

## **SAILING EXTRACTS FROM HUGH MILLER'S "THE CRUISE OF THE BETSEY"**

*Hugh Miller came from Cromarty on the Black Isle, Ross-shire, the committing north east coast of Scotland and his father was a ship master in the home trade. He began pioneering explorations of the geology of Scotland whilst working as a stone mason. Although given the opportunity to go to university he chose to learn the craft as it enabled him to write in the winter months. On moving to Edinburgh he became an influential evangelical journalist, editing *The Witness*, the circulation of which exceeded the *Scotsman*. To combat overwork and a chest complaint acquired from stone cutting he took walking holidays which also provided material for the paper.*

*"The Cruise of the Betsey" relates Hugh Miller's three weeks investigating the geology of the Small Isles - Eigg, Canna, Muck and Rum in 1844, with a shorter trip the following year. It also vividly portrays the use of the Free Church Yacht Betsey by the minister, the Reverend John Swanson, to tend his Small Isles parish. Below is the sailing extracted from the rest of the text. Geologists will want the full account which has the additional curiosity value of the pre-Darwinian creationist view of the fossil record but for sailors the dependence on sail in these challenging coastal waters makes this a remarkable early account of yacht cruising. The book was published in 1858 but much of it had first appeared in the *Witness*, including the "Supplementary" covering his return in June 1846. The writing was completed by the end of that year whilst the events were still fresh in Miller's mind. The account was under-pinned by diaries, field note books and labelled geological specimens, assuring accuracy and authenticity through capture of detail.*

*During the Great Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843 around a third of its Ministers left to form the Free Church of Scotland, in reaction to patrician landlords and state meddling in the affairs of the church. The *Witness* had played a crucial role in preparing the ground for Dr Thomas Chalmers to lead the breakaway. The Reverend Swanson was an original who attended the Convocation and signed the Act of Separation and Deed of Demission. In doing so he gave up his living rather than betray his principles. Homeless with wife and family, they were provided with a house by Mr Colin Elder of Isle Ornsay, Skye. The Reverend Swanson and Hugh Miller had been school friends in Cromarty. The Reverends Elder and Swanson had probably known each other from their student days in Aberdeen where Elder had attended Marischall College and Swanson King's College.*

*The owner of Eigg, Dr McPherson whose father had been a Church of Scotland minister, would not permit another manse (vicarage) on the island, so the Reverend Swanson tended his parish from the excellent natural anchorage of Isle Ornsay, Skye with the yacht Betsey. It was courageous enough for a family man to give up his income and house in those pre-Welfare State days, the more so to serve the Small Isles parish all year round from the leaky old Betsey. There are no all weather anchorages off the Small Isles*

*but coping with this was in keeping with the character of a man who would brook no interference from laird or state. Working the parish of Small Isles in this fashion was hugely difficult but he continued for about four years, moving to Nigg, Ross-shire in 1847, both his parents having come from the north.*

*Hugh Miller's social conscience, honed by the hardships of the life of an itinerant quarry man and stone mason, brilliantly illuminates the horrific conditions of the under class of the Western Isles. He was among the first to condemn the Highland clearances and in the Cruise of the Betsey shows the effects of uncaring landlords, ignorant and remote government. It is social history in the raw, the evidence of which, ruined croft houses and vestiges of raised bed agriculture can be seen today. It is essential reading for an informed perspective when cruising the Western Isles.*

*“.....” indicates deletion of mainly geology text. Some has been left in where thought to be of particular interest to the cruising yachtsman, such as prominent features visible from seaward. All additions to the original text are in italics.*

## CHAPTER I

### ***The Reverend John Swanson, the yacht Betsey and passage to Tobermory by steamer***

In the previous season [1843] I had intended ..... But the weeks glided by all too quickly. My friend, too, the Rev. Mr Swanson of Small Isles, on whose assistance I had reckoned, was in the middle of his troubles at the time, with no longer a home in his parish, and not yet provided with one elsewhere; .....

And so my design on the Hebrides had to be postponed for a twelvemonth. But my friend, now afloat in his Free Church yacht [1844], had got a home on the sea beside his island charge, which, if not very secure when nights were dark and winds loud, and the little vessel tilted high to the long roll of the Atlantic, lay at least beyond the reach of man's intolerance, and not beyond the protecting care of the Almighty. He had written me that he would run down his vessel from Small Isles to meet me at Tobermory, and in consequence of the arrangement I was now on my way to Mull [by steamer]. St Swithin's day [Monday July 15<sup>th</sup> 1844].....

### ***Meeting the Reverend John Swanson and the mate John Stewart at Tobermory***

We entered the Bay of Tobermory about midnight [on the steamer], and cast anchor amid a group of little vessels. An exceedingly small boat shot out from the side of a yacht of rather diminutive proportions, but tantly rigged for her size, and bearing an outrigger astern. The water this evening was full of phosphoric matter, and it gleamed and sparkled around the little boat like a northern aurora around a dark cloudlet. There was just enough light to show that the oars were plied by a sailor-like man in a Guernsey

frock, and another sailor-like man,-the skipper, mayhap,-attired in a cap and pea-jacket, stood in the stern. The man in the Guernsey frock was John Stewart, sole mate and half crew of the Free Church yacht Betsey; and the skipper-like man in the pea-jacket was my friend the minister of the Protestants of the Small Isles. In five minutes more I was sitting with Mr Elder beside the little iron stove in the cabin of the Betsey; and the minister [*John Swanson*], divested of his cap and jacket, but still looking the veritable skipper to admiration, was busied in making us a rather late tea.

### ***Accommodation on the Betsy and John Stewart's companion crewman***

The cabin,-my home for the greater part of the three following weeks, and that of my friend for the greater part of the previous twelvemonth,-I found to be an apartment about twice the size of a common bed, and just lofty enough under the beams to permit a man of five feet eleven to stand erect in his nightcap. A large table, lashed to the floor, furnished with tiers of drawers of all sorts and sizes, and bearing a writing desk bound to it a-top, occupied the middle space, leaving just room enough for a person to pass between its edges and the narrow coffin-like beds in the sides, and space enough at its fore-end for two seats in front of the stove. A jealously barred skylight opened above; and there depended from it this evening a close lanthorn-looking lamp, sufficiently valuable, no doubt, in foul weather, but dreary and dim on the occasions when all one really wished from it was light. The peculiar furniture of the place gave evidence to the mixed nature of my friend's employment. A well-thumbed chart of the Western Isles lay across an equally well-thumbed volume of Henry's "Commentary" [*Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*]. There was a Polyglot [*extracts of the Bible in different languages*] and a spy-glass in one corner, and a copy of Calvin's "Institutes," with the latest edition of "The Coaster's Sailing Directions," in another; while in an adjoining state-room, nearly large enough to accommodate an arm-chair, if the chair could have but contrived to get into it, I caught a glimpse of my friend's printing-press and his cases of types, canopied overhead by the blue ancient of the vessel, bearing in stately six-inch letters of white bunting, the legend, FREE CHURCH YACHT." A door opened which communicated with the fore-castle; and John Stewart, stooping very much to accommodate himself to the low roofed passage, thrust in a plate of fresh herrings, splendidly toasted, to give substantiality and relish to our tea. The little rude fore-castle, a considerably smaller apartment than the cabin, was all a-glow with the bright fire in the coppers, itself invisible: we could see the chain-cable dangling from the hatchway to the floor, and John Stewart's companion, a powerful-looking, handsome young man, with broad bare breast, and in his shirt sleeves, squatted full in front of the blaze, like the household goblin described by Milton, or the "Christmas Present" of Dickens. Mr Elder left us for the steamer, in which he prosecuted his voyage next morning to Skye; and we tumbled in, each to his narrow bed,-comfortable enough sort of resting-places, though not over soft; and slept so soundly, that we failed to mark Mr Elder's return for a few seconds, a little after daybreak. I found at my bedside, when I awoke, a fragment of rock.....

