She stept with one foot in the tide,  
And yonder, a flaming pine-tree  
Blazed on a rock beside :  
While on sticks and staves the maiden  
Spread out white flaxen raiment,  
Stood wringing the dripping raiment,  
Stood swinging the heavy beater,  
While the echo ran round the sea-marge  
To the sounding ends of the land.

The Son of the Sun-god speeds  
in his wooing :

Down to the shore he leapt,  
Stretching his lissom limbs  
With the mighty leap, and stept  
To the maiden full lightly.

And taking her hands he claspt her  
And prest her close to his bosom,  
Claspt her in gladness and glee,  
And in noble and masterful accents,  
Spake as she trembled :

' O be gentle and kind to me, maiden !  
I am not made out of cloud-mists,  
I am no watery phantom,  
But a man with life and with love.  
Hark ! how beneath my bosom  
Beateth a mortal heart !  
Lay thy head on my bosom,  
Listen, love, without fear.'

Gently she leant upon him,  
Scarce daring, in tender dismay :  
And sudden the woman is won !  
There streams from the Son of the Sun-god,

From the beaming face of the hero,  
Joy, like the light of the sun.  
As, in the Northern-lights' glimmer,  
Clustering columns and pillars  
Shake in the flickering sheen,  
And in her soul's mighty smotion  
The maiden knew life and love.

The young people are not long of  
understanding each other, and set-  
tling the matter ; but the consent of  
her monstrous old father,

Kalew, blinded in battle,  
Moveless, a giant shape,  
Clad in a white-bear's skin ;  
A monster to see,  
A sight of grief and of terror,—

has to be obtained before she can  
leave ; and the ferocious old gen-  
tleman is naturally unwilling to be  
left alone in his blindness. However,  
between wine and guile, his consent  
is extorted, and he joins the hands  
of the lovers, and gives them per-  
mission to depart. This is the  
nuptial song :

Lo ! in the northern sky,  
The sign of the gods' protection ;  
Lo ! with broad arch of crimson  
The great crown set in the sky.  
Hark ! the clashing of lances !  
Hark ! the murmurs of armies,  
Now low, now high.  
Lo ! the glory of gods, that befriend us,  
Beams o'er the bridal.

Luminous armies of clouds  
Cover the sky,  
And with gleaming and glance  
On in the dance  
The armed warriors sweep by,  
The bright cloud-warriors, the angels  
Of heavenly, sweet sanctification,  
Of faith that will not lie !

Nor does the generous giant per-  
mit them to depart empty-handed :

He gave of the booty and plunder,  
Won when a Viking of old,  
As gifts for the Son of the Sunland,  
Woollen raiment, and girdles of gold,  
And swansdown, and soft snowy linen ;  
But chiefest and best of the treasures  
Was a cord most cunningly fashioned  
With knots threefold and fine ;  
A charmed gift from a Wuote,  
To win such a wind as might aid them,  
Gentle or stormy.

There is a touch of pathos in the

picture of the blind old father standing on the strand, while the song of the sailors dies away in the distance:

He spake: and she passed from her father,  
Parted, for grief and for gladness,  
The wife of the Son of the Sun-god.  
Away from the great red cliffs  
Sailed the gold-ship through bright blowing  
breezes;

Lonely, lonely, on shore  
Lingered the blind one!  
Stood, and gazed, without seeing,  
At the silver sand of the shore,  
While ever long while he listened,  
To the song that sounded from far.

The knotted cord (the most valuable of the giant's gifts) occupies an important place in the last part of

the poem, which relates how Kalla's brothers, finding their father on their return in a state of profound intoxication, and discovering the deception that Kalla had practised upon him, take to their boats and pursue the Son of the Sun-god. The pursuit is of course disastrously unsuccessful, and Peiwar carries home in safety the tall and comely bride:

And the tale is still told on the Kølens.  
Still sung is the Saga in Lapland;  
Though long ago Peiwar and Kalla  
Have passed from their home in the South-  
land

Unto Walhalla!

