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A visit to the Island of Sanday

by
Rev. Alexander Goodfellow



George Groushank

"All the excitement of trip day."

Kettletoft

Cienfuegos Press Ltd.,
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George Groushank

"A large proportion of the land in Sanday is under cultivation or used as grazing, and the majority of the population are employed all or part of their time working the farms and crofts."

Sanday: A Picture of a Northern Isle

A VISIT TO THE ISLAND OF SANDAY

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Rev. Alexander Goodfellow

(Being a new edition of the introduction to his *Church History of Sanday*, first published in 1912, with some light-hearted illustrations which have no pretensions to accuracy, but which stimulate the imagination as to how it might have been. The text is prefaced with a rather tortuous introduction relating to current political problems facing Scotland in general, and Orkney and Shetland in particular.)



"I had a most wretched season to go through the North Isles with."
George Low, 1779

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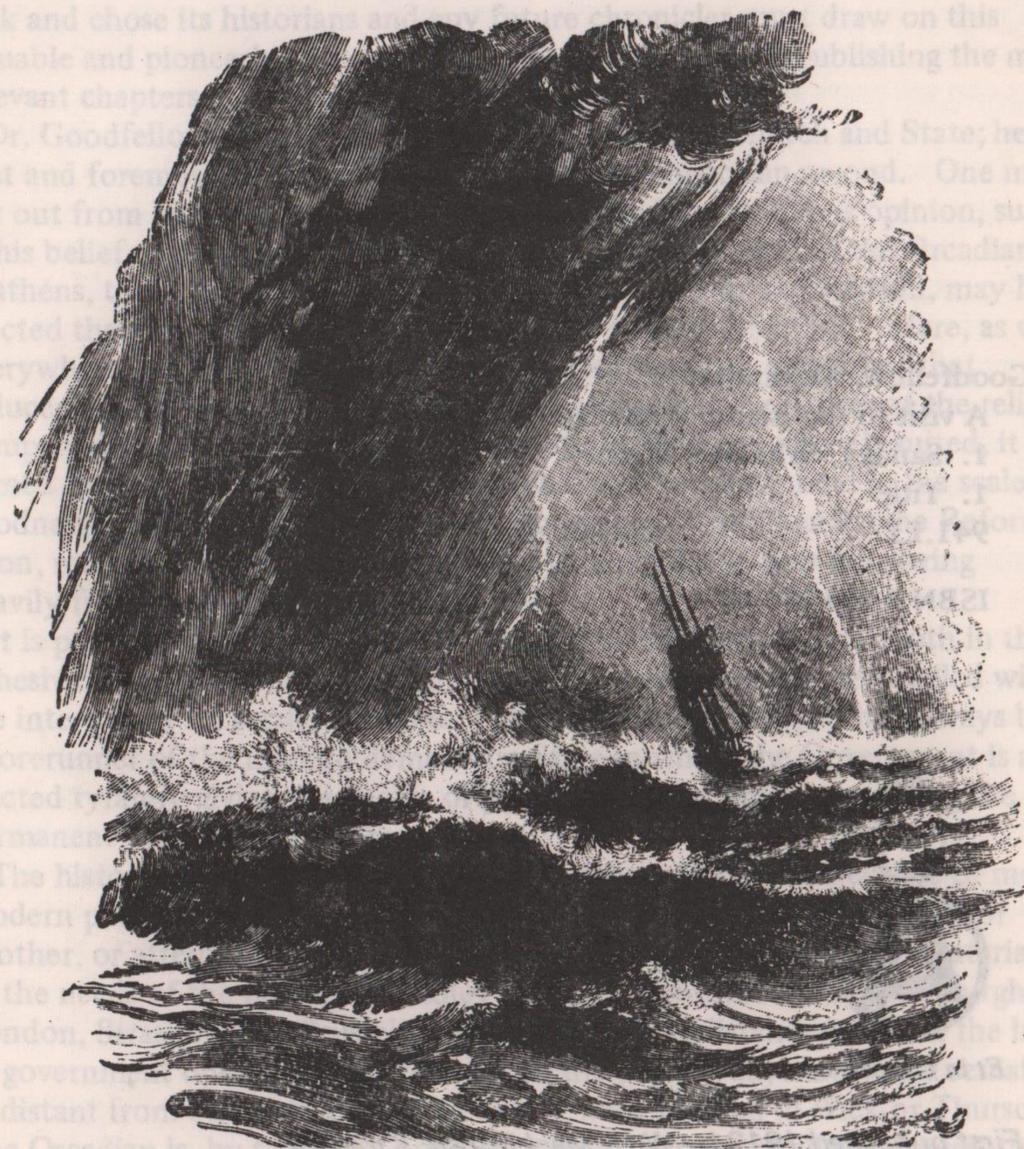
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Goodfellow, Alexander

A visit to the Island of Sanday.

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Et in Orcadia ego

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Introduction

The Reverend Alexander Goodfellow's *Church History of Sanday* is, of course, a partial one in both senses of the word; but a small island like Sanday cannot pick and chose its historians and any future chronicler must draw on this valuable and pioneering account from which we shall be republishing the most relevant chapters.

Dr. Goodfellow's prejudices tend naturally towards Church and State; he is first and foremost a Presbyterian minister and an historian second. One must sift out from his accounts that which is truth and that which is opinion, such as his belief that "... devout men engaged in the conversion of the Orcadian heathens, to show their utter abhorrence of the ancient superstition, may have erected their chapels on the very ruins of the temples of Odin". Here, as with everywhere else, it was not abhorrence or contempt but emulation that induced one religion to appropriate the holy places and customs of the religion it superseded. Where it could not eradicate, it adapted; where it suited, it turned the old gods into devils or monsters; or it reduced them in the scale of goodness to mere saints. Later, when Popery was overtaken by the Reformation, much the same process took place again with the new borrowing heavily from the old.

It is pertinent and provocative to note the continuous element both in the cohesive form of established religion and the way it has been reconciled with the interests of successive invaders. The Presbyterian religion has always been a forerunner of the modern democratic State in which the Government is an elected tyranny giving the choice of people as *rulers*, but guaranteeing the permanent stability of *rule from above*.

The history of Orkney up to the present time makes an irrelevance of most modern political systems, all of which worship the State to one degree or another, or attempt to deify it in the form of nationalism. It is immaterial to the needs of the people of Orkney if they are governed from Edinburgh, London, Strasbourg or Brussels. The geographical distance at which the hub of government operates is not relevant to the present day. It would remain as distant from our realities and needs if it were situated in Wick or Thurso. The Orcadian is, by tradition, not a nationalist but essentially an internationalist and one finds them all over the world; as a seafarer, farmer, etc., - the world's his and her oyster. However, with the subject of devolution dominating the political stage in the coming months the question of political alliances and national "allegiances" is going to be put to Orcadians and Shetlanders. It is a question to which considerable thought should be given.

In one of the more outlandish pieces of wartime propaganda, Alice Dutt Miller's poem "The White Cliffs of Dover" made quite a sensation for its glowing praise of England, written as if coming from a critical American. The comic *piece de resistance* — though it wasn't thought so then — was the part where she saw people queuing in the drizzling rain to pay their taxes, which she thought was the sublimest manifestation of patriotism.

In reality, however, nationalism doesn't take such forms. No Englishman enthuses over his wonderful civil service and how, under constitutional government, the trains run on time. No Scotsman regrets that he cannot be compelled to spend his prison sentence in Barlinnie rather than an effete open prison further south. No Welshman feels he should fill up his tax form in Cymric, but one can't be sarcastic, some intellectuals have gone so far as to do that, but one wonders if they intend to declare all their earnings if they can get away with it — even in Welsh.

Nationalism is a smoke screen put out by the State. Nobody can worship the State because it is an impersonal thing, a means of exploitation, a form of repression which may be greater or lesser, but it is always there; it is concentrated disciplinary force, no more to be loved than the public hangman. The public traditionally hated the latter so they were always provided with some form of emotional appeal to which they could respond. The British have flogged the monarchy to death to do it whereas the Americans are content with a few yards of bunting and tickertape as a tribal juju; but these things are only figureheads and the emotional charisma of the modern State — one the divine right, by conquest, was dead and damned — has been the national idea.

The belief in the State as a country, even as a person, is what has given Statism an emotion which is expressed as nationalism. People will give their lives to the *nation* when they are notoriously reluctant to pay a few shillings in customs duties to the State, which is precisely the same thing. The aristocracy were always willing to risk their lives for "the country", but engaged in tax swindles in case death duties cost their descendents too much.