### *Tobermory to Eilean Chaisteil anchorage, Eigg*

We weighed anchor about two o'clock [*Tuesday 16 July*], and beat gallantly out the Sound, in the face of an intermittent baffling wind and a heavy swell from the sea. I would fain have approached nearer the precipices of Ardnamurchan, ..... but prudence and the skipper forbade our trusting even the docile little Betsey on one of the most formidable lee shores in Scotland, in winds so light and variable, and with the swell so high. We could hear the deep roar of the surf for miles, and see its undulating strip of white flickering under stack and cliff. The scenery here seems rich in legendary association. At one tack we bore into Bloody Bay, on the Mull coast,-the scene of a naval battle between two island chiefs; at another, we approached, on the mainland, a cave inaccessible save from the sea, long the haunt of a ruthless Highland pirate. Ere we rounded the headland of Ardnamurchan, the slant light of evening was gleaming athwart the green acclivities of Mull, barring them with long horizontal lines of shadow, where the trap [*igneous rock*] terraces rise step beyond step, in the characteristic stair like arrangement to which the rock owes its name; and the sun set as we were bearing down in one long tack on the Small Isles. We passed the island of Muck, with its one low hill; saw the pyramidal mountains of Rum looming tall in the offing; and then, running along the Isle of Eigg, with its colossal Scur rising between us and the sky, as if it were a piece of Babylonian wall, or of the great wall of China, only vastly larger, set down on the ridge of a mountain, we entered the channel which separates the island from one of its dependencies, Eilean Chaisteil [*Castle Island*], and cast anchor in the tideway about fifty yards from the rocks. We were now at home,-the only home which the proprietor of the island permits to the islanders' minister; and, after getting warm and comfortable over the stove and a cup of tea, we did what all sensible men do in their own homes when the light wears late,-got into bed.

## CHAPTER II

### *Island fare and the difficulties of mooring at Eilean Chaisteil*

We had rich tea this morning [*Wednesday 17 July*]. The minister was among his people; and our first evidence of the fact came in the agreeable form of three bottles of fresh cream from the shore. Then followed an ample baking of nice oaten cakes. The material out of which the cakes were manufactured had been sent from the minister's store aboard, -for oatmeal in Eigg is rather a scarce commodity in the middle of July; but they had borrowed a crispness and flavour from the island, that the meal, left to its own resources, could scarcely have communicated; and the golden coloured cylinder of fresh butter which accompanied them was all the island's own. There was an ample supply of eggs too, as one not quite a conjuror might have expected from a country bearing such a name,-eggs with the milk in them; and, with cream, butter, oaten cakes, eggs, and tea, all of the best, and with the sharp-set sea-air appetites to boot, we fared sumptuously. There is properly no harbour on the island. We lay in a narrow channel, through which, twice

every twenty-four hours, the tides sweep powerfully in one direction, and then as powerfully in the opposite; and our anchors had a trick of getting foul, and canting stock downwards in the loose sand, which, with pointed rocks all around us over which the currents ran races, seemed a very shrewd sort of trick indeed. But a kedge and halser, stretched thwartwise to a neighbouring crag, and jambed fast in a crevice served in moderate weather to keep us tolerably right. In the severe seasons, however, the kedge is found inadequate, and the minister has to hoist sail and make out for the open sea, as if served with a sudden summons of ejection.

[.....Description of island made shoes presented to the skipper.....]

### ***Eilean Chaisteil anchorage***

To view the anchoring ground presents some very striking features. Between us and the sea lies Eilean Chaisteil, a rocky trap islet, about half a mile in length by a few hundred yards in breadth; poor in pastures, but perfectly rich in sea-weed, of which John Stewart used, he informed me, to make finer kelp, ere the trade was put down by act of Parliament, than could be made elsewhere in Eigg. This islet bore, in the remote past, its rude fort or dun, long since sunk into a few grassy mounds; hence its name. On the landward side rises Eigg proper, resembling in outline two wedges placed point to point on a board. The centre is occupied by a deep angular gap, from which the ground slopes upward on both sides, till, attaining its extreme height at the opposite ends of the island, it drops suddenly on the sea. In the northern rising ground the wedge-like outline is complete; in the southern one it is somewhat modified by the gigantic Scur, which rises direct on the apex of the height, i.e., the thick part of the wedge; and which, seen bows-on from this point of view, resembles some vast donjon keep, taller from base to summit, by about a hundred feet, than the dome of St Paul's. The upper slopes of the island are brown and moory, and present little on which the eye may rest, save a few trap terraces with rudely columnar fronts; its middle space is mottled with patches of green, and studded with dingy cottages, each of which this morning, just a little before the breakfast hour, had its own blue cloudlet of smoke diffused around it; while along the beach, patches of level sand, alternated with tracts of green bank, or both, give place to stately ranges of basaltic columns, or dingy grouplets of detached rocks. Immediately in front of the central hollow, as if skilfully introduced to relieve the tame part of the prospect, a noble wall of semicircular columns rises some eighty or a hundred feet over the shore; and on a green slope, directly above, we see the picturesque ruins of the Chapel of St Donan, one of the disciples of Columba, and the Culdee saint and apostle of the island.

One of the things that first struck me, as I got on deck this morning, was the extreme whiteness of the sand. I could see it gleaming bright through the transparent green of the sea, three fathoms below our keel, and, in a little flat bay directly opposite, it presented almost the appearance of pulverized chalk. A stronger contrast to the dingy trap-rocks around which it lies could scarcely be produced, had contrast for effect's sake been the object. On landing on the exposed shelf to which we had fastened our halser, I found the origin of the sand interestingly exhibited. The hollows of the rock, a rough trachyte, with a surface like that of a steel rasp, were filled with handfuls of broken shells thrown up by

the surf from the sea-banks beyond; fragments of echini, bits of the valves of razor fish, the island cyprina, mactridae, buccinidae, and fractured periwinkles, lay heaped together in vast abundance. In hollow after hollow, as I passed shorewards, I found the fragments more and more comminuted, just as, in passing along the successive vats in a paper-mill, one finds the linen rags more and more disintegrated by the cylinders; and immediately beyond the inner edge of the shelf, which is of considerable extent, lies the flat bay, the ultimate recipient of the whole, filled to the depth of several feet, and to the extent of several hundred yards, with a pure shell-sand, the greater part of which had been thus washed ashore in handfuls, and ground down by the blended agency of the trachyte and surf. ....

### ***Exploring Eigg***

We set out on our first exploratory ramble in Eigg an hour before noon. The day was bracing and breezy, and a clear sun looked cheerily down on the island, and strait, and blue open sea. We rowed southwards in our little boat through the channel of Eilean Chaisteil, along the trap-rocks of the island, and landed under the two pitchstone veins of Eigg, so generally known among mineralogists,.....

[.....Description of the famous cave of Frances, in which the whole people of Eigg were smoked to death by the McCleods.....]

## CHAPTER III

[.....Exploration of the Scur of Eigg.....]

### ***View of the Betsey from the Scur of Eigg***

I took one last look of the scene ere we commenced our descent. There,- in the middle of the ample parish glebe, that looked richer and greener in the light of the declining sun than at any former period during the day,-rose the snug parish manse; and yonder,-in an open island channel, with a strip of dark rocks fringing the land within, and another dark strip fringing the barren Eilean Chaisteil outside,-lay the Betsey, looking wonderfully diminutive, but evidently a little thing of high spirit, tant-masted, with a smart rake aft, and a spruce outrigger astern, and flaunting her triangular flag of blue in the sun.

[.....Reverend Elder's account of the Disruption and dealings with the proprietor of Eigg, the descent from the Scur and assistance and hospitality from the islanders.....]

## CHAPTER IV

### *View from the Eilean Chaisteil anchorage [Thursday 18 July]*

There had been rain during the night; and when I first got on deck, a little after seven, a low stratum of mist, that completely enveloped the Scur, and truncated both the eminence on which it stands and the opposite height, stretched like a ruler across the flat valley which indents so deeply the middle of the island. But the fogs melted away as the morning rose, and ere our breakfast was satisfactorily discussed, the last thin wreath had disappeared from around the columned front of the rock-tower of Eigg, and a powerful sun looked down on moist slopes and dank hollows, from which there arose in the calm a hazy vapour, that, while it softened the lower features of the landscape, left the bold outline relieved against a clear sky. Accompanied by our attendant of the previous day, bearing bag and hammer, we set out a little before eleven for the north-western side of the island, by a road which winds along the central hollow.

