The drollery of this is Blackwood's charge against Jeffrey, as if unconscious of the abuse lavished on himself by the bitter political opponents of his creed in Edinburgh, and re-echoed in London. Well sung Burns—

"O, would some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us,
It would——"

What would it not do?

My next, though of a year's earlier date, shows the real interest he felt in the welfare of the "Shepherd."

My dear Sir,—I am just favoured with your kind letter of 30th April. I am truly sorry that our worthy friend The Shepherd does not fall within the class to which your Society[*] gives pensions. If, however, great originality and true poetical genius could have given any title, sure I am there could not be so strong a case as our friend's for the Society's extending their patronage.

I feel much indebted to you for your most friendly offer of moving for a draft of £50. This, however, is a matter of some little delicacy, and though for my own part I think our friend would most gratefully accept a favour so delicately and honourably conferred upon him, yet I do not like to take it upon myself to say so. I intend, therefore, to consult some mutual friends here, and will write you in a few posts.

In another letter I find the canon of reviewing on which the Magazine was edited plainly laid down, and as it may still be deserving of attention in similar periodicals, I do not hesitate to give it a place:—

Edinburgh, 22nd Feb., 1830.

My dear Sir,—I was favoured with yours on Saturday. I assure you my memory did not require a jog with regard to your friend Mr. Roby's splendid and interesting work.[†] So soon as I read it, I put it into the hands of one who is most capable of writing an article creditable both to your friend's book and the mag. He is, however, a person who must take his own way, and will only do things at his own time. Much, many of my own publications have suffered from being either unnoticed altogether in maga., or noticed after the proper time was gone by; but I have laid it down as a rule never to urge any of my friends to notice a book unless it is their own free will to do so, and that they can make an article which will be worthy of maga.

As to your fair friend L. E. L., I have only to repeat what I have told you with regard to Mr. Roby. All the same, you must have observed how kindly she is mentioned whenever there is incidental occasion for it.

You are too old a man of letters to mind a little nibble of an occasional writer in maga. You may rest assured that all these friends, on whom I rely principally for the support of maga., think most kindly of you, and I hope in an early number there will be an expression of this, with regard to your "Foreign Literary Gazette," etc.[‡]

I am, my dear Sir,
Yours very truly,
W. Blackwood.

W. Jerdan, Esq.

With the close of another epistle of a two years' later date, and within two years of the writer's death, I conclude:—

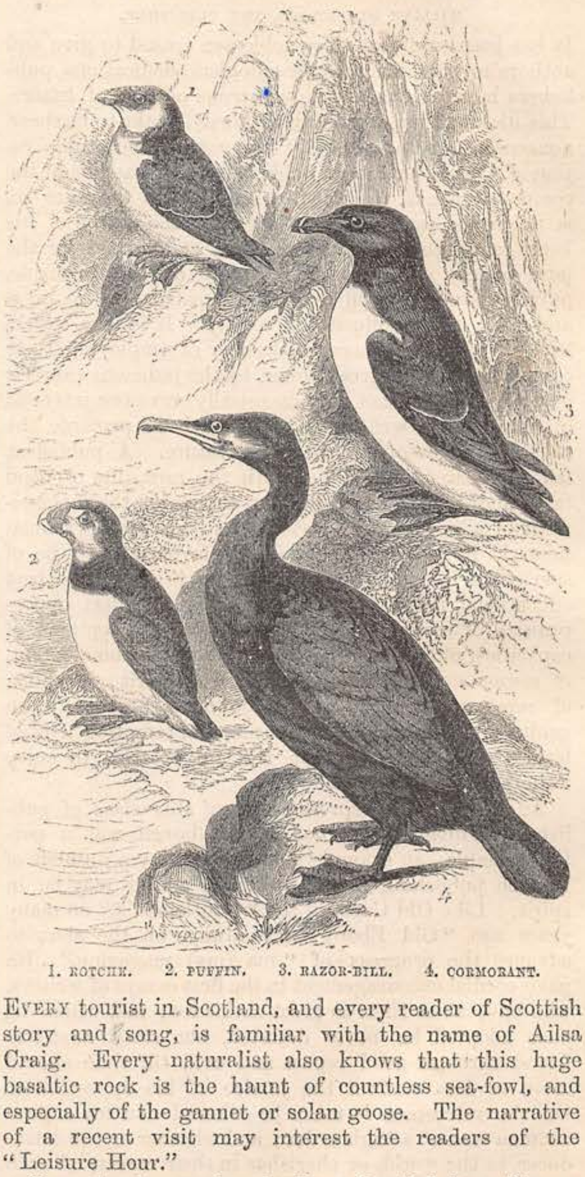
Edinburgh, 26th Oct., 1832.