After 1914, the imperial notion of patriotism was as stale as last week's beer. It had been pushed too far. After the rising challenge of socialism, the fascists revived the idea of glorification of nationalism — in Germany, a mystic idea bound up with race. This racialism of Germany's has come in for plenty of hammering, but since Stalinism and social democracy have made the very notion of socialism stink, the nationalist idea has revived. It was an alternative to class struggle. Whatever its form, it is reactionary not so much because of what it is as because it is a parasite around the State, a poison ivy that makes the prison walls of the barrack State look attractive.

In England, the disillusion with the Labour Party has given birth to one form of racialism which has made great strides in the National Front; in Scotland the Scottish Nationalist Party exploits the same feeling. It is noticeable that the National Front does not make much headway in Wales and Scotland where there are creditable nationalist alternatives to such crude racialism as is peddled by the National Front, but it comes to much the same thing.

However, nationalism in Scotland and Wales is not necessarily totalitarian — any more that State socialism is necessarily so — it merely creates the atmosphere for totalitarianism if the State needs it by fostering a national identification which overrides class interests and feelings of liberty.

The alternative to nationalism is not imperialism. Because one "nation" rules another, one does not have to choose one or the other. There are as many Scots and Orcadians south of the imaginary line that runs from Berwick on Tweed to the Solway Firth as north of it and no God-given-right has conferred that section of it above to Winnie Ewing, or to Jim Callaghan to pass it over.

The alternative is federalism. A useful word which can be lifted (and has been by the Liberals, as has the clear expression "Self-management") to adapt to something which it doesn't mean. But what I mean by federalism is the unification of communities independent of the State, as opposed to the unification of the peoples within it. As mentioned earlier, it matters little where we are ruled from and, in fact, we might as well allow the Danes to redeem their pledge and give us back as on a lapsed pawnbroker's ticket. People, places and whole communities were swapped around as wedding gifts and gambling debts by rulers, taken or forgotten and only the acceptance of rule and oppression has determined the tradition of keeping them where they are.

In the federal idea every community that naturally formed an independent community would be self-governing; each community would be like the free cities of the Middle Ages, they would be no bigger than was necessary for each of them to be able to enable all in them to participate in their running. Their co-ordination would not depend on ancient treaties or national affinities or the nearest powerful neighbour. They would unite, internationally, not nation by nation, but directly to whatever international combination appealed to them.

There is no reason why a majority of votes obtained on a dubious commitment should bind people who detest the policies involved. The coercion of the minority by a majority, solely obtained through parliamentary chicanery, is seen at its worst and most insoluble in Ireland! where nobody can devise a system — but federalism — where there won't be a disaffected minority somewhere — it is only a question of which.

The breaking up of Europe into regional communities, loosely federated, may seem utopian in view of the power of the States involved. But this is to worship power. In fact, if such regions arise they can sap away at the pillars of power much as the national idea is doing, but with far greater potency.

What is the basis of a region as opposed to a nation? Self-interest; self-sufficiency; the clear possibility of self-management; the sense of community; the possibility of circumventing rule from above. There is no real need to bring race or colour or nation into it. One can preserve the folk traditions and progress — one can *only* preserve folk traditions and progress when one is not subordinated to a national centre. If, however, the Scottish National Party has its way, the fostering of reactionary and backward looking attitudes will soon prove to be a more effective curse of Scotland (and Orkney and Shetland) than any playing card ever was.

The editor is no doubt as prejudiced in urging a system of direct democracy and self-managed federalism as persistently as the author of the following history persuades submission to the prevailing authority, but the State has assumed proportions beyond the imagination of over seventy years ago. With the almost inevitable prospect of uranium mining in these islands it is now no mere academic question as to whether the politicians and civil servants who order the affairs of state are kilted or bowler hatted. Those who depopulated The Highlands and Islands for the Cheviot sheep, the stag, and grouse moors earned the hatred of history, but they have been superseded by those who would depopulate the world.

Stuart Christie, Publisher



*Hearken once more,
I will tell thee the mundane lore - EMERSON*

A VISIT TO THE ISLAND OF SANDAY

Island of Sanday in the month of June, 1903, was under much more favourable climatic conditions than that of the Rev. George Low in the spring of 1773, who, writing to a friend about his difficulties and discouragements, said - "I had a most wretched season to go through the North Isles with, nothing but wind and rain, which detained me in this and the other place, sometimes for weeks, that I could not set my nose over the door. However, I had made a shift to get a tolerable good description of the No. Isles, with an account of the most considerable curiosities lately found there, with drawings, of which you shall have an enumeration

by the next opportunity." Alas! what would antiquarians and historians not give for a sight of Low's Orcadian "mundane lore," but by some mysterious Providence the MSS. with the description of the North Isles - curiosities and drawings - have all disappeared. Poor Low's labour accomplished under such difficulties seems to have been lost labour after all. In his "Tour through Orkney and Shetland in 1774" there is almost nothing about the North Isles. "Thanks to the Best," as the pious Orcadian would say, "my lines have fallen in pleasant places," as I was able to look out and about every day during my short sojourn, enjoying the sunshine - Nature's benediction - all the time. And so far my precious MS has not disappeared into oblivion as my readers may see.

According to Dr Wood who resided for several years in Sanday and has been described as "an ingenious medical gentleman" and an antiquarian of no mean authority in his day, "The island of Sanday is first mentioned in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, during the reign of Earl Paul, who having, in 1136, defeated Earl Ronald in a sea-fight, and having captured most of his fleet, returned in triumph to Orkney and invited to a special banquet all the aristocracy of the islands with their friends. He then resolved that a watch-tower should be erected on Fair Isle, on which a fire should be kindled, should an army be observed approaching from Shetland. There was another watch-tower erected in Ronaldsay and similar ones in most of the other islands, so that the signal might be seen over the whole. He appointed Thorstein, the son of Havard, the son of Gunnar, to take charge of Ronaldsay; and Magnus, his brother to take charge of Sanday."

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JAMES CLARKE, Publisher



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“Sanday is again mentioned in the year 1137 after Earl Ronald had returned to the islands. Ronald sends ambassadors to the Bishop begging he would intercede for him. He afterwards adds to the embassy Thorstein, the son of Rangnu, and Thorstein, the son of Havard of Sanday. Again, Sanday is mentioned as a fit place for a conference to be held between Swein, son of Asleif, Anakol, a follower of Earl Erlend. ‘When Gauti met Swein he sent a messenger to Anakol and requested Swein to betake himself to Sanday with his followers that they might hold a conference there. He therefore promised he should go thither.’” “In the year 1157 Earl Erlend and Swein left Shetland for Orkney; but ‘encountering a severe storm and a variety of whirlpools, in Dennis Roost, it happened that Swein was separated from the Earl and driven to Fair Isle with twelve of their ships. He concluded that the Earl had perished. From thence he sailed south to Sanday where he found Erlend with three ships. There was great joy on both sides at this meeting.” “In the year 1158 Swein fled to Sanday to escape the wrath of Earl Haralld whose house in Gairsay he had forcibly entered with intent to murder him; but Haralld then happened to be in a neighbouring island hunting hares. When Haralld was informed by his domestics of this outrage of Swein he immediately set out in search of him to Enhallow where Swein had fled; however he contrived to conceal his vessel in a large cavern in one of the cliffs of that island, and so eluded the search of his pursuers, although they were at one time so close to the mouth of the cavern that he overheard their conversation.” “He leaves his ship in the cavern and seizes a merchant vessel which belonged to the monks, sails to Sanday, and there lands and sets fire to the ship. Upon landing he repairs to a farm called Valunes, occupied by a man named Bardr; he was a kinsman of Swein; having privately begged of him to come out he made known to him his wish to remain there.”*

If we are to believe Professor Dietrichson in his recent *“Monumenta Orcadia,”* and there are some antiquarian remains to justify the same, this island was of vast importance during the Norse period - 872 to 1468 - when ‘a wave of emigration from Norway to Sanday’ took place, and where he supposes the “first stronghold of the earls to have been established,” - witness Ellsness, Tressness, and Newark.