[.....*The north western side of the island, description of the view of Rum.....musical sand on Eigg.....*]

## CHAPTER V

[.....*Bay of Laig, Eigg, .....Saturday 20 July-Minister stays aboard to write his sermon.....shales of Ru-Stoir.....fossils.....*]

## CHAPTER VI

[*Sunday 21 July, .....Midday return to the Betsey, the story of the previous incumbent's loss off his living for drunkenness, evening aboard, boys in a dingy..... tale of the sheep stealer.....*]

### *Passage from Eilean Chaisteil to Isle Ornsay*

On the morning of Monday [*22 July*] we unloosed from our moorings, and set out with a light and variable breeze for Isle Ornsay, in Skye, where the wife and family of Mr Swanson resided, and from which he had now been absent for a full month. The island diminished, and assumed its tint of diluting blue, that waxed paler and paler hour after

hour, as we left it slowly behind us; and the Sciur, projected boldly from its steep hill-top, resembled a sharp hatchet edge presented to the sky. "Nowhere," said my friend, "did I so thoroughly realize the Disruption of last year as at this spot. I had just taken my last leave of the manse; Mrs Swanson had staid a day behind me in charge of a few remaining pieces of furniture, and I was bearing some of the rest, and my little boy Bill, scarce five years of age at the time, in the yacht with me to Skye. The little fellow had not much liked to part from his mother, and the previous unsettling of all sorts of things in the manse had bred in him thoughts he had not quite words to express. The further change to the yacht, too, he had deemed far from an agreeable one. But he had borne up, by way of being very manly; and he seemed rather amused that papa should now have to make his porridge for him, and to put him to bed, and that it was John Stewart, the sailor, who was now to be the servant girl. The passage, however, was tedious and disagreeable; the wind blew ahead, and heart and spirits failing poor Bill, and somewhat sea-sick to boot, he lay down on the floor, and cried bitterly to be taken home. 'Alas, my boy!' I said, 'you have no home now: your father is like the poor sheep-stealer whom you saw on the shore of Eigg. This view of matters proved in no way consolatory to poor Bill. He continued his sad wail, "Home, home, home!" until at length he fairly sobbed himself to sleep; and I never, on any other occasion, so felt the desolateness of my condition as when the cry of my boy, - 'Home, home, home!' was ringing in my ears."

### *Isle Ornsay harbour – the Swanson's and Elder's residences*

We passed, on the one hand, Loch Nevis and Loch Hourn, two fine arms of the sea that run far into the mainland, and open up noble vistas among the mountains; and, on the other, the long undulating line of Sleat in Skye, with its intermingled patches of woodland and arable on the coast, and its mottled ranges of heath and rock above. Towards evening we entered the harbour of Isle Ornsay, a quiet well-sheltered bay, with a rocky islet for a breakwater on one side, and the rudiments of a Highland village, containing a few good houses, on the other. Half a dozen small vessels were riding at anchor, curtained round, half-mast high, with herring nets; and a fleet of herring-boats lay moored beside them a little nearer the shore. There had been tolerable takes for a few nights in the neighbouring sea, but the fish had again disappeared, and the fishermen, whose worn-out tackle gave such evidence of a long continued run of ill luck, as I had learned to interpret on the east coast, looked gloomy and spiritless, and reported a deficient fishery. I found Mrs Swanson and her family located in one of the two best houses in the village, with a neat enclosure in front, and a good kitchen-garden behind. The following day [*Tuesday 23 July*] I spent in exploring the rocks of the district, - a primary region with regard to organic existence, "without *form* and void". From Isle Ornsay to the Point of Sleat, a distance of thirteen miles, gneiss is the prevailing deposit; and in no other place in the district are the strata more varied and interesting than in the neighbourhood of Knockhouse, the residence of Mr Elder, which I found pleasingly situated at the bottom of a little open bay, skirted with picturesque knolls partially wooded, that present to the surf precipitous fronts of rock. One insulated eminence, a gun-shot from the dwelling house, that presents to the sea two mural fronts of precipice, and sinks in steep grassy slopes on two sides more, bears atop a fine old ruin. There is a



blind fronted massy keep, wrapped up in a mantle of ivy, perched at the one end, where the precipice sinks steepest; while a more ruinous though much more modern pile of building, perforated by a double row of windows, occupies the rest of the area.

[.....Description of the castle keep and geology.....]

## CHAPTER VII

*[Wednesday 24 July – Thursday 25 July After a day spent exploring the local geology, Miller returned by gig to Isle Ornsay. ....Reminiscences of boyhood friendship with Swanson nineteen years earlier, exploring the fossiliferous deposits at Eathie, Black Isle, Ross-shire.....]*

### ***Passage to Rum – Madeira wine, the gale and the history and condition of the Betsey***

Next day at noon [**Friday 26 July**] we weighed anchor, and stood out for Rum, a run of about twenty-five miles. A kind friend had, we found, sent aboard in our behalf two pieces of rare antiquity,-rare anywhere, but especially rare in the lockers of the Betsey,-in the agreeable form of two bottles of semi-fossil Madeira,- Madeira that had actually existed in the grape exactly half a century before, at the time when Robespierre was startling Paris from its propriety, by mutilating at the neck the busts of other people, and multiplying casts and medals of its own; and we found it, explored in moderation, no bad study for geologists, especially in coarse weather, when they had got wet and somewhat fatigued. It was like Landlord Boniface's ale, mild as milk, had exchanged its distinctive flavour as Madeira for a better one, and filled the cabin with fragrance every time the cork was drawn.

Winds were light and variable. As we reached the middle of the sound opposite Armadale, there fell a dead calm; and the Betsey, more actively idle than the ship manned by the Ancient Mariner, dropped sternwards along the tide, to the dull music of the flapping sail. The minister spent the day in his cabin [**Saturday 27 July**], engaged with his discourse for the morrow; and I, that he might suffer as little from interruption as possible, *mis*-spent it upon deck. I tried fishing with the yacht's set of lines, but there were no fish to bite,-got into the boat, but there were no neighbouring islands to visit,-and sent half a dozen pistol-bullets after a shoal of porpoises, which, coming from the Free Church yacht, must have astonished the fat sleek fellows pretty considerably, but did them, I am afraid no serious damage. As the evening began to close gloomy and gray, a tumbling swell came heaving in right ahead from the west; and a bank of cloud, which had been gradually rising higher and darker over the horizon in the same direction, first changed it's abrupt edge atop for a diffused and broken line, and then spread itself over the central heavens. The calm was evidently not to be a calm long; and the minister issued orders that the gaff-topsail should be taken down, and the storm-jib bent; and that

we should lower our topmast, and have all tight and ready for a smart gale a-head. At half-past ten, however, the Betsey was still pitching to the swell, with not a breath of wind to act on the diminished canvass, and with but the solitary circumstance in her favour, that the tide ran no longer against her, as before. The cabin was full of all manner of creakings; the close lamp swung to and fro over the head of my friend; and a refractory Concordance, after having twice travelled from him along the entire length of the table, flung itself pettishly on the floor. I got into my snug bed about eleven; and at twelve, the minister, after poring sufficiently over his notes, and drawing the final score, turned into his. In a brief hour after, on came the gale, in a style worthy of its previous hours of preparation; and my friend, -his Saturday's work in his ministerial capacity well over when he had completed his two discourses, -had to begin the Sabbath morning early as the morning itself began, by taking his stand at the helm, in his capacity of skipper of the Betsey. With the prospect of the services of the Sabbath before him, and after working all Saturday to boot, it was rather hard to set him down to a midnight spell at the helm, but he could not be wanted at such a time, as we had no other such helmsman aboard. The gale, thickened with rain, came down, shrieking like a maniac, from off the peaked hills of Rum, striking away the tops of the long ridgy billows that had risen in the calm to indicate its approach, and then carrying them in sheets of spray aslant the furrowed surface, like snow drift hurried across a frozen field. But the Betsey, with her storm-jib set, and her mainsail reefed to the cross, kept her weather bow bravely to the blast, and gained on it with every tack.