My dear Sir,—By-and-by an advertisement will be sent to your publisher of the proposals for publishing by subscription our friend Allan's admirable picture of "Sir Walter in his Study." You will see what is so justly said of it in the "Noctes." A word from you goes a great way, and I am sure it will not be wanting. The advertisement is in my advertising sheet.

I am, my dear Sir,
Yours very truly,
W. Blackwood.

Here we meet with one proof of many that it was not self-interest alone which sustained the writer's unflagging activity. He was ever watchful to serve a friend as well as to advance the interests of his magazine. If we look back upon his era it must be acknowledged (whilst others worked worthily and well in the same direction) that the renown and profit of Scotland were far and wide extended by the impulse given to its press by William Blackwood.

A TRIP TO AILSA CRAIG.



1. ROTCHE. 2. PUFFIN. 3. RAZOR-BILL. 4. CORMORANT.

Every tourist in Scotland, and every reader of Scottish story and song, is familiar with the name of Ailsa Craig. Every naturalist also knows that this huge basaltic rock is the haunt of countless sea-fowl, and especially of the gannet or solan goose. The narrative of a recent visit may interest the readers of the "Leisure Hour."

On a lovely evening in June, I sailed from Girvan, having obtained permission to spend two or three days on the island.

Two craigsmen, Hudon and Sandy, are on the beach waiting for us, and take my baggage up to the hut. I immediately start along the shore, if shore it may be called, for to leeward of the Craig, that is, on the Ayrshire side, is a raised heap of boulders of all sizes, piled up in alarming disorder, and forming a triangular raised beach. Happily there is a path which leads to the climbing-place, where the birds are swarming in myriads, kittiwake gulls, herring gulls, razor-bills, guillemots, puffins, all sporting in the water, or flying, or sitting on the ledges of rock.

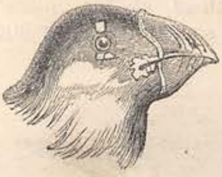
---

[*] The British Society of Literature, of which I was a zealous promoter, and long upon the council.

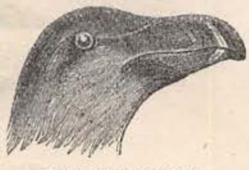
[†] My friend Roby's "Traditions of Lancashire." Poor Roby! He left a sad tradition of himself, being killed in the wreck of a vessel between the Mersey and the Clyde.

[‡] Lasted thirteen weeks, and cost thirteen hundred pounds.

As I want some birds to dissect and some skins in good condition for stuffing, I ask if I may go up the face of the cliffs with the climbers. The two craigsmen and myself sally out, and walk along the path to the only place where any bushes grow, which are one or two stunted elder-trees. The ground is here very rugged; huge rocks seem hurled in confusion, of many tons weight, and moreover so sharp and slippery as to require very great caution in walking. And this is the commencement of the breeding-place of the sea-birds. High up above us on the cliff the razor-bills, puffins, and guillemots are sitting, and I am very eager to see their haunts. The climbing here is over the tops of the basaltic pillars and along ledges about a foot wide, with nothing to take hold of; but rubbing my stockings in earth helped me a little.


HEAD OF PUFFIN.

The nets are not unlike herring nets, long and tanned, but with rather larger meshes. I can see the birds struggling in them, and a few cool and cautious steps bring me within reach of them. Three or four puffins are struggling in the meshes with their red sharp nebs picking at the net, and entangled in a curious manner. I sit down beside them and clutch hold of a puffin, which gives me a sharp snap and draws blood. I catch the next round the neck and extricate it, and as its plumage is unsullied it proves a good specimen. Climbing to some more nets, which are simply spread over the rocks, and secured to the débris of rock on which the puffins roost, there are, in the craig parlance, several "strannies," or razor-bill auks. Having secured several in good feather, and collected out of the other nets the birds which twine themselves in the meshes so that it is difficult to extricate them, I have leisure to look around me. The rocks here are piled one over the other in great disorder; huge pieces, tons in weight, are just on the verge of the precipice, and around me the rocks are like basaltic columns in regular pillars, save where frost and damp have detached portions. The rock is of a fine grained basaltic texture, and takes a fine polish. It is largely used for making curling stones. The Craig is rented from the Marquis of Ailsa for that purpose, and for the sake of the sea-birds' feathers, the birds being sent to Girvan and surrounding places to be plucked.


