

"that everybody should be made on the same pattern. And even if one doesn't like it, it is good for one to make visits; otherwise, one loses 'the sweet habit of kindness.'"

"Yes, there's something in that," I cried eagerly. "Sometimes, when I've had a bad cold and haven't paid calls for a few weeks, I feel myself getting quite crusty, and I shrink from going out more than ever."

"I know: I have felt it too," Mary replied thoughtfully, "after one of my bad turns. Unsociability grows on what it feeds, and we mustn't encourage it. And, do you know, sometimes I've felt that the most tiresome people—people I've really felt to be quite bores at the time—have given me a kind of mental fillip, and brought me out of myself and my grievances."

"I wonder," I said thoughtfully, "why calls don't make *me* feel so? Perhaps you're right—I don't set about it in the right spirit. But one gets *so* tired of calls—calls when people don't want to see you—calls when you only hope they won't be at home—calls when it's a question of one's husband's interest—calls when the boys are home from school—calls when it's 'the children's hour'—"

"I should like 'the children's hour,'" put in Mary tenderly.

"Well," I said, beginning to regain my self-respect, "London isn't so bad as the provinces or the colonies as regards calling. There it amounts almost to a curse. A cousin of mine is married to a barrister out there, and—only imagine!—a very vulgar woman complained to her husband—a rich, powerful solicitor

—that my cousin had 'cut her dead' in the street. The husband actually wrote and threatened to withdraw his patronage unless the matter were satisfactorily explained. And my poor cousin is as short-sighted as a bat, and never saw the dreadful woman at all. Such things couldn't happen in England."

Mary smiled.

"No," she said; "we are often rude and ill-bred, but that is a depth we don't sink to."

"Well, things are quite bad enough here. Days at home," I went on, "are my greatest bugbears. People living in the suburbs declare themselves 'at home' on one particular day in the week. Sometimes they have the assurance to announce themselves as only at home 'the fifth Monday in the month'; and how *can* you be expected to remember that? If you *don't* go on their 'day,' it's not considered polite; and if you *do*, you simply don't see them at all—only a number of their friends; and people *never* like each other's friends."

"It's very hard on you," Mary replied smilingly; "and really I begin to think that I am a lucky person. I am never called upon to endure these woes, and I can yet have nice friends who come to see *me*."

I felt a pang of inward shame.

"Mary," I said, "I'm a brute. I won't say any more."

And here tea came in, and we had the cosiest happiest time together—the tea served in the prettiest little Oriental cups, with the kettle simmering on the hob, and the Persian cat purring at Mary's feet. I felt as if I had left the cruel world outside for a peaceful haven.

A TRIP TO ST. KILDA.

A PRIZE PAPER BY THE REV. R. C. MACLEOD. WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.



EAST WINDOW, RODEL.

THERE was a saintly man once, a hard-working parson, who, in the presence of his bishop, was deploring the wickedness of his clerical neighbours who one and all took an annual holiday. "Now I," he went on, "have not slept out of my own parish for fifteen years."

He waited for an episcopal benediction. It came, but not quite in the form expected.

"Oh, your poor parishioners!" said the bishop with exquisite humour.

I am not a saintly man, but I have a fond and tender regard for the welfare of my poor parishioners;

and so it comes to pass that I religiously go away for a few weeks every year.

My 1893 holiday was fairly begun when the scene opens. The good ship *Flowerdale* was coming slowly into the quay at Dunvegan, in the Island of Skye, one lovely June evening. I, the parson, was standing, camera in hand, taking a shot at a group on the shore; my brother, the captain, was leaning over the bows meditating.

"Are you coming?" reaches us across the water in three girlish voices.

"Yes," goes back in two stentorian basses.

The owners of the three voices make signs of great joy.

We, the parson and the captain, had been somewhat taken aback when we went on board the *Flowerdale* at six in the morning, by reading the contents of a note from one of our nieces at Dunvegan, which was handed to us by the captain.

She suggested that we should get up at five the following morning, and start for Harris in order to join the *Dunara Castle*, and go in her to St. Kilda.