### ***History and condition of the Betsey***

She had been the pleasure yacht, in her day, of a man of fortune, who had used, in running south with her at times as far as Lisbon, to encounter, on not worse terms than the stateliest of her neighbours in the voyage, the swell of the Bay of Biscay; and she still kept true to her old character, with but this drawback, that she had now got somewhat crazy in her fastenings, and made rather more water in a heavy sea than her one little pump could conveniently keep under. As the fitful gust struck her headlong, as if it had been some invisible missile hurled at us from off the hill-tops, she stooped her head lower and lower, like old stately Hardyknute under the blow of the "King of Norse," till at length the lee chain plate rustled sharp through the foam; but, like a staunch Free Churchwoman, the lowlier she bent, the more steadfastly did she hold her head to the storm. The strength of the opposition served but to speed her on all the more surely to the desired haven. At five o'clock in the morning [*Sunday 28 July*] we cast anchor in Loch Scresort, -the only harbour of Rum in which a vessel can moor, -within two hundred yards of the shore, having, with the exception of the minister, gained no loss in the gale. He, luckless man, had parted from his excellent *sou-wester*; a sudden gust had seized it by the flap, and hurried it away far to the lee. He had yielded it to the winds, as he had done the temporalities [*his Church of Scotland living*], but much more unwillingly, and less as a free agent. Should any conscientious mariner pick up anywhere in the Atlantic a serviceable ochre coloured *sou-wester*, not at all the worse for wear, I give him to wit that he holds Free Church property, and that he is heartily welcome to hold it, leaving it to himself to consider whether a benefaction to its full value, deducting salvage, is not owing, in honour, to the sustentation fund.

It was ten o'clock ere the more fatigued aboard could muster resolution enough to quit their beds a second time; and then it behoved the minister to prepare for his Sabbath labours ashore. The gale still blew in fierce gusts from the hills, and the rain pattered like small shot on the deck. Loch Scresort, by no means one of our finer island lochs, viewed under any circumstances, looked particularly dismal this morning. It forms the opening of a dreary moorland valley, bounded on one of its sides, to the mouth of the loch, by a homely ridge of old red sandstone, and on the other by a line of dark augitic hills, that attain, at a distance of about a mile from the sea, an elevation of two thousand feet. Along the slopes of the sandstone ridge I could discern, through the haze, numerous green patches, that had once supported a dense population, long since "cleared off" to the backwoods of America, but not one inhabited dwelling; [*a reference to the Highland clearances when nineteenth century landlords ejected croft tenants to make way for more profitable sheep- see Chapter VIII*] while along a black moory acclivity under the hills on the other side I could see several groupes of turf cottages, with here and there a minute speck of raw-looking corn beside them, that, judging from its colour, seemed to have but a slight chance of ripening. The hilltops were lost in cloud and storm; and ever and anon as a heavier shower came sweeping down on the wind, the intervening hollows closed up their gloomy vistas, and all was fog and rhime to the water's edge. Bad as the morning was, however, we could see the people wending their way, in threes and fours, through the dark moor, to the place of worship,-a black turf hovel, like the meeting-house in Eigg. The appearance of the Betsey in the loch had been a gathering signal; and the Free Church islanders- three fourths of the entire population-had all come out to meet their minister.

On going ashore, we found the place nearly filled. My friend preached two long discourses, and then returned to the yacht, a "worn and weary man." The studies of the previous day, and the fatigues of the previous night, added to his pulpit duties, had so fairly prostrated his strength, that the sternest teetotaller in the kingdom would scarce have forbidden him a glass of our fifty-year-old Madeira. But even the fifty-year-old Madeira proved no specific in this case. He was suffering under excruciating headache, and had to stretch himself in his bed, with eyes shut but sleepless, waiting till the fit should pass,-every pulse that beat in his temples a throb of pain.

## CHAPTER VIII

*[Monday 1 August – Tuesday 2 August .....Geology of Rum, the Highland clearances.....island trout fishing.....].*

### ***Passage from Loch Scresort, Rum to the Bay of Glenelg***

We fared richly this evening, after our hard day's labour, on tea and trout; and as the minister had to attend a meeting of the Presbytery of Skye on the following Wednesday,

we sailed next morning [*Tuesday 30 August*] for Glenelg, whence he purposed taking the steamer for Portree. Winds were light and baffling, and currents, like capricious friends, neutralized at one time the assistance which they lent us at another. It was dark night ere we had passed Isle Ornsay, and morning broke as we cast anchor in the Bay of Glenelg. At ten o'clock [*Wednesday 31 August*] the steamer heaved-to in the bay to land a few passengers, and the minister went on board, leaving me in charge of the Betsey, to follow him, when the tide set in, through the Kyles of Skye.

## CHAPTER IX

### *View of Kyle of Skye from the Bay of Glenelg, Berera Barracks, Glenelg*

No sailing vessel attempts threading the Kyles of Skye from the south in the face of an adverse tide. The currents of Kyle Rhea care little for the wind filled sail, and battle at times, on scarce unequal terms, with the steam propelled paddle. The Toward Castle this morning had such a struggle to force her way inwards as may be seen maintained at the door of some place of public meeting during the heat of some agitating controversy, when seat and passage within can hold no more, and a disappointed crowd press eagerly for admission from without. Viewed from the anchoring place at Glenelg, the opening of the Kyle presents the appearance of the bottom of a land locked bay; the hills of Skye seem leaning against those of the mainland: and the tide buffeted steamer looked this morning as if boring her way into the earth like a disinterred mole, only at a rate vastly slower. First, however, with a progress resembling that of the minute-hand of a clock, the bows disappeared amid the heath, then the midships, then the quarter-deck and stern, and then, last of all, the red tip of the sun-brightened union-jack that streamed gaudily behind. I had at least two hours before me ere the Betsey might attempt weighing anchor; and, that they might leave some mark, I went and spent them ashore in the opening of Glenelg,-a gneiss district, nearly identical in structure with the district of Knock and Isle Ornsay. The upper part of the valley is bare and treeless, but not such its character where it opens to the sea; the hills are richly wooded; and cottages and cornfields, with here and there a reach of the lively little river, peep out from among the trees. A group of tall roofless buildings, with a strong wall in front, form the central point in the landscape: these are the dismantled Berera Barracks, built, like the line of forts in the great Caledonian valley,-Fort George, Fort Augustus, and Fort William,-to overawe the Highlands at a time when the loyalty of the Highlander pointed to a king beyond the water; but all use for them has long since gone by, and they now lie in dreary ruin,-mere sheltering places for the toad and the bat. I found in a loose silt on the banks of a river, at some little distance below the tide mark, a bed of shells and coral, which might belong, I at first supposed, to some secondary formation, but which I ascertained on examination, to be a mere recent deposit, not so old by many centuries as our last raised sea beaches. There occurs in various localities on these western coasts, especially on the shores of the island of Pabba, a sprig coral, considerably larger in size than any I have elsewhere seen in Scotland; and

it was from its great abundance in this bed of silt that I was first led to deem the deposit an ancient one.