HEAD OF RAZOR-BILL.

Climbing to a convenient spot where there is plenty of standing-room, I wait for the climber coming, and examine the breeding-places of the birds. The puffin (*Fratercula Arctica*) and the razor-bill auk (*Alca Torda*) are the two birds that breed at this particular spot, and on every ledge, or projecting bit of rock near, a demure little puffin sits, quite tame, allowing itself to be almost touched by the hand without moving. They are flying past, one at a time, with great rapidity, within arm's length. The rocks around me are white with their excrement. Wherever a patch of earth is, between the shattered fragments of rock, there are the holes of the puffins.

The razor-bill auks are here in great plenty. In form and habits they greatly resemble the puffins, but they have black feet, a different shape of bill, and rather bigger bodies. The eggs of the razor-bills and guillemots are exceedingly large for the size of the bird, and taper to a point so that they shall not roll off the narrow ledges. There are great quantities of razor-bills' eggs within arm's reach. The egg itself is generally of a whitish ground, very variously spotted and blotched; in some eggs there are thousands of minute specks of a deep brown, in others big blotches of a rich sienna, or speckles of a dark umber brown. Great quantities of the eggs were *clocked*, as we say in Scotland, *i.e.*, addled, or half hatched.

The divers, owing to their legs being placed so far back, almost close to the tail, have a peculiar odd way of standing straight upright. A row of these birds standing on the narrow ledges looks rather grotesque.

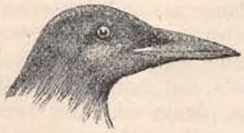
But, meanwhile, I see the climber, after visiting the other nets, tie the *paties*, or puffins, in bunches and heave them down. Owing to the projection of the rock, as the part which I now stand on is overhanging the sea, I do not not see them fall, but they do fall into the sea, and the other craigsman picks them up in the punt. Having cautiously descended, we return to the hut and rest.

We now walk along the path to where the ascent begins. On all sides save one the Craig is surrounded by steep precipices, which are almost impossible to climb. Climbing up the steep path single file, we reach the ruined castle, which is a square tower having several apartments, and a winding stair leading on to the roof.

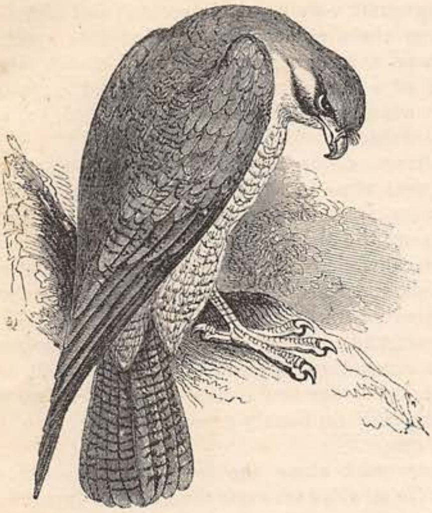
It requires cautious walking, as the stones are loose, and the path is a mere wild goat's track, leading close above the edge of the precipice. Where a hollow runs down to the Barrhead, or edge of the precipice, is a terrace of rock, which it is easy to climb; so taking off my boots, and strapping my vasculum (botanical box) tight on my back, I go cautiously. The ledges are white with kittiwake gulls, and their nests are scattered all about the ledges. The beautiful birds are sitting on their nest as I approach, and allow me to come almost within arm's reach without flying away, and then the poor kitties rise in a body and hover round me, brushing past my face, and uttering their peculiar cry, "Kittiwake! kittiwake!" Great quantities of nests are within reach. The nest is generally built on a little ledge, or where a tuft of moss grows, and often they hang to the side of the rock, like swallows' nests under the eaves of a cottage. The eggs, which are generally three in number, are of various colours, but generally the shade is light brown, or stone colour with dark markings of brown.

The rock birds and gulls are swarming in immense numbers on the rocks as we approach, and they seem not in the least frightened as I climb up among the rocks, being seldom disturbed here.