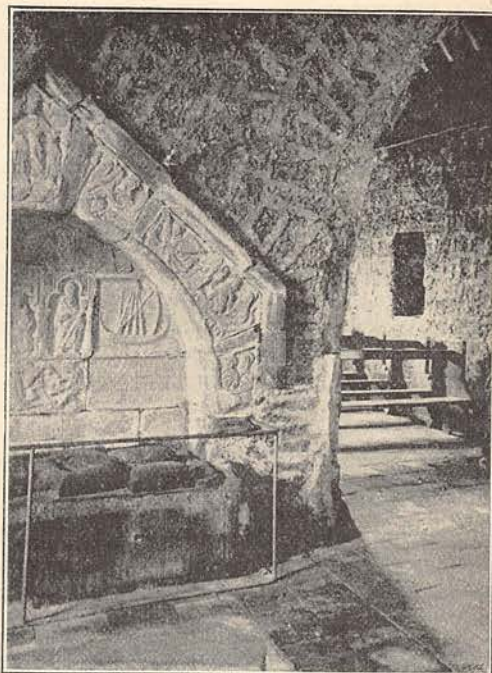
We had travelled up to Oban by rail the previous day from the South of England, and, tired mortals that we were, were looking forward to a long night's rest with much satisfaction.

We discussed the question, and, not without certain pangs at the idea of again getting up at five in the morning, decided that we would be good, self-sacrificing uncles and go; and hence the affirmative answer which filled the hearts of those girls with joy. Certainly, if virtue was ever rewarded, it was so on this occasion.

At six o'clock the following morning we were on board the *Lochiel*, snuggest of West Highland steamers, and shaking hands with Captain MacNiel, most genial and charming of mariners, and a few minutes later we were steaming out of the loch.

The Minch for once was absolutely calm, and our voyage was most enjoyable. In due course we arrived at Rodel, in Harris. Here the first thing to be done was to send our impedimenta on to Obbe, where we meant to pass the night. We found that the vehicle dignified with the name of Her Majesty's Mail was a sort of chaos of wheels, torn basket-work, and rotten wood. It had probably many years ago been a lady's basket carriage, but now it really was the most wonderful contrivance to be still used that was ever beheld by mortal eyes. Into this we packed our baggage. This was not a very easy business, because, among other misfortunes which had occurred to this ancient carriage, the bottom had come out, and the moment you tried to put anything in, it fell through on to the road.

However, we were in light marching order, and it is wonderful what patience and string will do, so at last we had the satisfaction of seeing this wonderful vehicle start on its way. Here at Rodel, we came across Mr. X—, the agent for the estate of South Harris, who

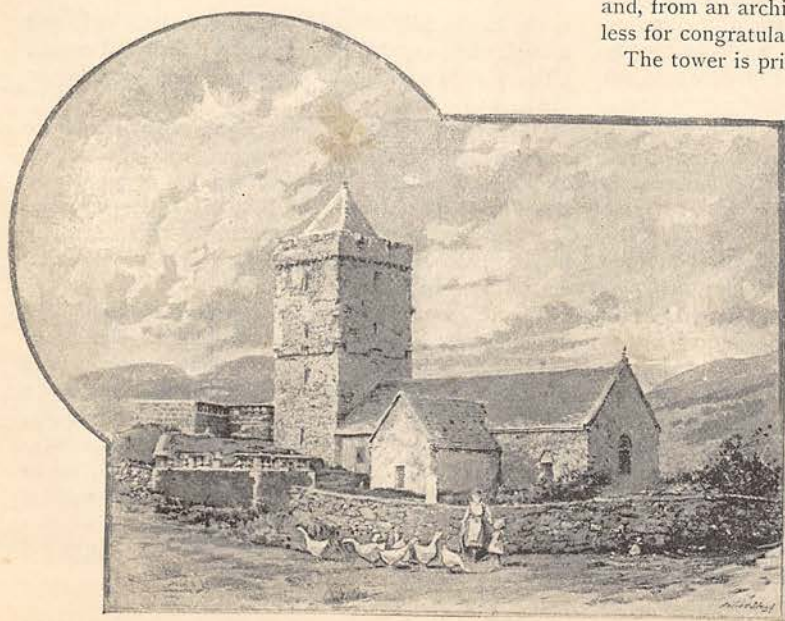


M'LEOD'S TOMB AT RODEL.

made himself very agreeable, and volunteered to guide us to the church, and show us the most remarkable objects of interest there. I fancy this most interesting building owes its erection to a community of monks, who were settled here in the Middle Ages.