### *Passage through Kyle Rhea to Broadford Bay – sailing performance of the Betsey*

We weighed anchor about noon [*Wednesday 31 July*], and entered the opening of Kyle Rhea. Vessel after vessel, to the number of eight or ten in all, had been arriving in the course of the morning, and dropping anchor, nearer the opening or further away, according to its sailing ability, to await the turn of the tide; and we now found ourselves one of the components of a little fleet, with some five or six vessels sweeping up the Kyle before us, and some three or four driving on behind. Never, except perhaps in a Highland big river flood, have I seen such a tide. It danced and wheeled, and came boiling in huge masses from the bottom; and now our bows heaved abruptly round in one direction, and now the jerked as suddenly round in another; and, though there blew a moderate breeze at the time, the helm failed to keep the sails steadily full. But whether our sheets bellied out, or flapped right in the wind's eye, on we swept in the tideway, like a cork caught in a thunder shower in one of the rapids of the High Street. At one point the Kyle is little more than a quarter of a mile in breadth; and here, in the powerful eddie which ran along the shore, we saw a group of small fishing-boats pursuing a shoal of **sillocks** [*very young saithe (coal fish)*] in a style that blent all the liveliness of the chase with the specific interest of the angle. The shoal, restless as the tides among which it disported, now rose in the boilings of one eddie, now beat the water into foam amid the stiller dimplings of another. The boats hurried from spot to spot wherever the quick glittering scales appeared. For a few seconds rods would be cast thick and fast, as if employed in beating the water, and captured fish glanced bright in the sun; and then the take would cease, and the play rise elsewhere, and oars would flash out amain, as the little fleet again dashed into the heart of the shoal. As the Kyle widened, the force of the current diminished, and sail and helm again became things of positive importance. The wind blew a-head, steady though not strong; and the Betsey, with companions in the voyage against which to measure herself, began to show her paces. First she passed one bulky vessel, then another: she lay closer to the wind than any of her fellows, glided more quickly through the water, turned in her stays like **Lady Betty** [*probably Lady Betty Stanley, wife of Lord Stanley, honoured by a minuet written in 1732 by Thomas Alexander Erskine, Viscount Fenton, known as Fiddler Tam, of Kellie Castle Fife*] in a minuet; and, ere we had reached Kyle Akin, the fleet in the middle of which we had started were toiling far behind us, all save one vessel, a stately brig; and just as we were going to pass her too, she cast anchor, to await the change of the tide, which runs from the west during flood at Kyle Akin, as it runs from the east through Kyle Rhea. . The wind had freshened; and as it was now within two hours of full sea, the force of the current had somewhat abated; and so we kept on our course, tacking in scant room, however, and making but little way. A few vessels attempted following us, but, after an inefficient tack or two, they fell back on the anchoring ground, leaving the Betsey to buffet the currents alone. Tack followed tack sharp and quick in the narrows, with an iron-bound coast on either hand. We had

frequent and delicate turning: now we lost fifty yards, now we gained a hundred. John Stewart held the helm; and as none of us had ever sailed the way before, I had the vessel's chart spread out on the companion-head before me, and told him when to wear and when to hold on his way,-at what places we might run up almost to the rock edge, and at what places it was safest to give the land a good offing. Hurrah for the Free Church yacht Betsy! And hurrah once more! We cleared the Kyle, leaving a whole fleet of tide-bound behind us; and, stretching out at one long tack into the open sea, bore, at the next, right into the bay at Broadford, where we cast anchor for the night, within two hundred yards of the shore. Provisions were running short; and so I had to make a late dinner this evening on some of the razor fish of Rum, topped by a dish of tea. But there is always rather more appetite than food in the country;-such, at least, is the common result under the present mode of distribution: the hunger overlaps and outstretches the provision; and there was comfort in the reflection, that with the razor-fish on which to fall back, it overlapped it but by a very little on this occasion in the cabin of the Betsy. The steam-boat passed southwards next morning, and I was joined by my friend the minister a little before breakfast.

### *The view from Broadford Bay*

The day [*Thursday 1st August*] was miserably bad: the rain continued pattering on the skylight, now lighter, now heavier, till within an hour of sunset, when it ceased, and a light breeze began to unroll the thick fogs from off the landscape, volume after volume, like coverings from off a mummy,-leaving exposed in the valley of the lias a brown and cheerless prospect of dark bogs and of debris-covered hills, streaked with downward lines of foam. The seaward view is more pleasing. The deep russet of the interior we find bordered for miles along the edge of the bay with a many-shaded fringe of green; and the smooth grassy island of Pabba lies in the midst, a polished gem, all the more advantageously displayed from the roughness of the surrounding setting. We took boat, and explored the Lias in our immediate neighbourhood till dusk.....

### *Exploring Pabba Island*

Friday [*2nd August*] made amends for the rains and fogs of its disagreeable predecessor: the morning rose bright and beautiful, with just wind enough to fill, and barely fill, the sail hoisted high, with miser economy, that not a breath might be lost; and, weighing anchor, and shaking out all our canvass, we bore down on Pabba to explore. This island, so soft in outline and colour, is formidably fenced round by dangerous reefs; and, leaving the Betsy in charge of John Stewart and his companion, to dodge on in the offing, I set out with the minister in our little boat, and landed on the north-eastern side of the island, beside a trap-dyke that served us as a pier. He would be a happy geologist who, with a few thousands to spare could call Pabba his own. It contains less than a square mile of surface; and a walk of little more than three miles and a half along the line where the waves break at high water brings the traveller back to his starting point; and yet, though thus limited in area, the petrifications of its shores might themselves fill a museum.....

The tide had begun to flow, and we had to quit our explorations, and return to the Betsy. The wind had become less, and all the canvass we could hang out enabled us to draw but a sluggish furrow. The stern of the Betsey “wrought no buttons” on this occasion; but she had a good tide under her keel, and ere the dinner-hour we had passed through the narrows of Kyle Akin. The village of this name was designed by the late Lord McDonald for a great sea-port town; but it refused to grow; and it has since become a gentleman in a small way and does nothing. It forms, however, a handsome group of houses, pleasantly situated on a flat green tongue of land, on the Skye side, just within the opening of the Kyle; and there rises on an eminence beyond it a fine old tower, rent open, as if by an earthquake, from top to bottom, which forms one of the most picturesque objects I have almost ever seen in landscape. There are bold hills all round, and rocky islands, with the ceaseless rush of tides in front; while the cloven tower, rising high over the shore, is seen, in threading the Kyles, whether from the south or north, relieved dark against the shy, as the central object in the vista. We find it thus described by the Messrs Anderson of Inverness, in their excellent “Guide Book,”-by far the best companion of the kind with which the traveller who sets himself to explore our Scottish Highlands can be provided. “Close to the village of Kyle Akin are the ruins of an old square keep, called Castle Muel or Maoil, the walls of which are of a remarkable thickness. It is said to have been built by the daughter of a Norwegian king, married to a Mackinnon or Macdonald, for the purpose of levying an impost on all vessels passing the Kyles, excepting, says the tradition, those of her own country. For the more certain exaction of this duty, she is reported to have caused a strong chain to be stretched across from shore to shore; and the spot in the rocks to which the terminal links were attached is still pointed out.” It was high time for us to be home. The dinner hour came; but, in meet illustration of the profound remark of Trotty-veck [*character from The Chimes, Charles Dickens*], not the dinner. We had been in a cold Moderate District, whence there came no half dozens of eggs, or whole dozens of trout, or pailfuls of razor fish, and in which hard cabin-biscuit cost us sixpence a pound. And now our stores were exhausted, and we had to dine as best we could, on our last half ounce of tea, sweetened by our last quarter pound of sugar. I had marked, however, a dried thornback hanging among the rigging. It had been there nearly three weeks before, when I first came aboard, and no one seemed to know for how many weeks previous; for, as it had come to be a sort of fixture in the vessel, it could be looked at without being seen. But necessity sharpens the discerning faculty, and on this pressing occasion I was fortunate enough to see it. It was straightway taken down, skinned, roasted, and eaten; and, though rather rich in ammonia,-a substance better suited to form the food of the organisms that do not unite sensation to vitality, than organisms so high in the scale as the minister and his friend,-we came deliberately to the opinion, that, on the whole, we could scarce have dined so well on one of Major Bellenden’s jack boots,-“so thick in the soles,” according to Jenny Dennison, “forby being tough in the upper leather.” [*Sir Walter Scott, Old Mortality*] The tide failed us opposite the opening of Loch Alsh; the wind, long dying, at length died out into a dead calm; and we cast anchor in ten fathoms of water, to wait the ebbing current that was to carry us through Kyle Rhea.