The first survey of Orkney is said to have taken place in 1263 by command of Hakon IV. who issued orders to divide the whole lands of Orkney and Zetland into Marklands containing eight Eyrlands or Urislands, each of which should find quarters and supplies for a Hofding and a fixed number of men, probably in proportion to the Skatts formerly paid. Most likely at this time the island of Sanday was properly mapped out. This was also the year of King Hakon’s ill-fated expedition against Scotland. He set out from Bergen along with Magnus III., Earl of Orkney, in “a good longship,” with a magnificent fleet of 100 galleys. For most of the summer he lay among these islands completing his preparations. When this Norwegian Armada proceeded southwards a violent storm arose dashing many of the ships against each other and greatly injuring the fleet. In the battle of Largs some 16,000 brave Norsemen fell. Hakon returned to Kirkwall with a broken fleet and a broken heart and after a short time he sickened and died. His body lay in state in St Magnus Cathedral; from thence it was conveyed to Bergen and buried in the royal

* From the Statistical Account of Lady Parish, 1841, drawn up by the Rev. Walter Traill.



“In the battle of Largs some 16,000 brave Norsemen fell.”

sepulchre of Norway.* And when the Spanish Armada of 1588 sailed against England she fared no better, if not worse, than the Norwegian Armada had done. Philip’s “Invincibles” like Hakon’s were compelled to retreat, and in doing so, at least, as many as were left, had to sail by the Orkneys ‘where the storms of the northern seas broke upon them and finished the work of destruction.’ Some of those ship-wrecked sailors were cast on the islands where the ‘barbarians showed them no small kindness!’ After a time they entered into matrimonial engagements and settled down among the natives. This is common tradition and the dark Spanish look of some of the inhabitants of the North Isles goes a long way to substantiate the story. About this time the famous Elizabethan navigator, Sir Martin Frobisher, sailed around these coasts, and “his account of the condition of the Orcadians in 1577 does not indicate an advanced state of civilisation.”†

This may have been true of the mass of the people but surely even then there was an upper class in the islands. In Sanday there were various “Bull” or “Bu” houses in 1502 as may be seen from the “Rentals” handed down which go to prove the existence of some better class families. Sir Wm. Sinclair, Knight, takes his title, “First of Warsetter,” from one of the estates here, and was the

* See “The St. Clairs of the Isles,” by Roland William Saint Clair - pages 83, 482, 548.

† “The St. Clairs of the Isles” - p. 545.

son of "William the Waster," the disinherited Master of Orkney. Sir William's brother was Henry, Lord Sinclair, who was killed at Flodden in 1513. It appears also that Sir James Sinclair, the natural son of Sir William, who was Governor of Kirkwall Castle in 1515 and defeated the invasion of his Scottish kindred in 1529, was knighted by King James V. and in 1533 obtained from the Scottish King a feudal grant of Sanday and Eday through "misrepresenting these islands as infertile holmes." If this was so he suffered the penalty as conscience made him a coward. On hearing that His Majesty was to visit Orkney, Sir James, fearing exposure, committed suicide, it is said, by throwing himself from the Gloop of Linkness in Deerness.*

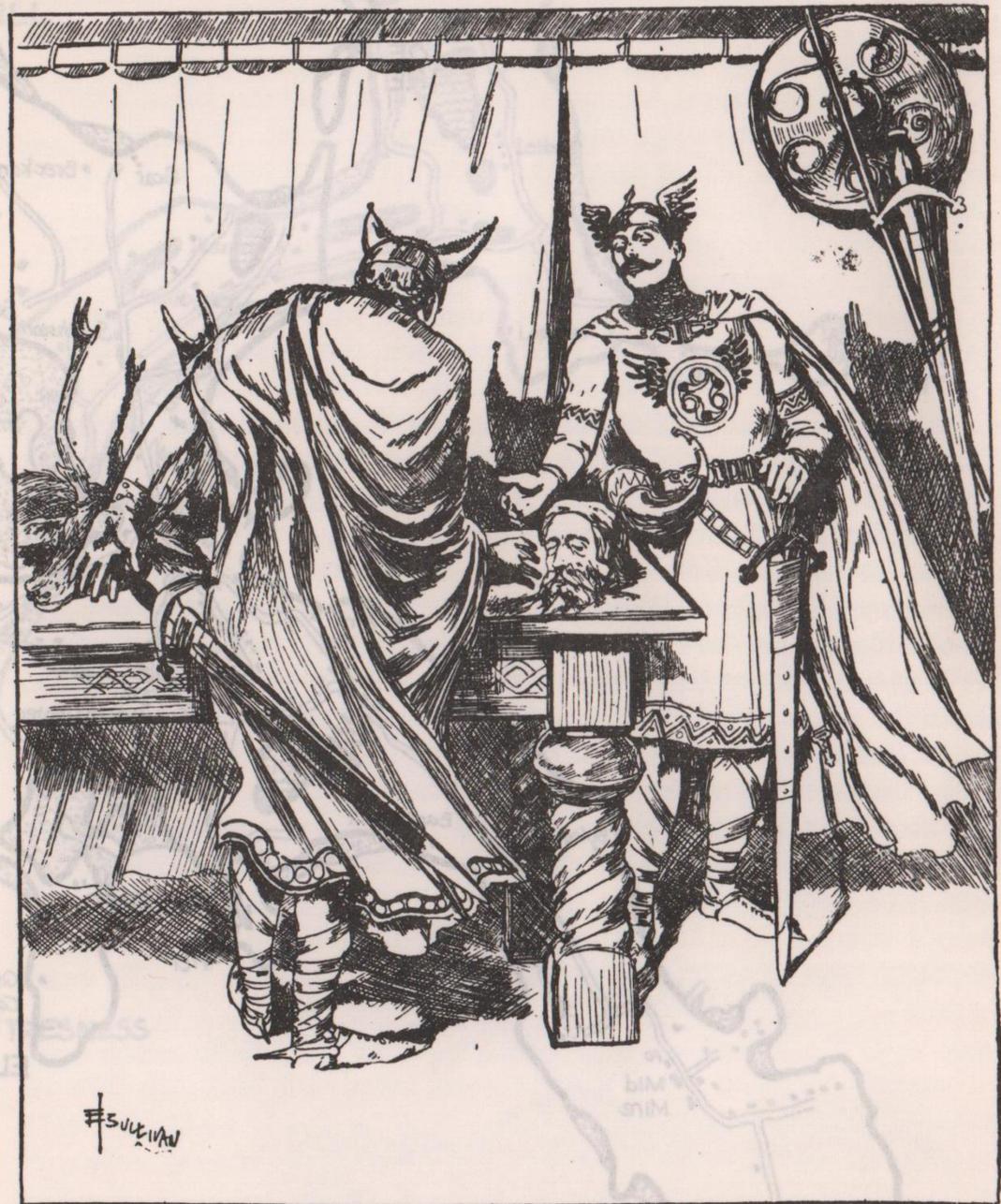


"... but surely even then there was an upper class in the islands."

The earliest historian of these islands was the Benedictine so familiarly known as Jo. Ben. who begins his "Description" with North Ronaldshay and Sanday in 1529.† As he passed through the latter island he saw a horrible sight at the graveyard in Cross which reads like an apocryphal story – countless heads of human beings were seen, a thousand of them larger than three heads of the present day men, and from their gums teeth like kernels were extracted. He was wonder-struck and enquired at an aged person about the bodies and half-burned bones and was told that the people were for a long time subject to Stronsay by paying a yearly tribute, but the unwarlike Sandonians desired to be free. The day came when the people of Stronsay arrived on the island to

* "The St. Clairs of the Isles" – pp. 132, 3, 8.
 † John Bellenden – "The Description of the Isles of Orkney." Some think that the date 1529 should be much later. He was appointed to the Archdeaconry of Moray and made a Canon of Ross. He opposed the Reformation work, retired and died at Rome, 1550. See "Old Lore" – No. 6.

lift the tribute and to enjoy a holiday. Many of their wives and friends came with them in the boats. The day was lovely and they were leaping and dancing with joy. But the Sanday people who were hiding and biding their time rushed upon their oppressors and slew every one of them. After this no one asked for taxes.

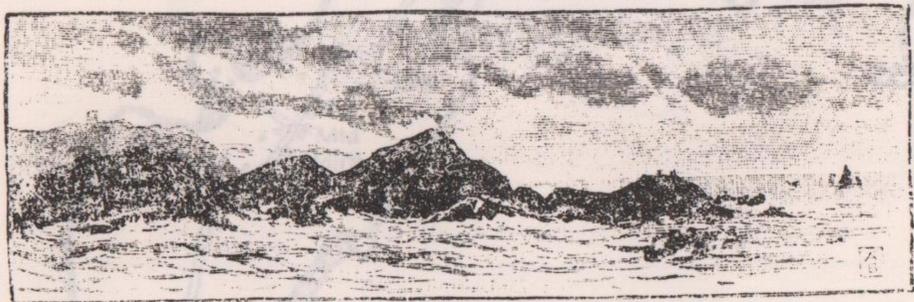


"After this no-one asked for taxes."