It had lain in ruins for many years, until it was roofed in and made fit for Divine service some time ago; but this was done without any attempt being made to restore it in harmony with the original design, and, from an architectural point of view, is a matter less for congratulation than regret.

The tower is principally remarkable for the figures carved on it; they are very various. Two are human forms supposed to be very ancient, possibly emblems of some forgotten pagan worship, worked into the walls. Besides these are a bishop or abbot, a sheep, a bull's head, and a dog's head. The east window is a small but beautiful specimen of the Decorated style. Inside are several tombs of the McLeods, the ancient lords of the soil. The most remarkable is the tomb of Alistair Crotach, or hump-backed Alexander, dated 1528. It is very richly adorned with carving; above are figures supposed to represent the twelve Apostles; on the main portion of the tomb, amongst



RODEL.

armorial bearings and other emblems, is a curious bas-relief. This represents Satan weighing the sins and good deeds of the deceased in a balance; the latter, of course, outweighs the former to the evident disgust of his Satanic Majesty, and to the joy of some angels who are standing round.

Beneath is the effigy of a knight in armour. The inscription runs as follows: "Hic locutur Alexander filius vilmi MacClod dno de Dunbegan anno dei mccccxxviii."

After spending some time sketching and photographing, we went to the house for tea, and then toiled over to Obbe. We had with commendable prudence kept with us our mackintoshes, so with them to carry, besides our cameras and sketching materials, we were rather heavily laden; and to make matters worse, we found that the driver of the mail had left our things at the post-office, a mile short of the coffee-house in which we were to pass the night.

However, we carried part of the luggage ourselves, and chartered a very small boy to carry the rest, who turned out to be a perfect Hercules, and staggered along beneath a burden of two bags and a lot of rugs, to the admiration of all beholders.

Never was a more glorious sunset seen, and we remained out till eleven o'clock or past, watching the ever-changing colours which were brilliantly reflected in the calm waters of the Sound of Harris. The next morning was blazing hot, but we spent the forenoon profitably enough, with the help of camera and sketch-book, and talking to the natives, who were, like all Highlanders, most charming fellows. They were very busy taking some cattle over to the islands in a boat, and it was very amusing to watch the battle between some very determined stirks on the one side, and an army of men and dogs on the other.

About one o'clock the steamer, the *Dunara Castle*, came in. We got on board just in time for a good dinner, and, as we started at once, when I came on deck after refreshing the inner man, we were already nearly through the Sound of Harris, and were soon out on the great Atlantic. It was wonderfully calm, just a little swell, and that was all. We were nearly half-way across the fifty miles which separate St. Kilda from the Long Island, before we saw something like a man's hand on the horizon, which, hazy as it was, we knew must be St. Kilda. An hour more, and we could distinguish the main island straight ahead, and Boreray (a small rocky island) on our starboard bow, and now we rapidly closed in with the land. It was getting late, but the light was good, so I used all the plates in my dark slides on hand-camera shots as we ran in, and had to retire to a sort of black hole of Calcutta, beneath the saloon floor, to put in a fresh supply. By the time I came on deck we were at anchor within the wondrous Dun, the small island which protects the bay upon the south, and the boats to take us on shore were in the water.

The village, which consists of the church, the manse, a store, and sixteen houses, is built facing the sea in one long row, each house separated from the next by a space of a few yards. The houses themselves are

built of stone, and roofed with felt, and are certainly very superior in comfort to the black hut of the Skye or mainland crofter. Behind this row of houses is a steep hill, rising to a height of about 1,200 feet. The landing-place is on the north side of the bay, on the extreme right of the village as you look at it from the sea; below the houses is a beach of beautiful white sand. Landing is sometimes impossible in St. Kilda,



UNLOADING CARGO.

as the bay is fully exposed to a south-east wind; and indeed, whatever the quarter whence the wind comes, a heavy swell is generally rolling in and breaking on the rocks.

On my previous visit, twenty years ago, though we spent a week lying on a yacht in the bay, we never landed without the help of a number of men, who stood ready on the rocks to haul up the boat the moment she touched the shore. On this occasion, however, we had unheard-of good luck, and landed without any difficulty.