### *The return to Isle Ornsay through Kyle Rhea, the Caileach stone*

The ebb-tide set in about half an hour after sunset; and in weighing anchor to float down the Kyle,-for we still lacked wind to sail down to it,-we brought up from below, on one of the anchor flukes, an immense bunch of deep-sea tangle, with huge soft fronds and long slender stems, that had lain flat on the rocky bottom, and had here and there thrown out roots along its length of stalk, to attach itself to the rock, in the way the ivy attaches itself to the wall. Among the intricacies of the true roots of the bunch, if one may speak of the true roots of an alga, I reckoned up from eighteen to twenty different forms of animal life,-Flustrae, Aertulaariae, Serpulae, Anomiae, Modiolae, Astarte, Annelidae, Crustacea and Radiata. Among the Crustaceans I found a female crab of reddish-brown colour, considerably smaller than the nail of my small finger, but fully grown apparently, for the abdominal flap was loaded with spawn; and among the echinoderms, a brownish-yellow sea-urchin about the size of a pistol-bullet, furnished with comparatively large thinly set spines. There is a dangerous rock in Kyle Rhea, the Caileach stone, on which the Commissioners for Northern Lighthouses have stuck a bit of board, about the size of a pot-lid, which, as it is known to be there, and as no one ever sees it after sunset, is really very effective, considering how little it must have cost the country, in wrecking vessels. I saw one of its victims, the sloop of an honest Methodist, in whose bottom the Caileach had knocked out a hole, repairing at Isle Ornsay; and I was told, that if I wished to see more, I had only just to wait a little. The honest Methodist, after looking out in vain for the bit of board, was just stepping into the shrouds, to try whether he could not see the rock on which the bit of board is placed, when all at once his vessel found out both board and rock for herself. We also had anxious looking out this evening for the bit of board: one of us thought he saw it right a-head; and when some of the others were trying to see it too, John Stewart succeeded in discovering it half a pistol-shot astern. The evening was one of the loveliest. The moon rose in cloudy majesty over the mountains of Glenelg, brightening as it rose, till the boiling eddies around us curled on the darker surface in pale circlets of light, and the shadow of the Betsey lay as sharply defined on the brown patch of calm to the larboard as if it were her portrait taken in black. Immediately at the water-edge, under a tall dark hill, there were two smouldering fires, that now shot up a sudden tongue of bright flame, and now dimmed into blood-red specks, and sent thick strongly-scented trails of smoke athwart the surface of the Kyle. We could hear, in the calm, voices from beside them, apparently those of children; and learned that they indicated the places of two kelp-furnaces,-things which have now become comparatively rare along the coasts of the Hebrides. There was the low rush of tides all around, and the distant voices from the shore, but no other sounds; and, dim in the moonshine, we could see behind us several spectral-looking sails threading their silent way through the narrows, like twilight ghosts traversing some haunted corridor.

### *The escape of the Betsey from stranding at Isle Ornsay the previous year*

It was late ere we reached the opening of Isle Ornsay; and as it was still a dead calm, we had to tug in the Betsey to the anchoring ground with a pair of long sweeps. The minister pointed to a low-lying rock on the left hand side of the opening,-a favourite haunt of the



seal. "I took farewell of the Betsy there last winter," he said. "The night had worn late, and was pitch dark; we could see before us scarce the length of our bowsprit; not a single light twinkled from the shore; and, in taking the bay, we ran bump on the skerry, and stuck fast. The water came rushing in, and covered over the cabin-floor. I had Mrs Swanson and my little daughter aboard with me, with one of our servant-maids who had become attached to the family, and insisted on following us from Eigg; and, of course, our first care was to get them ashore. We had to land them on the bare uninhabited island yonder, and a dreary enough place it was at midnight, in winter, with its rocks, bogs, and heath, and with a rude sea tumbling over the skerries in front; but it had at least the recommendation of being safe, and the sky, though black and wild, was not stormy. I had brought two lanterns ashore: the servant girl, with the child in her lap, sat beside one of them, in the shelter of a rock; while my wife, with the other, went walking up and down along a piece of level sward yonder, waving the light, to attract notice from the opposite side of the bay. But though it was seen from the windows of my own house by an attached relative, it was deemed merely a singularly distinct apparition of the Will o' the Wisp, and so brought us no assistance. Meanwhile we had carried out a kedge astern of the Betsy, as the sea was flowing at the time, to keep her from beating in over the rocks; and then, taking our few moveables ashore, we hung on till the tide rose, and, with our boat alongside ready for escape, succeeded in warping her into deep water, with the intention of letting her sink somewhere beyond the influence of the surf, which, without fail, would have broken her up on the skerry in a few hours, had we suffered her to remain there. But though, when on the rock, the tide had risen as freely as over the cabin sole inside as over the crags without, in the deep water the Betsey gave no sign of sinking. I went down to the cabin; the water was knee-high on the cabin floor, dashing against bed and locker, but it rose no higher;-the enormous leak had stopped, we knew not how; and, setting ourselves to the pump, we had in an hour or two cleared the ship.

### *Saved by her flexible clinker planking*

The Betsey is clinker built below. The elastic oak planks had yielded inwards to the pressure of the rock, tearing out the fastenings, and admitted the tide at wide yawning seams; but no sooner was the pressure removed, than out they sprung again into their places, like bows when the strings are slackened; and when the carpenter came to overhaul, he found he had little else to do than remove a slit plank, and to supply a few dozens of drawn nails."

## CHAPTER 10

### *Sermon at Isle Ornsay*

The anchoring ground at Isle Ornsay was crowded with coasting vessels and fishing boats; and when the Sabbath came round [*Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August*], no inconsiderable proportion of my friend's congregation was composed of sailors and fishermen. His text

was appropriate,—"He bringeth them into their desired haven;" and his sea-craft and his theology were alike excellent, there were no incongruities in his allegory, and no defects in his mode of applying it, and the seamen were hugely delighted.....

*[Monday 5<sup>th</sup> August]*

On Monday I spent several hours in re-exploring the Lias of Lucy Bay and its neighbourhood, and then walked on to Kyle-Akin, where I parted from my friend, Mr Swanson, and took the boat for Loch Carron. *[From here Miller took a mail-gig to the East Coast and continued his holiday exploring east coast geology - Chapters XI and XII.]*

### CHAPTER XIII

#### SUPPLEMENTARY.

*The following summer, June 1845, Miller returned to the Reverend Swanson and the yacht Betsey at Isle Ornsay with a further geological quest in his mind arising from his investigations the previous year. He had found fossil reptile remains on the shore and wanted to search for the strata from which they had originated.*

We found the Betsey riding in the anchoring ground at Isle Ornsay, in her foul-weather dishabille, with her topmast struck and in the yard, and her cordage and sides exhibiting in their weathered aspect the influence of the bleaching rains and winds of the previous winter. She was at once in an undress and getting old, and, as seen from the shore through rain and spray,-for the weather was coarse and boisterous,-she had apparently gained as little in her good looks from either circumstance as most other ladies do. We lay storm bound for three days at Isle Ornsay, watching from the window of Mr Swanson's dwelling the incessant showers sweeping down the loch.

#### *Isle Ornsay to Eigg, the calm and tow into Eilean Chaisteal*

On the morning of Saturday, the gale, though still blowing right ahead, had moderated; the minister was anxious to visit this island charge, after his absence of several weeks from them at the Assembly; and I, more than half afraid that my term of furlough might expire ere I had reached my proposed scene of exploration, was as anxious as he; and so we both resolved, come what might, on doggedly beating our way adown the Sound of Sleat to Small Isles. If the wind does not fail us, said my friend, we have little more than

a day's work before us, and shall get into Eigg about midnight. We had but one of our seamen aboard, for John Stewart was engaged with his potato crop at home; but the minister was content, in the emergency, to rank his passenger as an able-bodied seaman; and so, hoisting sail and anchor, we got under way, [*Saturday 14 June*] and clearing the loch, struck out into the Sound.