Being satisfied for the present with climbing, I descend to have an inspection from the water. Having rowed round the base of the precipice I have an opportunity of observing the clouds of sea fowl on their ledges. Looking up, one seems overpowered at the immense height, and rendered giddy by the whirr of wings. On the lower rocks the kittiwake gulls breed; the guillemots resort to the ledges; and above them the razor-bills. The climber points out to me the only nesting-place of the "scarts," as he calls them, or cormorants. I see their ledge, and see with my telescope several sitting on their nests, a long way


HEAD OF GUILLEMOT.

out of reach. Several pairs of ravens (*Corvus Corax*), too, build annually here; also a rare bird, the peregrine falcon (*Falco Peregrinus*), annually makes his eyrie on an inaccessible craig near the top.



PEREGRINE FALCON.

The boat has been carefully pulled alongside one of the reefs of rocks; the steering is very difficult, owing to the intricate passages and sunken rocks. We carefully approach the "scart" rock, a flat rock from which the cormorants dive, and which they generally fish from. Owing to the sunken rock it is difficult to approach, but as Hudon knows every inch of the place, he pulls cannily alongside. He and I jump out, and Sandy throws out several iron traps like rat-traps. These we set on the rock, to try and catch a "scart," if possible, for stuffing.

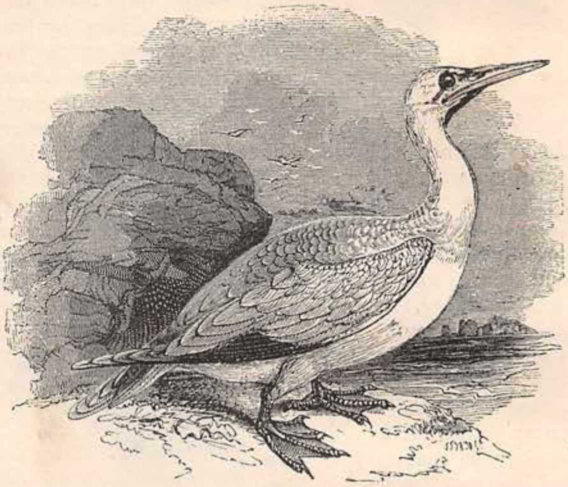
Immense blocks of rock have fallen together, and made a rude cavern of some extent, and this the craigsmen call the "kirk," but why I cannot say. Hudon shows me another way of catching the fowl: he hides behind a ledge of rock at the entrance to the kirk, and I crouch behind; he then grasps his long bird-pole in his hand, and as an unlucky "patey" or "strannie" comes flying within reach, he knocks it down with the pole.

Hudon now collects and ties the birds together, and I stroll or clamber about, and go to the foot of the precipice and sit down and watch the incessant whirr of wings, and listen to the varied and clamorous cries of the fowl.

Presently the current carries the punt past the bend, and gently wafts us under the base of "Ashy Doo," and past the "scart rock," from which a dark green cormorant shoots off. We now get to the far side of the Craig, where huge precipices all along uprear themselves from the water. In some places the air is almost darkened with the flights of the birds, and the ear pained with the noise of their clamorous and discordant cries. Hudon gives a whoop, which echoes from craig to craig, and immediately the whole legion of birds leave their ledges: the puffins, razor-bills, and guillemots, with a rapid movement of their wings, plunge with the speed of thought into the sea, and the gulls, with cries, circle round our heads as thick as snow-flakes on the blast of the north wind. Whole schools of puffins and other rock birds are sporting in the sea, some with feeble cries of delight dashing the water over one another, others diving after sprats, and pursuing their prey with wings as well as feet. The kittiwake gulls do not seem to dive so much, but lie motionless on the calm water, or poise themselves on one leg on the rocks, or sail with slow extended wings through the air.

Drifting round a projecting rock, a huge cavern opens far into the bowels of the earth, and as we approach several rock doves, wild slate-coloured pigeons, fly out. Drifting round another line of rocks, we see myriads of solan geese clustering on the ledges, and flying far up overhead; huge white or light grey birds, with their long slender wings just tipped with black.

In rowing back the fierce heat from the cloudless sun, as it shines down untempered by a breath of air, is almost suffocating; so during the middle of the day I rest on the rocks in the shade. Then, as the afternoon draws to a close, Sandy says that if I like to go up to the Barrhead he will show me the place where the "gants" breed. I accordingly take a stout staff in my hand, and, after following Sandy some distance round to the far side of the Craig, he tells me to shut my eyes, and carefully leads me to the verge of the precipice, and when I open them at his signal, the quantity of gannets is something amazing.