In what are called "Peterkin's Rentals,"* there are three different references to Sanday at three different periods, namely, in 1502, with an account of the value of the various lands or farms and the amount of scat paid to king and bishop, as may be seen from Lord Sinclair's rental book of Orkney; in 1595, there are the Rentals "Pro Rege" and "Pro Episcopo," belonging to the crown and mitre; and in 1627, the "Report of the Estate of the Isle of Sanday"

*Rentals of the Ancient Earldom and Bishoprick of Orkney with some other explanatory and relative documents – Collected by Alexander Peterkin, Sheriff-Substitute of Orkney, 1820.

as given in by the Commission appointed by the Bishop of Orkney wherein is set forth what was called — “The JUST TYRELL of the Landis, Teynds, and wther Poyntis.” The two ministers and four leading men of the island were the Commissioners and they closed their report by declaring — “This we have done according to our conscience and knowledge.” The document consists of three pages with information about the kirks, parishes, lands and some of the men connected with the estates, of whom something may be said again. In the two “Statistical Accounts” of the parishes of this island a vast amount of useful and interesting information may be found. The writers were competent men as will be seen. The first or old “Account” of 1792 was from the pen of Rev. William Clouston of Cross and Burness and is an elaborate and valuable document of 50 pages dealing with fully 30 different subjects relating to Sanday and North Ronaldshay and may be regarded both as a storehouse and a lighthouse in connection with these two islands. Here one will find much concerning the population, the habits and customs of the people, names of places, the soil, diseases, shipwrecks, servants’ wages and work, kelp making and selling, as well as something about the schools and kirks. One thing of special note is that the only map of these islands was made by Mr. Murdoch McKenzie, a native of the country, in 1746-7. And in regard to Sanday he had the assistance of Mr. John Trail of Burness Parish who by “most exact measurements” found that this very irregular island was fully 12 miles in length and about 1½ miles in breadth, making 19 square miles, while North Ronaldshay was 4 miles square. The second or new “Statistical Account” appeared about fifty years afterwards in 1841 when the different parishes were taken up by different men. Cross and Burness came from the able pen of Robert Scarth, Esq., Scar House; Lady from Rev. Walter Traill, minister of the parish; and North Ronaldshay from Rev. Adam White. These three accounts are full of interest and of great value and in no way overlap or supersede but rather supplement the former excellent account by Mr Clouston.



Burness is protected from the full force of the Atlantic surge by the holmes of Ire.

THE THREE PARISHES

As Gaul was divided into three parts so this island has been divided into three parishes — Lady, Cross, and Burness, or St. Colm’s. As one has said the island itself may be regarded as “three large peninsulae.” The division has been from time immemorial, at least, from early Roman Catholic days, as the names seem to indicate. Whether the Churches have been named after

the parishes or vice versa, that is, whether things civilia or things sacra came first, one cannot now say. Cross and Burness parishes have been united since the Reformation, it is believed, or before our written records. Formerly Burness was united as quoad sacra to Cross, while North Ronaldshay was included in the united parishes until 1830 when it was erected into a Parliamentary church. Then in 1833 it was declared by Act of Assembly to be a quoad sacra and erected as such by Court of Teinds in 1847.* And seeing that this island is separated from Sanday by a dangerous firth — “about seven miles wide” — it is well entitled to be a parish by itself. Before this, Cross and Burness had each a church but about the time of the Disruption the building in the latter place became dilapidated, while the one in Cross afterwards fell into the same condition, so a new church was erected in a more central position, suitable for the people in both parishes. This was done in 1862.

1. BURNESS, OR ST. COLM, OR ST. COLUMBA.

Mr. Scarth in his account of this parish says that Burness was “anciently called St. Colm’s,” as if it had originally had been named after that saint. And no doubt but the Saint has the priority and is in harmony with Holy Cross and Our Lady. In Peterkin’s Rentals as far back as 1502 this parish is referred to as “Parrochia Sancti Columbi” as may be seen from these words — “This Sett and Rentall of Sanct Collumbis parrochin maid the xiiij day of Junij Im Vc tua.” Then, in 1595 the same name still exists — “Parochia Sancte Columbae.” It is only when we come to the “Report of the Estate of the Isle of Sanday — 26th June, 1627” that the name of the parish is called Burness, when the minister signs himself — “Thomas Cok, minister at Burnes.” The Church, however, is still named “Saint Combs Kirk.” But when or how Burness came to supersede St. Colm, the secular for the sacred one cannot tell.

This makes us inquire into the meaning of the word Bur Ness and see how appropriate it is to the place. Of course the “ness” is common to a great many “heads” or promontories in this island, as Elsness, Lopness, but the word “Bur” is not found so frequently. There is a Burness in the parish of Firth and in old records we come across “Baikie of Burness.” Here, however, we have the name of a parish, and according to Mr. Moodie-Heddle of Clett† the word “Bur” or “Bor” means “tide,” so we have Burness as the “point or head of the tide.” It seems to belong to the same class of words as Burray (Isle of the tide), Burwick (Bay of the tide), and Burravoe (Voe of the tide). The parish lies to the north of the island, and is like Lady parish “almost a dead flat,” or like a “billiard table,” and does not rise much above sea level. It “extends to about 2500 imperial acres,” is “almost surrounded by the sea,” and on the shores there is said to be “a most plentiful supply of seaweed, both for manure and for the manufacture of kelp.” Burness is protected from the “full force of the Atlantic surge by the holms of Ire and the half-tide rocks or skerries of Rive.” The shores are in general flat but the “appearance of the parish is green, fertile, and lively, excepting

*Tudor makes a mistake in saying that the island of North Ronaldshay was formerly attached to Lady Parish—p.358.

†Information kindly given to the author.

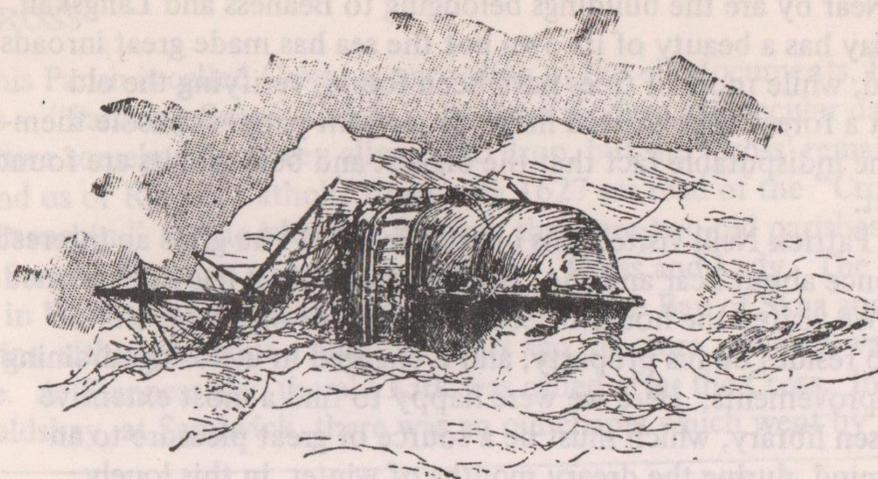
near its junction with Cross parish, where there is a moor of about 200 acres of a most barren and forbidding appearance" — this was in 1840. And what Mr. Scarth says is well worth quoting — "Few places present more encouragement to the sportsman than the parishes of Cross and Burness, for though there are no grouse or hares, as on Eday or on the mainland of Orkney, there are great numbers of lapwing, snipe, and land-rail; while rabbits are not counted by hundreds, but by thousands. On more than one farm 3,000 rabbits are taken yearly!" Without doubt the links abound with rabbits, the shores with kelp, and the sea with lobsters, not to speak of other good things. Rabbit skins and kelp had become almost unsaleable by 1840, but since then both have been remunerative, especially the kelp, concerning the latter one man has pithily put it — "The kelp pays the rent, and buys the coal, and there's a pound or twa ower." In the golden days of kelp Burness produced 220 tons annually and Cross 260, in all 480 tons of superior quality which brought in "a clear average return to the proprietor of £9 per ton, making £4320."