We were soon shaking hands with the whole population of the island, some seventy souls. The older ones can talk no English, but the younger members of the community speak it well. We expressed the desire to see a man go over the rocks and catch some birds, and though they had on hand a heavy job, disembarking the goods brought by the steamer, two agreed to show off. Before leaving the shore we tried to get a photograph of a number of the people, but it was getting on for half-past eight and the result was not very satisfactory.

We then started off to the proposed scene of the bird-catching operations, getting on our way a photograph

of the village, with some huge stone fences in the foreground. On the hillside we noticed large numbers of hive-shaped little buildings, which we were told were used as silos. There are said to be thirty thousand of them on the island, so that whenever the grass is cut there may be always a silo handy, to put it in. It is remarkable that the inhabitants of a remote island like St. Kilda should have been practising from time immemorial a method of preserving grass, which agriculturists in more highly-civilised parts of the world are only now beginning to look on as a practicable one.

We had a stiffish climb, but were amply rewarded when, on reaching the top, there suddenly burst upon us one of the most wonderful sights I ever saw. We found ourselves standing on the edge of a perpendicular precipice, which even in its lowest parts rises to a height of 800 feet above the sea; to the right and left of us towered pinnacles of rock, some hundreds of feet higher still, and in front of us the strange rocky shapes of Boreray rising out of the boundless ocean. A good-sized brig was lying becalmed between us and Boreray, but she looked like a child's toy ship from the top of the cliffs on which we stood.

As we climbed upwards it had seemed almost dark in the shadow of the hill, but when we reached the summit it was like going into some brilliantly-lit place, for, though the sun was set in the north-west, the glorious glow of a Highland sunset was still blazing in the sky, and reflected in the smooth water.

We gazed on the wondrous scene in silence for a minute or two, till we were joined by the two men who were to show us their prowess as cragsmen. They selected a jutting-out piece of rock where their proceedings could be easily seen. One of the men stood at the top holding on to the rope, the other, bare-footed, literally proceeded to walk down the face of the cliff.

The rope is an innovation only used within the last twelve years, and since its introduction no accidents have occurred. The fowler carried in his hand a slender stick about ten or twelve feet long, to the end of which was attached a noose. On ledges of the rock were large numbers of birds, mainly fulmar petrels, a bird which defends himself by spitting an offensive but valuable oil at anyone who comes near him.

Selecting one of these, the cragsman dropped the noose over its head, and caught it round the neck. Had he been on regular fowling work, he would have allowed the bird to spit the oil into a leather receptacle carried round the waist, wrung the bird's neck, suspended him at his side, and continued his work. As it was he came up again, bringing the bird with him.

He seemed to look on the feat as we should look on a little walk across the street, and, indeed, I fancy, now the rope is used, there is no danger; but a man wants a good head and practice from childhood if he is to be a first-rate cragsman. We had a long talk with the two men, and then came down, going on the way to see a very ancient underground dwelling, supposed to date from prehistoric times. Before going on board we went to see a man who was very ill. I fear they were rather disappointed that our medical skill was not equal to diagnosing the case. As we walked to the shore we met several women marching along, burdened with sacks of meal weighing two hundred and twenty pounds, which they seemed to carry with perfect ease.

All hands were hard at work landing cargo, as the steamer people wanted to get away the next day, and that being a Sunday all must be landed before midnight, or they must wait till Monday morning.