GANNET, OR SOLAN GOOSE.

I have never seen the breeding-place of the gannets before, and the sight and the noise almost make my brain reel. I cautiously sit down on the top of one of the pillars, and gaze long and in silence. A hollow-shaped bay or amphitheatre of rocks rises sheer from the sea about six hundred feet high or more, I should think, formed of regular columns or basaltic pillars, and on the top of each of these pillars, of which there are myriads, broken off all the way up, is the nest of a gannet, on every ledge as close as they can stick, and the noise which the thousands of gannets make passes description. Close under where I sit are several nests, and I cautiously climb down with Sandy to inspect them. A great bulky nest it is, large enough to fill a coal-scuttle with, composed of sea-weed, dried grass, moss, etc., and in each nest there is *one* egg. Hence, some say, the origin of the name solan goose.

But now the fierce heat is declining, as the sun is sinking in the west, and faint zephyrs gently fan my heated face. Sandy goes along the Barrheads farther, while I climb gently up the sides of the Craig; but toiling over the rocks and clambering up the precipices is hot work, and I leisurely proceed. First a sloping terrace, followed by a ridge of bare rock, then another terrace, then a low marshy sort of swamp, with a lagoon, or wee loch, the waters of which are black with peat, but with which I slake my burning thirst. A few more trifling steps, and what a gorgeous spectacle is unfolded at my feet.

In the dim distance, faint in the gathering mist, Malin Head rises from the broad Atlantic, and then the huge bulk of Rathlin Island, and the dread Giant's Causeway, are seen darkly frowning over the waste of waters, and the very fields and villages are seen on fair Erin. The wild Mull of Cantire, and Sanda Island, with its white lighthouse, are distinctly seen under the setting sun; and one's eye ranges lovingly over the picturesque Cantire side, past Campbelton Harbour, till the land slowly sinks into Tarbert Loch. Green Islay is peeping over, with the terrible Mull of Oe, and the three Paps of Jura looking like faint and delicate cloudlets. Beauteous Arran lies at my feet, with wee Pladda sleeping at her side, with all her tumultuous and terrible crests of rock, Goath Bheima, the mountain of the winds, looking proudly around her, while Cumbray rises like a vast iceberg from the lovely Clyde and fertile Bute, past which the blue Loch Fyne wanders, till it is lost in the labyrinth of hills.

But slowly the sun is sinking in the west. Behind the mighty Paps of Jura a few faint and gauzy vapours, which before seemed ethereal as spirits, now are glowing red as fire, as they wait upon their king; the whole horizon brightens; the hills are sharp and clear and red as flames of fire; and the faint and far-off cliffs of Ardnamurchan, rosy as maiden's blush, look like evening mists, but in reality are firm as the foundation of the world. The Arran hills are tinted with gorgeous lights, one side bright and pure, the other purple and dark. The great rock throws its shadow far across the water—the water, which is, as it were, a sea of flame, brilliant yellow, gradually fading into a bright red, as flames playing over glowing charcoal, save where rugged islets rise,

"And break the spreading of the golden tide,
And fling their shadows on the pictured deep."

Here long I linger, unable to tear myself away from the lovely scene; and the last quivering ray of the sun has sunk, and slowly the rosy light pales into fainter yellow, and fainter is the glow reflected in the calm water, and the last tints have faded from the hills; though the crests are yet warm and ruddy, their corries and valleys are black as a storm at night. Ireland is slowly fading from my view, and one by one the westernmost islands pale and fade away. The daylight still lingers about the few snow-clad hills of the far north, and the horizon is still bright and lambent. But in the east, one by one the stars appear faintly flickering, like angel spirits keeping watch over the world by night, and slowly the pale crescent moon rises from the dark hills and sheds its subdued light across the calm, still water. And the cries of the sea fowl are hushed, save when a patie more wakeful than its brethren shoots past, like an evil thought across the mind.

Now one by one the lighthouses send their steady lights across the darkening water. The Cloch, Little Cumbray, Pladda, Campbelton, Sanda, and Loch Ryan, one by one shine forth bright and steady. Slowly I tear myself from the summit, and with careful and cautious steps descend in the increasing darkness.

Hudon is about to start to look for me, as he wonders why I am so late; and when I tell him I have just come from the summit, he wonders how I have found my way in the gloom.