"The kelp pays the rent, and buys the coal, and there's a pound or twa ower."

As for lobsters, in 1840, they were said to have been "caught in great numbers by boats from the shore, and bought up and conveyed to the London market direct from Sanday by smacks." And even yet the lobsters are a profitable source of income to many when sometimes a hundred will be got in a single night and sold for a sixpence each or more. The record night was when Thomas Scott, Thrave, Nester, caught 114 while another man brought in 83.

Along by Scar House, the Links, and the Point of Rive there are a few things of some interest, at least, to a stranger. The "Knowes o' Huckland" is like an old Picts' house and seems to be a fine place for the native sheep to "smoor" in when the waters rise. The grass is plentiful all around and horse may feed there at a shilling a month! There is another kind of grass called "bent", long and coarse, which grows in great abundance in this



"Some intended and some no intended, at least we dinna' ken."

district and seems to be of little use. The Point of Rive and the Ruff of Rive lead out to the beacon where mariners are warned of danger, but alas! in spite of the warning many sad shipwrecks have taken place, as one remarked, "Some intended and some no intended, at least, we dinna' ken." I counted twelve sailors' graves with stones set up to remind the wanderers of sacred dust and fateful events. The Loch of Rive is right opposite to the Point where one may find lots of holes with eggs laid by the "graddies." Pits for kelp also are found all along the shore until one comes to the remarkable Pit o' Rive which was built by Colonel Horwood when the kelp trade was flourishing, but now, alas! all going to waste, having been unused for a number of years. There may be seen the stone tower and brick stalk with furnace beneath which was used for drying and burning the kelp and making it ready to be shipped south. A stone dyke 6 or 8 feet high had been built round the place which is about 100 feet long. The wooden hut where the watchman lived is still to the fore. The whole concern must have cost the enterprising Colonel several hundreds of pounds and it was a sad pity that the undertaking was doomed to failure. The buildings, however, may be regarded as monumental to the worthy man.

The entire parish (unless 3 acres in Hettal, and 18 acres the minister's glebe lands) now belonging to the Horwoods, was the property of Thomas Traill of Westove in 1840 and included the two mansion houses of Scar and Saville. He had 60 tenants, paying rent varying from £4 to £40, and the rents including the wind-mill and water-mill brought in about £510, exclusive of kelp. Scar house with a farm of nearly 80 acres was occupied by the factor, Robert Scarth, while the house of Saville, with lands around, was occupied by the Rev. Walter Traill of Westove, and both places together were valued at £130 yearly. It appears that the superior duties had been purchased from the Earl of Zetland, so that the burdens of stipend, school salary, etc., only amounted to about £70. The net land rent of Burness then was £571. From the Valuation Roll, published for 1906, we see the annual rental value has been doubled. Saville is a large three storied house with a high wall enclosing what was said to have been the finest garden in the island. Here the Rev. W. Traill lived instead of at

the Manse. Near by are the buildings belonging to Beaness and Langskail. Otterswick Bay has a beauty of its own but the sea has made great inroads upon the land, while roots of trees have been found, verifying the old tradition that a forest once existed here. At present people console themselves with the indisputable fact that the biggest and best rabbits are found in this district.

When Mr. Patrick Neill visited this quarter in 1804* he gives an interesting reminiscence about Scar and the "Savil boulder" as it has been termed by Tudor. "We visited the house of Scarr, the seat of Mr. Traill of Westove, who resides on his property, and is engaged in inclosing, draining and other improvements. Here we were happy to find a most extensive and well-chosen library, which must be a source of great pleasure to an enlightened mind, during the dreary months of winter, in this lonely insular situation." He then tells something about the boulder — "In a meadow, near the place called Saville, about half a mile from the Church of Burness, Mr. Traill showed us a large moorstone, or isolated mass of primary rock. The whole island of Sanda is composed of secondary rocks — sandstone, sandstone flag, and limestone. The solitary exception in question seems to be a mass of gneiss. We endeavoured to estimate the gross weight of the mass, and calculated it to be about 14 tons. This moorstone we considered as one of the most uncommon mineralogical appearances in Orkney; the nearest primary rocks being at Stromness, which is above thirty miles distant, and several rapid firths intervening." Professor Heddle, according to Tudor, examined this rock minutely and suggests that it may possibly be of Scandinavian origin. This "Savil boulder" measures above ground 6½ x 6 x 2½ feet, but its base is buried underneath the surface. Since then the "erratic" has been removed to the grounds belonging to Scar house where it is a more conspicuous object. But its removal from the Park of Saville, that part called the "coo's moo", was no easy task, when the weight and bulk of the stone are taken into consideration. As one man remarked — The greater part of two summers (1879-80) was taken up with the work, about 50 men were engaged, and three good horses spoilt. This big ornament adds to the interest of Scar House.

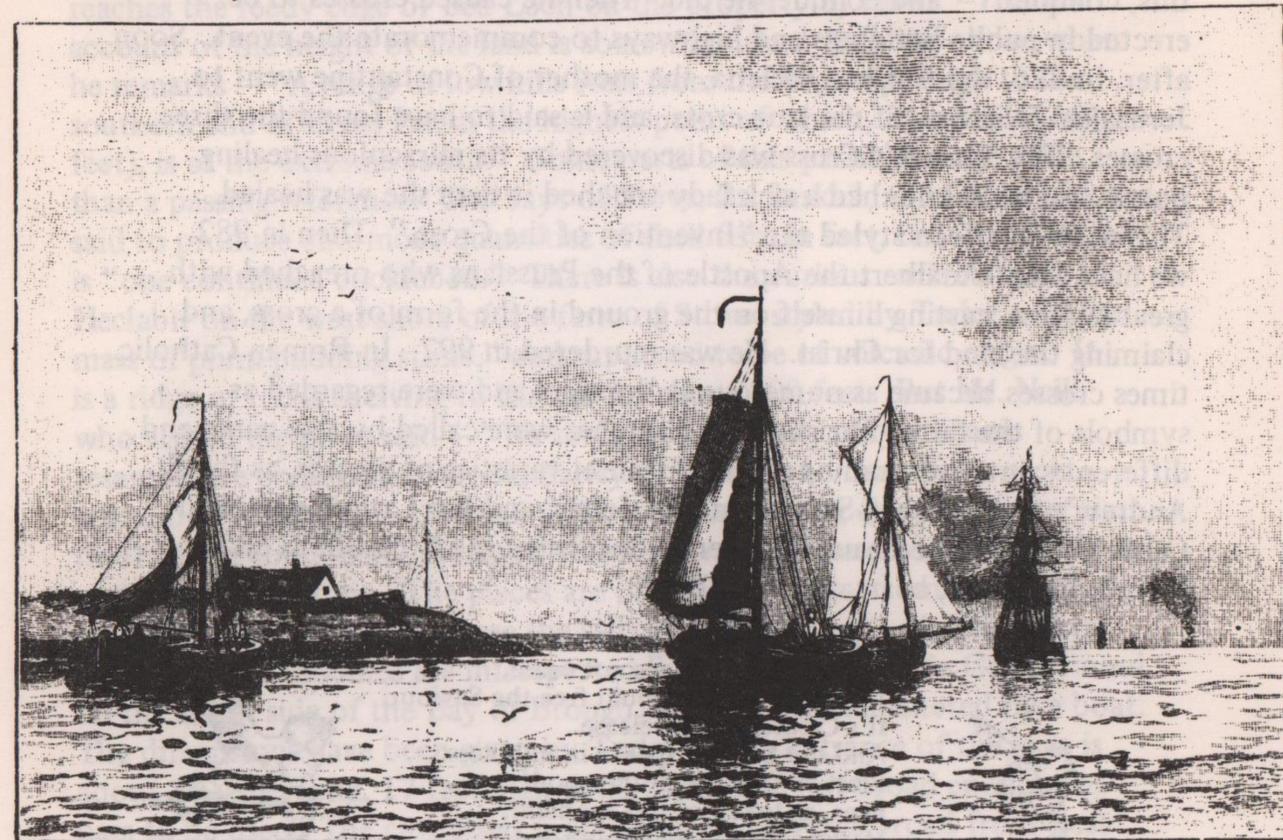


"...and three good horses were spoilt."

*A tour through Orkney and Shetland chiefly in connection with natural history. Mr. Neill was Secretary of the Natural Society of Edinburgh.