We tacked in long reaches for several hours, now opening up in succession the deep withdrawing lochs of the mainland, now clearing promontory after promontory in the island district of Sleat. In a few hours we had left a bulky schooner, that had quitted Isle Ornsay at the same time, full five miles behind us; but as the sun began to decline, the wind began to sink; and about seven o'clock, when we were nearly abreast of the rocky point of Sleat, and about half-way advanced in our voyage, it died into a calm; and for full twenty hours thereafter there was no more sailing for the Betsey. We saw the sun set, and the clouds gather, and the pelting rain come down, and nightfall, and morning break, and the noontide hour pass by, and still we were floating idly in the calm. I employed the few hours of the Saturday evening that intervened between the time of our arrest and nightfall, in fishing from our little boat for medusae with a bucket. They had risen by myriads from the bottom as the wind fell, and were mottling the green depths of the water below and around far as the eye could reach. Among the commoner kinds,-the kind with the four purple rings on the area of its flat bell, which ever vibrates without sound, and the kind with the fringe of dingy brown, and the long stinging tails, of which I have sometimes borne from my swimming excursions the nettle-like smart for hours,-there were at least two species of more unusual occurrence, both of them very minute. The one, scarcely larger than a shilling, bore the common umbiliferous form, but had its area inscribed by a pretty orange coloured wheel; the other, still more minute, and which presented in the water the appearance of a small hazel-nut of a brownish-yellow hue, I was disposed to set down as a species of beroe. On getting one caught, however, and transferred to a bowl, I found that the brownish-coloured, melon-shaped mass, though ribbed like the beroe, did not represent the true outline of the animal: it formed merely the centre of a transparent gelatinous bell, which, though scarce visible in even the bowl, proved a most efficient instrument of motion. Such were its contractile powers, that its sides nearly closed at every stroke, behind the opaque orbicular centre, like the legs of a vigorous swimmer; and the animal, unlike its more bulky congeners,-that, despite of their slow but persevering flappings, seemed greatly at the mercy of the tides, and progressed all one way,-shot, as it willed, backwards, forwards, or athwart. As evening closed, and the depths beneath presented a dingier and yet dingier green, until at length all had become black, the distinctive colours of the acelpha,-the purple, the orange, and the brown,-faded and disappeared, and the creatures hung out, instead their pale phosphoric lights, like the lanthorns of a fleet hoisted high to prevent collision in the darkness. Now they gleamed dim and indistinct as they drifted undisturbed through the upper depths, and now they flamed out bright and green, like beaten torches, as the tide dashed them against the vessel's sides. I bethought me of the gorgeous description of Coleridge, and felt all its beauty:-

“They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they reared, the elfish light

Fell off in hoary flakes.  
Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire,-  
Blue, glassy green, and velvet black:  
They curled, and swam, and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.”

A crew of three, when there are watches to set, divides wofully *sic* ill. As there was, however, nothing to do in the calm, we decided that our first watch should consist of our single seaman, and the second of the minister and his friend. The clouds, which had been thickening for hours, now broke in torrents of rain, and old Alister got into his water-proof oil-skin and souwester, and we into our beds. The seams of the Betsey’s deck had opened so sadly during the past winter, as to be no longer water-tight, and the little cabin resounded drearily in the darkness, like some dropping [*sic*] cave, to the ceaseless patter of the leakage. We continued to sleep, however, somewhat longer than we ought,-for Alister had been unwilling to waken the minister; but we at length got up, and, relieving watch the first from the tedium of being rained upon and doing nothing, watch the second was set to do nothing and be rained upon in turn. We had drifted during the night-time on a kindly tide, considerably nearer our island, which we could now see looming blue and indistinct through the haze some seven or eight miles away. The rain ceased a little before nine, and the clouds rose, revealing the surrounding lands, island and main,-Rum, with its abrupt mountain-peaks,-the dark Cuchullins of Skye,-and, far to the south-east, where Inverness bounds on Argyllshire, some of the tallest hills in Scotland,-among the rest, the dimly-seen Ben-Nevis. But long wreaths of pale gray cloud lay lazily under their summits, like shrouds half drawn from off the features of the dead, to be again spread over them, and we concluded that the dry weather had not yet come. A little before noon we were surrounded for miles by an immense but thinly-spread shoal of porpoises, passing in pairs to the south to prosecute, on their own behalf, the herring fishing in Lochfine *sic* or the Gareloch; and for a full hour the whole sea, otherwise so silent, became vocal with long-breathed blowings, as if all the steam-tenders of all the railways in Britain were careering around us; and we could see slender jets of spray rising in the air on every side, and glossy black backs and pointed fins, that looked as if they had been fashioned out of Kilkenny marble, wheeling heavily along the surface. The clouds again began to close as the shoal passed, but we could now hear in the stillness the measured sound of oars, drawn vigorously against the gunwhale in the direction of the island of Eigg, still about five miles distant, though the boat from which they rose had not yet come in sight. “Some of my poor people,” said the minister, “coming to tug us ashore!” We were boarded in rather more than half an hour after,-for the sounds in the dead calm had proceeded the boat by miles,-by four active young men, who seemed wonderfully glad to see their pastor; and then; amid the thickening showers, which had recommended heavy as during the night, they set themselves to tow us unto the harbour. The poor fellows had a long and fatiguing pull, and were thoroughly drenched ere, about six o’clock in the evening, we had got up to our anchoring ground, and moored, as usual, in the open tide-way between *Eilean Chaisteil* and the main island. There was still time for an evening discourse, and the minister, getting out of his damp clothes, went ashore and preached.

The evening of Sunday closed in fog and rain, and in fog and rain the morning of Monday arose. The ceaseless patter made dull music on deck and skylight above, and the slower drip, drip, through the leaky beams, drearily beat every time within. The roof of my bed was luckily water-tight; and I could look out from my snugger of blankets on the desolations of the leakage, like Bacon's philosopher surveying a tempest from the shore. But minister was somewhat less fortunate, and had no little trouble in diverting an ill-conditioned drop that had made a dead set at his pillow. I was now a full week from Edinburgh, and had seen and done nothing; and, were another week to pass after the same manner,-as, for aught that appeared, might well happen,-I might just go home again, as I had come, with my labour for my pains. In the course of the afternoon, however, the weather unexpectedly cleared up, and we set out somewhat impatiently through the wet grass, to visit a cave a few hundred yards to the west of *Naomh Fraing*, in which it had been said the Protestants of the island might meet for the purposes of religious worship, were they to be ejected from the cottage erected by Mr Swanson, in which they had worshipped hitherto.....

### *Neglect of the poor of Egg*

On our return to the Betsey, we passed through a straggling group of cottages on the hillside, one of which, the most dilapidated and smallest of the number, the minister entered, to visit a poor old woman, who had been bed ridden for ten years. Scarce ever before had I seen so miserable a hovel [*and he had lived in a few as an itinerant stone mason*]. It was hardly larger than the cabin of the Betsey, and a thousand times less comfortable. The walls and roof, formed of damp grass grown turf, with a few layers of unconnected stone in the basement tiers, seemed to constitute one continuous hillock, sloping upwards from foundation to ridge, like one of the lesser moraines of Agassiz, save where the fabric here and there bellied outwards or inwards, in perilous dilapidation, that seemed but awaiting the first breeze. The low chinky door opened direct into the one wretched apartment of the hovel, which we found lighted chiefly by holes in the roof. The back of the sick woman's bed was so placed at the edge of the opening, that it formed at one time a sort of partition to the portion of the apartment, some five or six feet square, which contained the fireplace; but the boarding that had rendered it such had long since fallen away, and it now presented merely a naked rickety frame to the current of cold air without. Within a foot of the bed-ridden woman's head there was a hole in the turf wall, which was, we saw, usually stuffed with a bundle of rags, but which lay open as we entered, and which furnished a downward peep of sea and shore, and the rocky *Eilean Chaisteil*, with the minister's yacht riding in the channel hard by. The little hole in the wall had formed the poor creature's only communication with the face of the external world for ten weary years. She lay under a dingy coverlet, which, whatever its original hue, had come to differ nothing in colour from the graveyard earth, which must so soon supply its place. What perhaps first struck the eye was the strange flatness of the bed clothes, considering that a human body lay below: there seemed scarce bulk enough under them for a human skeleton. The light of the opening fell on the corpse-like features of the woman, -sallow, sharp, bearing at once the stamp of disease and of famine; and yet