I awake next morning at grey dawn, and hastily dressing, sally out. It is about half-past three, and the sun has just risen over the Ayrshire hills. Already the sea fowl are astir, and are sporting and playfully dabbling in the water; a faint yet fresh breeze is blowing, the breath of the morning gently rippling the blue sea. I ask Sandy to accompany me, as he promised, up the Craig to get some choice varieties of eggs for cabinet specimens; so while Hudon is lighting the fire, he takes me up the hill, past the castle, and wading through the wet brackens, we climb the first terrace. Deliciously cool and pleasant the air is, and on every side the glad notes of the birds resound. The rock pipit (*Anthus Aquaticus*) is uttering its shrill call, and on each craig of rock sits a sedate little puffin; the curlew (*Numenius Aquaticus*) is wheeling above us, and the thrush, or mavis, strange to say, is singing blithely, and very sweet its touching strains sound, echoing among the rocks. The ring ouzel (*Merula Torquata*) is here as usual, flitting about the rocks, and scolding us for intruding near its nest. But I have no time to stay and search for it, as I want to see the gulls.

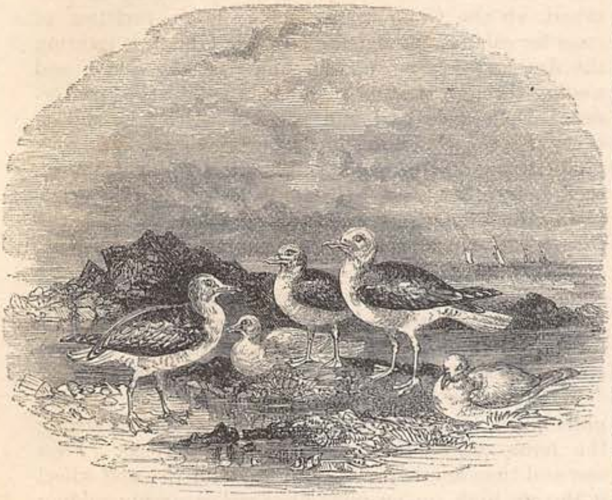
We are now approaching the place where the big gulls breed, and I see them at a distance, sitting among the ferns and on the top of the jutting rocks. First one and then another rises, and then all rise and wheel in the air, high up, on motionless wings, slowly gliding and floating as lightly as spirits. As we approach nearer, they get more clamorous, and bark like dogs. I find a nest of the lesser black-back gull (*Larus Fuscus*), and immediately after another, both with three big eggs in. Suddenly I come upon a nest with three pretty little young gulls in it, just like chickens, only with webbed feet, and curiously spotted all over like the spots on the eggs. I take one in my hand, and the two others run and hide among the rock and fern, but while I am examining my captive, the enraged old ones swoop down on me in an alarming manner. They soar to a great height, then with outstretched wings swoop down upon me, a few feet above my head, and soar the other side; then swoop down again, coming each time closer, as if to strike me, and the rustle and vibration of their feathers makes a noise as if meant to intimidate me.

But Sandy is calling; so leaving the big gulls to their airy flights, I follow after him as he leads straight to the bay of the gannets. He takes off his shoes, and I do the same, and cautiously walk over the edge of the precipice along a narrow shelf on which the gannets are breeding. The myriads of gannets are still sitting on their nests, and the males are away fishing, and now and then one comes floating from seaward towards the Craig, and I see him disgorge his fish for the sitting partner to breakfast on.

I take one or two of the cleanest eggs, as they are the freshest, and then Sandy and I come back to the glen that runs down to the Barrhead; and climbing about the sharp and rugged precipice, Sandy selects some fine varieties of the razor-bill, beautifully clouded and mottled, also a few uncommon varieties of the guillemot, and what is a prize, I see a bridled guillemot (*Uria Lacrymans*) sitting on a ledge. With some difficulty I climb to it, and find that its egg is fresh laid, which I take.

Packing the eggs carefully in my vasculum, I climb back to the top, and follow Sandy down the now more familiar path. During my absence up the hill, my boatman Rab and his laddie have arrived from Girvan, having had to row almost all the way, there being little or no wind.

After breakfast, as a puff of wind is rising which we mean to take advantage of, I pack up my treasures of eggs and specimens, my traps are placed in the punt, and we row out to the boat, which is anchored off the Craig. Then the craigsmen give me a parting cheer as the lug is hoisted, and we slowly drift out, and I give them a parting wave of the bonnet as I leave the Craig with great regret. T. C. W.