2. CROSS

This Parish is called Cross, or according to the old documents, Holy Cross — "Parochia Sancte Crucis." In these modern and secular days the adjective somehow has been allowed to drop, but the 'Cross' remains to remind us of Roman Catholic times. By 1627 we read of the "Crose Kirk and Parochin." In the island of Westray there are two old parishes and kirks having the same names as in Sanday — Cross and Lady. The Cross Kirk in Westray was situated near the shore of the Bay of Skea and is now in ruins, although about a hundred years ago, or more, worship was conducted there. At Stenness also the old Kirk was called after the Cross. In South Ronaldshay, at Sandwick, there was an old chapel which went by the name



"It is curious to observe with what dexterity the islanders guide their handsome-looking and neatly rigged yaws through the breakers of the Roost."

of Holy Rood, which, of course, means the same as Holy Cross. In Shetland the name has been applied to various kirks, as the Cross Kirk of Dunrossness, Northmaven, and Haroldswick, Unst, as well as to the Cross Goe, and the Cross Isle. Throughout Scotland there are many places named after the Cross, such as Cross Michael in Kircudbright, Cross Raguel, a ruined abbey near Maybole, while in almost every town or village there was wont to be a Market Cross. In Kirkwall there is still seen standing, beside the Cathedral, the stone cross, bearing the date 1621 which date is believed to mark its restoration by Bishop Graham, the stone itself being much older. In Norse days, it is said, the cross or "corss" was used only as the signal for purely ecclesiastical Things or meetings; but, in after times when the islands became subject to the Scottish Crown, it was used for all assemblies.

Both the name and the symbol of the Cross came to be regarded as sacred by Christians. Since Christ was transfixed to the Roman Cross on the Hill of Calvary the badge of shame and scorn has become transformed into that of glory and honour. Jesus redeemed the Cross from its ignominy as well as the sinner from his iniquity. Paul gloried in the cross. After a time the symbol came to take the place of the reality, the material or outward cross instead of the spiritual. In the second century Christians often prayed with arms extended putting themselves into the form of a cross. The Emperor Constantine's great victory over Maxentius in 321 was largely due to the vision he had of the cross in the heavens the night before the battle. The three words above the flaming cross were — "By this, conquer" — and conquer he did. Then he caused crosses to be erected in public buildings and highways to commemorate the event. Soon after, in 326, the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine went to Jerusalem in search of the true cross, and is said to have found the three crosses. The Saviour's Cross was discovered by its miraculous healing power, for no sooner had a sick lady touched it than she was healed. This story has been styled the "Invention of the Cross." Then in 982 we have Saint Adalbert the Apostle of the Prussians who preached with great success, casting himself on the ground in the form of a cross, and claiming the land for Christ. He was murdered in 997. In Roman Catholic times crosses became as numerous as the stars and were regarded as symbols of the faith. Parishes and churches were called by this name and different saints even came to have different varieties of crosses, as the St. Andrew's St. George's, St. Martin's (in Iona), and the Latin Greek, and Celtic Crosses. The beautiful legend concerning the Crossbill as taken from Longfellow, bears on this subject:—

"Stained with blood and never tiring,
With its beak it does not cease,
From the cross 'twould free the Saviour,
It's Creator's Son release.
And the Saviour speaks in mildness;
Blest be thou of all the good!
Bear, as token of this moment,
Marks of blood and holy rood!
And that bird is called the crossbill;
Covered all with blood so clear.
In the groves of pine it singeth
Songs like legends, strange to hear."



To come back to the parish of Cross, as to its position, it lies in the southern part of the island and extends to about 4600 acres, of which, in 1840, it was said that "fully a fourth part is moorland, and another fourth party sandy down and links," while its "general appearance is very beautiful." And according to Mr. Scarth — "It is well sheltered from west and north by the island of Eday, separated from it by a narrow sound varying from 1½ to 3 miles wide, through which the tides are constantly pouring with a velocity of not less than eight miles an hour. This Sound has much the appearance of a noble river, and the resemblance is increased during the ebb-tide by the foaming rapids, as they may be called of Lashy-Roost running nearly across the channel from side to side; and it is curious to

observe with what dexterity the islanders guide their handsome-looking and neatly rigged yawls through the breakers of the Roost." And the same writer goes on to say — "The land in Cross rises at two points to more than 300 feet above the sea, and the surrounding islands, sounds, firths, and bays, with the green and generally fertile plains of Sanday itself, present, from these points, one of the most delightful views the eye can rest upon. One of these heights, called the Brae of Fea, falls only a very little distance towards the west, when it terminates in a precipice washed at the bottom by the sea, and perforated by curious caverns; while on the east side the slope is gentle and covered with rich pasture grass, enamelled with the field gentian, the bird's eye primrose, the squill, and other flowers, until it reaches the reedy edge of Bea Loch on the property of How." Tudor's account of the height of the land is somewhat lower than the above when he remarks — "A range of low hills runs from the Bay of Brough to the southern end of Cross Parish the highest point of which, Stove Hill (249 feet), is at the extreme south." Some parts of this parish deserve more than a passing reference. The bays of Stove, Backaskail, and Otterswick are said to produce enormous quantities of shell-fish, in fact, the first of these is "one continued cocklebed." There is also the curious rock called Heclabir on the west shore of the farm of Stove, styled by Tudor a "huge mass of plum-pudding stone," and supposed to be of volcanic origin. It is a ridge of rocks shelving to the sea for about 200 feet. But Mr. Neill who visited the place said — "We soon found that its only volcanic resemblance consisted in the similarity of its name to that of the great volcano in Iceland: for the rock of Heclabir is nothing else than a breccia; most of the component pieces of which are rounded and waterworn nodules of sandstone. The pieces are of different sizes, from balls of 3, 5, or 10 lbs weight, to such as are the size of sparrows' eggs. A few quartz and calcareous nodules are interspersed." The Cave of Helzie Geo is found on the south side of the Bay of Brough, but can only be entered by a boat. The dimensions have been given by Tudor — The entrance of the cave is about 30 yards long, 17 feet high at half tide, and not broad enough for oars to be used. The cave itself is about 40 or 50 yards broad from west to east, is about 35 feet high, and is said to extend a considerable way south. To explore it properly requires torches, the more so as there are said to be numerous rocks just under the water. Laminess has a couple of circular basins with a ridge of stones separating one basin from the other "very like a pier." The mound on the Ness seems to be a broch or pict's house as lots of curious things have been found among the heaps of stones. Mr. David Sinclair found a helmet, a skull, a battle-axe, pieces of urns, an amber bead, a horn ring, a deer's horn, bronze shell with pin attached to it like an ornament for a shawl. In his house he has also a beautiful Norwegian wedding tiara which he received from an old woman whose brother had been a sailor, as well as other things of interest. And Mr. Jas. Sinclair, Pool has sent to Edinburgh Museum various articles of an antiquarian nature, stones, a bone whistle, a small comb clasped on each side, and a bronze bodkin. There is another place called The Knowes or Hill Trows, where six or eight mounds may be seen, one of them bigger than the rest, with

several large stones and holes showing clear marks of a burial place. A large ring is seen around the knowe with a deep ditch like a moat surrounding part of it. The farmer Mr. James Muir, when ploughing has come upon urns, small stone cists, and burnt stones, all pointing to burial or cremation. From this hill top there is a beautiful outlook which the old trows or trolls no doubt would enjoy.*

As Jo. Ben's curious tradition about Cross Parish has been already referred to one need not do more than give the summing up of the Bishop's Commissioners in 1627 — "As concerning the Croce kirk and parochin, the communicant is thairin ar two houndreth and thrie scoir; the lenth of the parochin is fowr mylis, and the breid thair of thrie quarters of ane myl. The minister hes for seruing of the cure thair two houndreth mark payit



"...as lots of curious things have been found among the heaps of stones."

to him be my Lord Kinlewin, quho is taksman of the said parochin; thir teyndis of old did belang to the prebendar callit Sacrista, quho was one of the chapter, thir teyndis was sett in tak be winquhile Robert Earle of Orknay to Androw Edmestoun, and he disponit thame to Johnne Lord of Kinlewin; all the landis within this parochinne they pay their dewtie to his Majestie conforme to the rentall, and are nott abill to pay any more, and many yeirs ar not abill to pay the present rent quhilk are upoune them. The fardest rowm of this parochinne is distant from the kirk three

*According to Tudor, "the word 'hill' in the case of hill trows or hill spirits, has nothing to do with hill or mountain, but is said to come from the Ice., hilda, unseen. These evil spirits were of two kinds — "Hill" and "Water" Trows, to which has been added a "Kirk" Trow even "waur" than the others.

myles; all thir kirkes ar bot in distance two mylis the one from the vther. As for lyming within this Ile, there is no necessitie; as concerning mainsing there be some roumes labourit be gentillmen for the quhilk they pay the uttermost awaill, conform to the rentall, as vther landes pays sett in tennendrie quhilk lysis neirest adjacent to thame within the Ile."