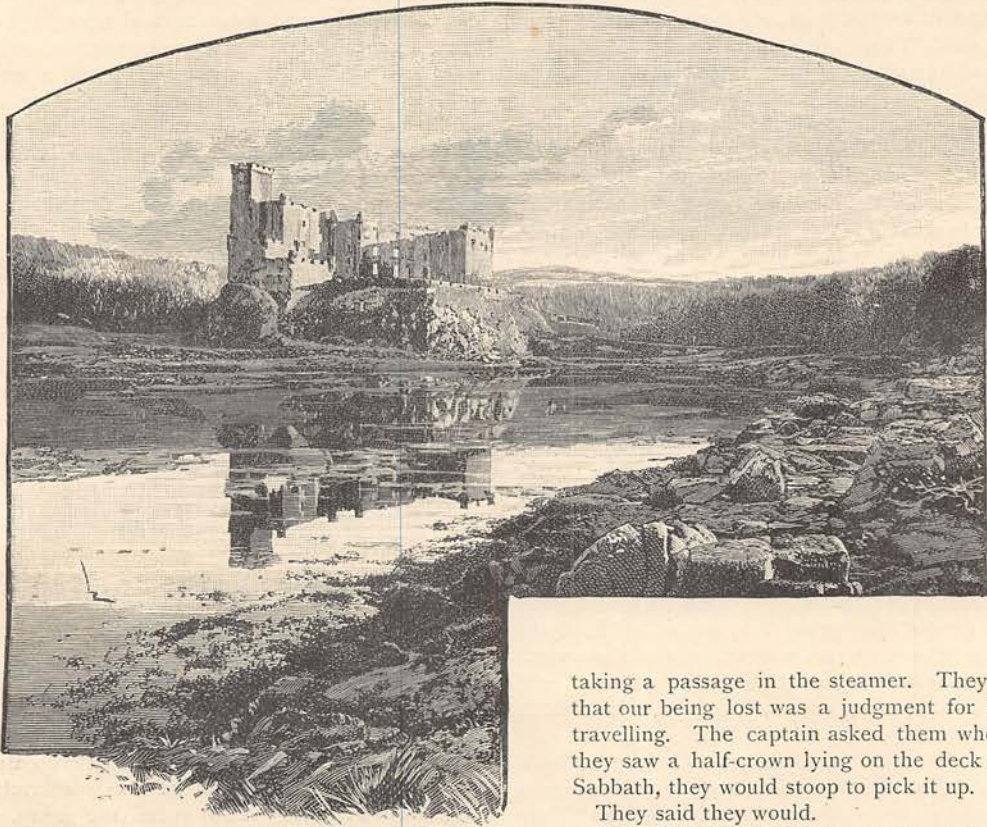
When we got on board we found the passengers busy fishing over the side of the vessel, and catching large numbers of cod, ling and skate. St. Kilda is a grand fishing station.

Sunday morning we went on shore, had a long talk with the minister, and saw some of the people. The population are all Free Church, and the minister belongs, of course, to that denomination; he is schoolmaster and doctor as well, and must lead a terribly solitary life, for he is the only highly-educated man on the island.

It was a very hot day, and there being no trees on St. Kilda we felt the want of shade severely. At twelve we started to steam round the group, which consists of the main island, Dun, Soay and Boreray. I suppose there is no finer rock scenery in the world. The outline of the Dun, which is separated from the



AT UIG.



DUNVEGAN CASTLE.

main island by a very narrow channel, is simply magnificent.

At one point the rock is pierced by a tunnel. Crowds of seabirds of all sorts are to be seen on every ledge of the rocks, and swimming on the sea.

It is difficult to exaggerate the magnificence of the rocks, both on the principal island and on Soay; and when we came to those precipices down which we had seen a man go the preceding evening, we could hardly believe that the descent could be possible, and that we had ourselves seen it done.

Our circuit of the islands completed, the vessel's head was put towards the east, and in a short time St. Kilda was lost in the haze of a summer day.

And soon we were lost also. The haze grew thicker and thicker until it almost deserved the name of a fog, and when land became visible the hills were certainly not those near the entrance to the Sound of Harris. Our dead reckoning had played us false, but whether we were too far north or too far south no one on board could say.

The captain consulted two St. Kilda men who were

taking a passage in the steamer. They opined that our being lost was a judgment for Sunday travelling. The captain asked them whether, if they saw a half-crown lying on the deck on the Sabbath, they would stoop to pick it up.

They said they would.

"Would not that be a breach of the fourth commandment?" inquired the captain.

"Oh, no," they replied, "that would just be a gift from the Lord."

Having thus protested against the wickedness of the whole thing, they said they thought we were too far north, so in accordance with their advice we steered a southerly course, and soon found that they were right, and after a delightful voyage came alongside the pier at East Loch Torbet about eleven at night.

When we came on deck on Monday morning we were on our way across the Minch back to Skye. We spent several hours at Uig, taking in and putting out cargo, which I profitably spent photographing, getting several shots at the boats alongside, the groups of passengers on the deck, and the men engaged in working the cargo.

After further delays at Stein and Colbost we finally arrived at Dunvegan about five in the evening. I would I had space to tell of the happy weeks we spent there, but, alas! it is denied; and certainly among the pleasant days of my summer holiday those which stand out in my memory as the brightest of all were those spent on the trip to St. Kilda.