THE RIGHT WAY OF POKING THE FIRE.

We have often remarked that, however modest and humble people may be in their pretensions in various arts and accomplishments, and however willing they may be to yield the palm of excellence to others, there is yet one accomplishment in which everybody invariably imagines that he excels everybody else—and that is the art of poking the fire. It is true you may not hear people express this secret conviction, but if your observation is worth a straw you may read it in their faces whenever one person in a company ventures to poke the fire in presence of the rest; and if your candour is on a par with your observation you will confess that you rarely—we might almost say never—see a fire poked without feeling, however deftly it has been done, that it still wants just one finishing touch at your own hands.

Various, indeed, are the methods of using the homely instrument whose special function it is to rouse the sleeping embers in the grate, and cause the cheerful flame to enliven the domestic hearth with genial light and warmth. Professors of chirography tell us they can evolve the mental portraiture of man or woman from an inspection of their handwriting; for our part, we feel confident that revelations much nearer the truth might be derived from a careful consideration of the way in which a person handles the poker. Let us look at a few of the methods most in vogue. First, there is the bold, careless, slapdash method, in which the performer thrusts the instrument between the bars without a moment's consideration of what he is about—rakes the coals this way and that for a quarter of a minute or so, and then throws down the instrument with a bang and a clang that startles pussy from the hearth-rug and sends her scampering. Still less tolerable is the persistent method in which over-earnest minds are apt to indulge, when the performer, having got possession of the poker, is loth to relinquish it, and goes on digging and picking at the fuel until his wife gets up from her chair and takes the instrument out of his hand; or, the lady being absent or failing to do that, the fire is finally poked out, and the bell is rung for Betty to come and renew it. Allied to these two methods is a third, still more demonstrative, which may be called the savage method, in which the performer storms the fireplace as he would an enemy's fortress, deals furious blows with his weapon upon the casemated upper works of caked lumps, and supplements these assaults by fierce lunges into the very vitals of the fire, as if resolved to tear its heart out. Such are the "heroic" methods of poking, in which those who adopt them may pride themselves if they like; but we confess to a preference for more moderate measures, as exhibited in a contrary style of practice. Among the moderate methods we may mention the encouraging mode, in which the poker, as it were, pats the blinking fire on the back, just to cheer it up a little, then gently clears away the lower strata of ashes, lets a little more oxygen into the lungs of the fainting subject, and so entices it to make an effort to recover itself and show the domestic circle a cheerful face. Analogous to this is the sympathetic and cautious method, which has to be pursued when the fire is at its last gasp and would certainly perish irrecoverably were it roughly handled. In this case the operator has to use the utmost dexterity, and to exercise at once prompt action and enduring patience: he cherishes the spark by supplying fresh fuel; he makes a passage for the current of air to the exact spot where it is wanted, and with the point of his instrument he adjusts those particles of fuel which, being in a half-burnt state, are the readiest to catch, so that they shall receive, retain, and spread the combustion.

Other methods of poking the fire might be here described were it worth while; but we pass them for the present, being desirous of turning our attention briefly to another aspect of the subject, which we may be allowed to designate its moral aspect.

There is no risk in asserting that society in all ages has stood in special need of poking up, and that, morally speaking, the demand for the right use of the poker is not a whit less urgent at the present day than it was in days that are past. Men have always had to be urged, or poked up, to the performance of their duties, and in all likelihood will continue to need constant provocation to this end. The fires of love and benevolence, of philanthropy and kindness, which should be ever burning brightly in their breasts, are always getting into a low and smouldering state, and sometimes, alas! they get extinguished altogether for lack of the stoking and poking which should have been administered to them, or, worse still, because the poking has been done by rash and unskilful hands.

Now the use of the moral poker is a much more difficult matter than the wielding of the domestic instrument spoken of above. What renders it so immensely more difficult, and so often defeats the most energetic endeavours, is the fact that when using the moral poker we never know whether we are stirring a glowing fire or a mere empty grate. A man, or any number of men, may look as benevolent as Mr. Peabody or Captain Coram, and yet have no more of the fire of benevolence in the heart than there is in a lump of ice. Thus the wielders of the moral poker—the men or the women whose office it is to stir up others to good works—are always, to some extent at least, working in the dark. Such workers, however, have the consolation of feeling that they are doing the right thing; and some of them, it is pleasant to know, show remarkable skill and dexterity in doing it. The very worst methods of setting about this business are the heroic methods