it was evident, notwithstanding, that they had once been agreeable,-not unlike those of her daughter, a good-looking girl of eighteen, who, when we entered, was sitting beside the fire. Neither mother nor daughter had any English; but it was not difficult to determine, from the sick-bed, feeble as the tones were, that he was no unfrequent visitor. He prayed beside the poor creature, and, on coming away, slipped something in her hand. I learned that not during the ten years in which she had been bed-ridden had she received a single farthing from the proprietor, nor, indeed, had any of the poor of the island, and that the parish had no session funds. I saw her husband a few days after,- an old worn out man, with famine written legibly in his hollow cheek and eye, and on the shrivelled frame, that seemed lost in his tattered dress; and he reiterated the same sad story. They had no means of living, he said, save through the charity of their poor neighbours, who had so little to spare; for the parish or the proprietor had never given them anything. He had once, he added, two fine boys, both sailors, who had helped them; but the one had perished in a storm off the Mull of Cantyre, and the other had died of a fever on a West India voyage; and though their poor girl was very dutiful, and staid in their crazy hut to take care of them in their helpless old age, what other could she do in a place like Eigg than just share with them in their sufferings? It has been recently decided by the British Parliament, that in cases of this kind the starving poor shall not be permitted to enter the law courts of the country, there to sue for a pittance to support life, until an intermediate newly-erected court, alien to the Constitution, before which they must plead at their own expense, shall have first given them permission to prosecute their claims. And I doubt not that many of the English gentlemen whose votes swelled the majority, and made it such, are really humane men, friendly to an equal-handed justice, and who hold it to be the particular glory of the Constitution, as well as shown by De Lolme, [*political theorist, 1741-1804, author of Constitution de l'Angleterre*] that it has not one statute-book for the poor, and another for the rich, but the same law and the same administration of the law for all. They surely could not have seen that the principle of their Poor Law Act for Scotland sets the pauper beyond the pale of the constitution in the first instance, that he may be starved in the second. The suffering papers of this miserable island cottage would have all their wants satisfied in the grave, long ere they could establish at their own expense, at Edinburgh, their claim to enter a court of law. I know not a fitter case for the interposition of our lately formed "Scottish Association for the Protection of the Poor" than that of this miserable family; and it is but one of many which the island of Eigg will be found to furnish.

After a weeks weary waiting, settled weather came at last; and the morning of Tuesday [24<sup>th</sup> June] rose bright and fair. My friend, whose absence at the General Assembly had accumulated a considerable amount of ministerial labour on his hands, had to employ the day professionally; and John Stewart was still engaged with his potato crop, I was necessitated to sally out on my first geological excursion alone..... [*Here Miller located the strata from where the reptilian remains had originated, the objective of this second visit to Eigg, and re-examined the musical sands at the Bay of Laig*]

*Gale on the return to Isle Ornsay - the Betsey springs a leak – the struggle to save the yacht*

On the morning of Wednesday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, we set sail for Isle Ornsay, with a smart breeze from the north-west. The lower and upper sky was tolerably clear, and the sun looked cheerily down on the deep blue of the sea; but along the higher ridges of the land there lay long level strata of what the meteorologists distinguish as parasitic clouds. When every other patch of vapour in the landscape was in motion, scudding shorewards from the Atlantic before the still increasing gale, there rested along both the Scur of Eigg and the tall opposite ridge of the island, and along the steep peaks of Rum, clouds that seemed as if anchored, each on its own mountain-summit, and over which the gale failed to exert any propelling power. They were stationary in the middle of the rushing current, when all else was speeding before it. It has been shown that these parasitic clouds are more local condensations of strata of damp air passing along the mountain-summits, and rendered visible but to the extent in which the summits affect temperature. Instead of being stationary, they are ever-forming and over-dissipating clouds, - clouds that form a few yards in advance of the condensing hill, and that dissipate a few yards after they have quitted it. I had nothing to do on deck, for we had been joined at Eigg by John Stewart; and so, after watching the appearance of the stationary clouds for some little time, I went below, and, throwing myself into the minister's large chair, took up a book. The gale meanwhile freshened, and freshened yet more; and the Betsey leaned over till her lee chain-plate lay along in the water. There was the usual combination of sounds beneath and around me, - the mixture of guggle, clunk, and splash, - of low, continuous rush, and bluff, loud blow which forms in such circumstances the voyager's concert. I soon became aware, however, of yet another species of sound, which I did not like half so well, - a sound as of the washing of a shallow current over a rough surface; and, on the minister coming below, I asked him, tolerably well prepared for his answer, what it might mean. "It means," he said, "that we have sprung a leak, and a rather bad one; but we are only some six or eight miles from the point of Sleat, and must soon catch the land." He returned on deck, and I resumed my book. Presently, however, the rush became greatly louder; some other weak patch in the Betsey's upper works had given way, and anon the water came washing up from the lee side along the edge of the cabin floor. I got upon deck to see how matters stood with us; and the minister, easing off the vessel for a few points, gave instant orders to shorten sail, in the hope of getting her upper works out of the water, and then to unship the companion ladder, beneath which a hatch communicated with the low strip of hold under the cabin, and to bring aft pails. We lowered our foresail; furled up the mainsail half-mast high; John Stewart took his station at the pump; old Alister and I, furnished with pails, took ours, the one at the foot, the other at the head, of the companion, to hand up and throw over; a young girl, a passenger from Eigg to the mainland, lent her assistance, and got wofully *sic* drenched in the work; while the minister, retaining his station at the helm, steered right on. But the gale had so increased, that, notwithstanding our diminished breadth of sail, the Betsey, straining hard in the rough sea, still lay in to the gunwhale; and the water, pouring in through a hundred opening chinks in her upper works, rose, despite of our exertions, high over plank, and beam, and cabin floor, and went dashing against beds and lockers. She was evidently

filling, and bade fair to terminate all her voyagings by a short trip to the bottom. Old Alister, a seaman of thirty years standing, whose station at the bottom of the cabin stairs enabled him to see how fast the water was gaining on the Betsey, but not how the Betsey was gaining on the land, was by no means the least anxious amongst us. Twenty year previous he had seen a vessel go down in exactly similar circumstances, and in nearly the same place; and the reminiscence, in the circumstances, seemed rather an uncomfortable one. It had been a bad evening, he said, and the vessel he sailed in, and a sloop, her companion, were pressing hard to gain the land. The sloop had sprung a leak, and was straining, as if for her life and death, under a press of canvass. He saw her outsail the vessel to which he belonged, but, when a few bow-shots a-head, she gave a sudden lurch, and disappeared from the surface instantaneously, as a vanishing spectre, and neither sloop nor crew were ever more heard of.

There are, I am convinced, few deaths less painful than some of those untimely and violent ones at which we are most disposed to shudder. We wrought so hard at pail and pump,-the occasion, too, was one of so much excitement, and tended so thoroughly to awaken our energies,-that I was conscious, during the whole time, of an exhilaration of spirits rather pleasurable than otherwise. My fancy was active, and active, strange as the fact may seem, chiefly with ludicrous objects. Sailors tell regarding the flying Dutchman, that he was a hard-headed captain of Amsterdam, who, in a bad night and head wind, when all other vessels of his fleet were falling back on the port they had recently quitted, obstinately swore that, rather than follow their example, he would keep beating about till the day of judgement. And the Dutch captain, says the story, was just taken at his word, and is beating about still. When matters were at the worst with us, we got under the lee of the point of Sleat. The promontory interposed between us and the roll of the sea; the wind gradually took off; and after having seen the water gaining fast and steadily on us for considerably more than an hour, we, in turn, began to gain on the water. It came ebbing out of drawers and beds, and sunk downwards along panels and table-legs,-a second retiring deluge; and we entered Isle Ornsay with the cabin-floor all visible, and less than two feet water in the hold. On the following morning, taking leave of my friend the minister, I set off, on my return homewards, by the Skye steamer, and reached Edinburgh on the evening of Saturday [28<sup>th</sup> June 1845].

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Paul Shave  
Yacht Blue Spindrift  
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