To show how the value of the land has risen in Cross and Burness during the past 250 years the following dates and rentals are given. According to the Valuation Roll of 1653 with some 14 proprietors rhw gross land-rent was £260, in 1793 about £413, in 1840 with 8 proprietors the net land-rent in Cross alone was £770, and in Burness £571, or in both £1341. In the published rental of 1905-6 the value is given for Cross at £1932 while Burness is £1167, or both combined £3099. From these figures one can see at a glance the big advance of rent during those past years.

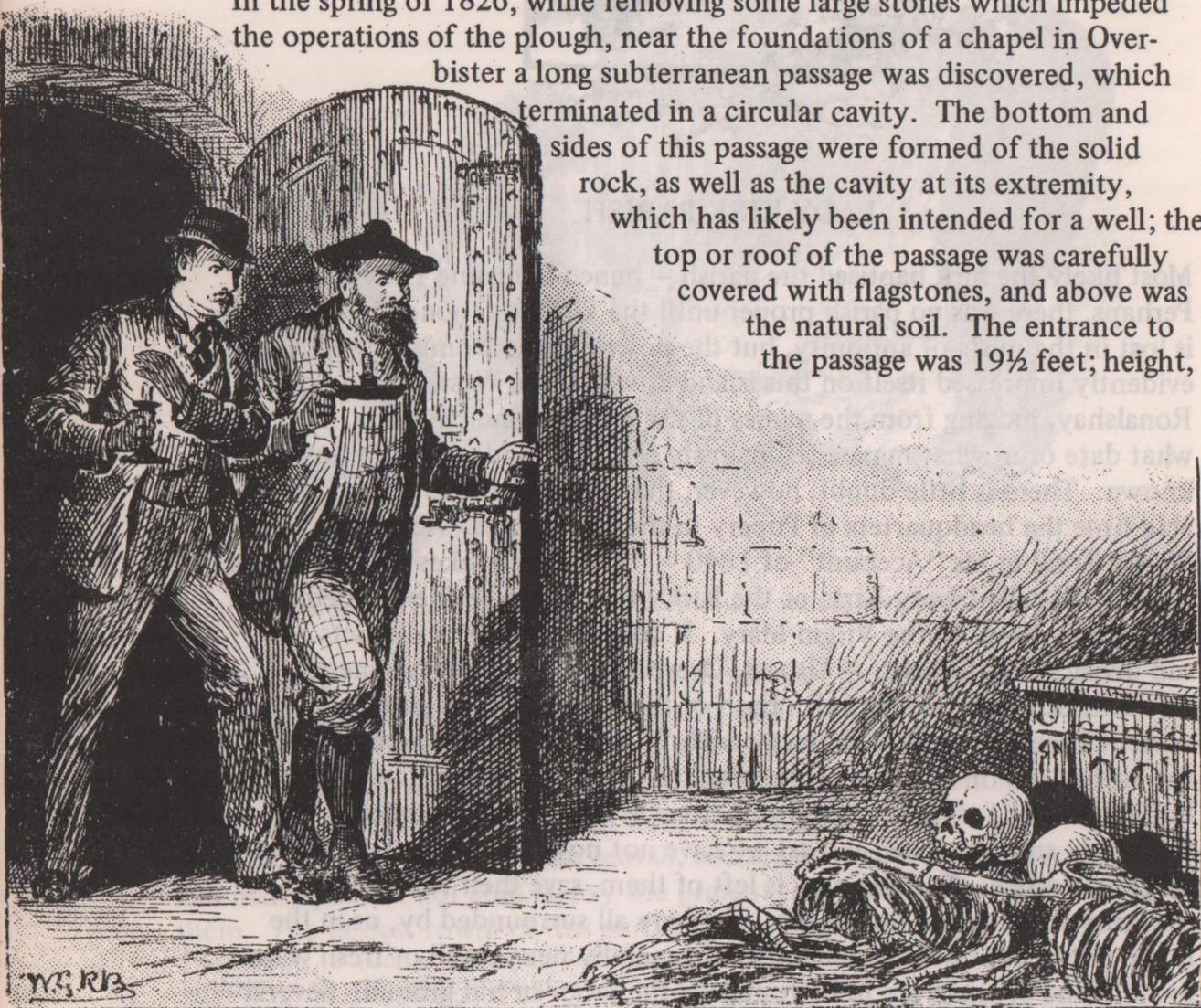


LADY KIRK PARISH

Most likely the kirk baptised the parish — hence the name Lady Kirk. Perhaps, there was no parish proper until the kirk was founded. The order is lost in the mists of antiquity, but the power of the Romish Church has evidently impressed itself on this island as well as on Westray and South Ronaldshay, judging from the names of the parishes and churches. At what date or in what manner Romanism reached Sanday cannot now be known. There is little doubt, however, that this island was for a considerable time the headquarters of Popery in the North Isles. According to Rev. Walter Traill in his "Account" of 1840 — "The parish takes its name from the church called Lady Kirk, or the Kirk of our Lady, evidently dedicated in Catholic times to the Virgin Mary. It consists of several districts or sub-divisions, as follows, — Elsness, Overbister, Coligarth, Tressness, Newark, Selibister, Northwall. Each of these districts was probably, in ancient times, a separate distinct parish." And Dr. Wood's remarks on the antiquities of this part of the island is of special interest: — "Religious buildings were formerly pretty numerous in this parish, in general, they were only small chapels, at least we have not now the remains of any large religious edifice. Nothing now is left of them, save their foundations overgrown with grass and weeds. They are all surrounded by, or in the immediate vicinity of, good land, and generally near a well or fresh water loch. None of them are to be found on the moor or hill ground. Several

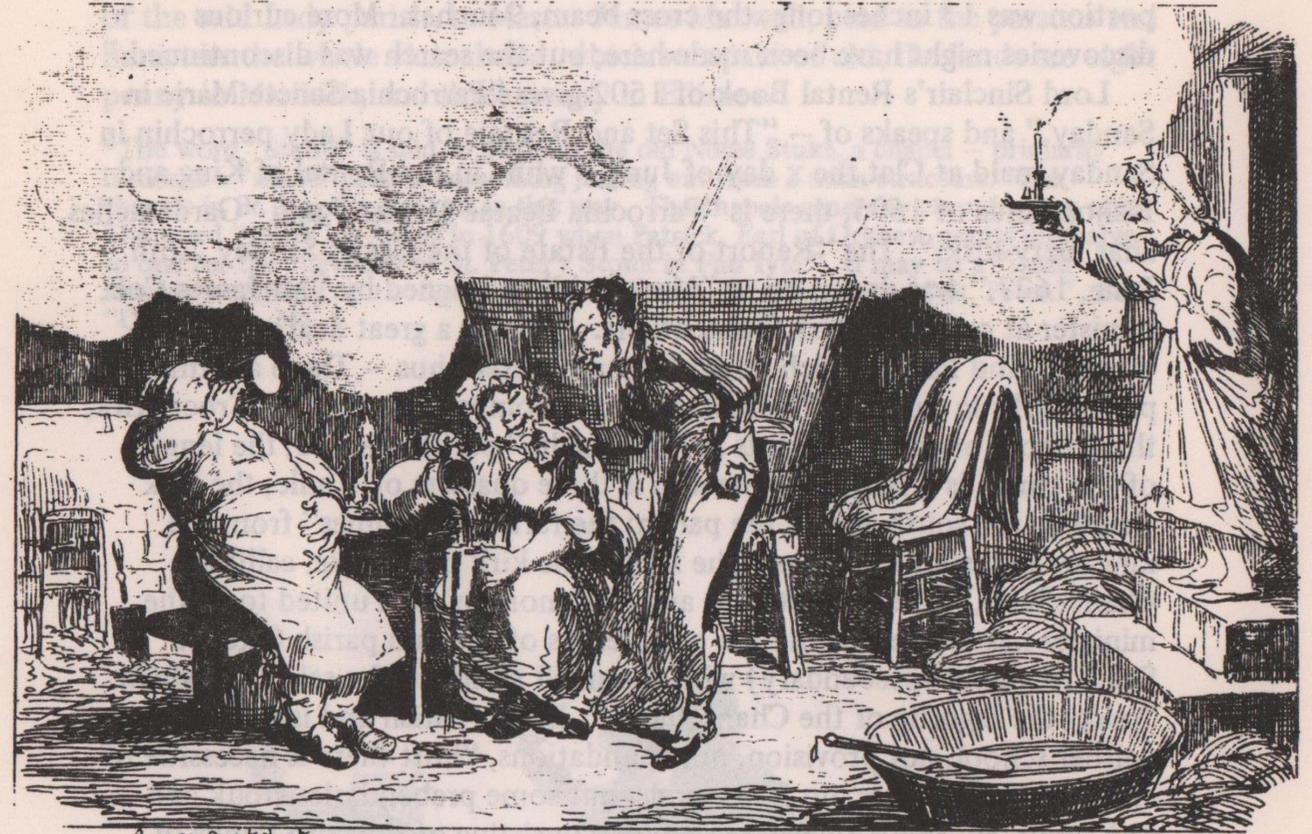
of them have been built close by the ruins of other buildings; such situations may have been chosen, from the ready access to stones which they afforded; or the devout men engaged in the conversion of the Orcadian heathens to show their utter abhorrence of the ancient superstition, may have erected their chapels on the very ruins of the temples of Odin. None of these chapels have exceeded twelve feet in length, and from eight to ten feet in breadth. Foundations of them may be seen at Northwall, Newark, Cleatt, Tressness, Overbister, Coliness, and other places. It is likely they would all have been dedicated to some saint or other holy person; but tradition, which is very scanty here, has only preserved the names of three of them; Peter Kirk, or St. Peter's Chapel (which has been of rather larger dimensions than the others), on the banks of Otterswick, near Newark; the chapel or Arstar, close by the round tower lately discovered at Newark; and St Magdalen's Chapel in Overbister. Fonts, or holy water basins, have been found at several of them. These fonts are all formed alike, from rounded pieces of red sandstone, roughly hollowed out on one side. On examining the small portions left of the walls of the chapels, they are found to be cemented with clay; some of them have been plastered inside with lime.

"In the spring of 1826, while removing some large stones which impeded the operations of the plough, near the foundations of a chapel in Overbister a long subterranean passage was discovered, which terminated in a circular cavity. The bottom and sides of this passage were formed of the solid rock, as well as the cavity at its extremity, which has likely been intended for a well; the top or roof of the passage was carefully covered with flagstones, and above was the natural soil. The entrance to the passage was 19½ feet; height,



"Many of the skeletons were pretty entire; they were lying with their heads to the west."

two steps cut in the rock. The length of the passage was 19½ feet; height, 3 feet; width, about 1 foot 9 inches; diameter of the well, 3 feet; from the roof to the bottom of the well, 3 feet 6 inches. Several small pieces of decayed oak were found in the passage. The well contained a very little water and mud. At a few feet distance from the entrance to this passage a causeway was discovered formed of rounded stones from the beach, and laid with great care, the stones in the centre being set upright, those on each side sloping towards the centre. The causeway was 4 feet broad; it



George Cruikshank

Strong punch is passed round during the evening

commenced at the chapel, and ran in a straight line to the westward for 30 or 40 yards; it then turned to the south, and was traced in that direction for about 60 yards. It most probably, at one time, led to a small loch, which is about 200 yards distant from the site of the chapel. Tradition gives no name to this chapel. The small hillock was known to the old people by the name of Carse of Henzie Hunt. St. Magdalen's Chapel stood about 200 yards north of this. No graves are to be found near any of these chapels, unless at one built on the ruins of the burgh of Coliness. This chapel has been built at the south-east corner of the ruins of the burgh. Its length was 12 feet; breadth little more than 8. A stone 2 feet long, 10 inches in thickness, and as many in breadth, was found in this chapel. One side of this stone was covered with small circular holes, about one inch in depth, and straight lines were cut from one hole to another; the holes were not arranged in any regular order. The use of this stone must remain unknown. At a very short distance from the west end of the chapel, a number of graves were discovered, all were lined with flagstones. None of them were above two feet under the surface of the ground. They were close

together in rows, forming the divisions between the graves. Many of the skeletons were pretty entire; they were lying with their heads to the west. All were on their right sides, with the knees a good deal bent. One of the skulls had a long wound on the upper part of it. A gold ring, rather larger than a finger ring, was found in one of the graves; but the boy who found it, broke it, to ascertain its composition. I saw only a small fragment of it. On the flag which formed the south or right side of one of these graves there was a very rude attempt at carving a cross Calvary. The upright portion was 13 inches long; the cross beam, 9 inches. More curious discoveries might have been made here; but the search was discontinued."

Lord Sinclair's Rental Book of 1502 gives "Parrochia Sancte Marie in Sanday," and speaks of — "This Set and Rentale of our Lady parrochin in Sanday maid at Clat the x day of Junij," while in the Rental of King and Bishop lands of 1595, there is "Parrochia Beatae Mariae," and "Gardemelles, alias Mary-kirk." The "Report of the Estate of the Isle of Sanday, 26th June, 1627," was drawn up at "Mari Kirk" and signed by "Mr James Cok, minister at our Lady Kirk," and others. There is a great deal said about this Kirk and Parish which might be summarised thus — There are three parish kirks in this isle, "Mare Kirk, Saint Combs Kirk, and the Croce Kirk," the number of communicants in "Our Ladie" parish are 320; the length of the parish is 5 miles, the breadth is three quarters of 1 mile; the kirk stands in the south end of the parish; the farthest "roumes" from the kirk are in distance 5 miles. The kirk, "ane kirk of dignitie, callit the Chancellarie," neither united to any kirk, nor any kirk united to it; the minister has for his stipend the corn teinds of the said parish (except Saint Augustine prebendary) with the small teinds of the said Isle, which "maks the dignitie of the Chancellarie." In this parish and isle there is neither school, nor provision, nor foundations, "bott there is necessitie of ane," no chaplainries, no friars lands, but some prebendaries stouk and kirk lands, as, Saint Augustine's stouk, consisting of the corn teinds of Lopness, wais and costs, (duty paid in kind, as meal and malt) which prebendary was in the old erection appointed for the maintenance of the "Sang Scholl" of Kirkwall, set in tack by Robert, Earl of Orkney, to David Scollay, prebendar, and left by him to his late son, Matthew Scollay, and "disponeit" (conveyed) by him to the late Patrick, Earl of Orkney, who died in possession thereof, his tack being expired, and now is in His Majesty's possession, paid yearly to His Majesty's chamberlains in rent three chalders of bere. More, the said stouk consists of lands in Lopness, Wais and How, and in Langtas. There are also lands belonging of old to the Archdeacon of Zetland set in feu by him to the laird of Asilmountt, and set by him in "wodsett" (in payment of a debt) to Malcolm Sinclair of Quandill, and left by him to his son George Sinclair, who has the said lands in present possession; in Langtas, in Arstas, in Cleatt, and in the town of How. More, there are lands pertaining to Saint Katherine's prebendary, set in feu by Archibald Balfour, and by him to the late Henry Sinclair of Cowquoy, and left by him to his son William Sinclair, lying within the town of Liwisgarth, and the town of How: these lands

pay no due to His Majesty, but all dues to the feuars reserving ten pounds paid to the prebendar in name of feu duty. Also, there are lands belonging to Saint Salvator's stouk, which is in laic patronage, given out of the house of Halcro, and feued by them to the late Malcolm Groat of Tankerness, and left by him to his son John Groat, who has taken the said stouk* "holden of new" of the laird of Halcro; in Owerbuster and in the town of How. Again, there are lands called the Parson's lands, lying about the kirk, feud of old before the Reformation by the late John Laxwell, parson of the said Lady parish, to Master James Maxwell, paid to the parsons and ministers the whole victual due, which was paid of old; the lands are eight penny in Marikirk, and three penny in Ellisnes.

*The word "Stouk" is said to be from the old Norse Stuka, a chapel — primarily it means a "sleeve", hence something jutting out from a main structure. The chapels in St. Magnus jutt out in this way. The chapels generally contained an altar. The word "stouk" is found in 1609 when Patrick, Earl of Orkney, grants discharge to one for the "devoties of St. Peter's Stouk in Fair Iyle." It may be a "small revenue or tithing or a collecting box for donations in the name of St. Peter." See "Old-lore" — No. 5.



"Ta ta tae Sanday"