

# Galemath.

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The yet discussed gale of February, thirty-seven years ago, has at length been outpaced by the one of several days' duration that raged so violently around the east coast in the latter days of January. In the known annals of gales, it easily breaks the record—at least on the eastern seaboard. To follow its wake along the coast, the observer cannot fail but to take notice of its ravages, and be struck stupendously by the power that has subjected the rocks and weaker coast defences to a pounding and bombardment that has been colossal, where rocks defying the onslaught have been battered and broken, and massive parts thrown unbelievable distances inland. Where resisting parts have been completely broken down, and inroads made by the greedy, ever-encroaching sea, in tempest mood. The exposed coastal places of Nesting all show signs of the mighty fray, but no part so great as that seen at Lingness which forms the south districts extreme north-east point.

Lingness may be aptly termed a peninsular croft. Its uniqueness and seclusion adds an attraction which the lover of nature's handiwork and solitude cannot fail but to admire. The idea of splendid isolation—the slogan of a famous newspaper recently—must have been the prime motive that actuated the founder of Lingness to make a home there. Lone, hill-guarded holdings are not uncommon in these islands, but isolated, sea-bound holdings are few. The approach to Lingness is by a narrow isthmus, over a hundred yards wide. Across it from shore to shore stretches a stone dyke—the only man-constructed defence—the rest of the enclosure is sea-girded. The east coastline of this place forms the north-west and north wall that encloses the north wick of Eswick. Following the east seaboard, from where the dyke-end referred to overhangs a geo, one comes to a part on the neck of the isthmus where there is a steep, rough cast ayre, called Attle Ayre. From here the ground rises, terminating in a fairly high hillock. At the back of this hillock, the steep, sloping ground ends at the edge of some high cliffs—the highest being the Maa Craig. Passing this crag, a decline is followed to where the rocks jut out, forming the furthest, and most exposed point. Here the line is bent sharply back, and begins to form in a winding manner inlets and projections, coves, crags, and ebb-tide reached holms.

Two beaches, or ayres, find place in the straggling contour—the rough pebbled north ayre with the north holm adjacent—reached dry at low water, and the south ayre—a stretch of dazzling white sands, seen from the road that winds round by the way of Brough to Eswick. Continuing from the white Ayre, it rounds a small ness,

making a detour, until in line with the ayre, but separated from it by a rising piece of ground. So around it winds to the west side of the isthmus, completing a peninsular contour, forming in the latter phase an almost landlocked piece of water known as the Dock, presumably on account of its safe and sheltered anchorage. At its entrance lies a small holm, the breeding place of countless Arctic terns, who fill the air with a ceaseless noisy clamour. During the nesting period, almost every foot of space on this holm is occupied by a nest. The ground that borders the head of the White Ayre is composed of sand-dunes, with deep, grass-grown hollows which show where flitmen have been excavating.

From the hillock on the east side, the ground runs down in a steep slope. From the not too high rocky buttress of the west seaboard, it slopes gently towards the east. The two grounds meet in a hollow, and in a hollow lies a fair sized fresh water loch. At the north end the loch is separated from the sea by the high, wider North Ayre. On the south, its waters are stemmed by the sand-duned strip of ground forming the head of White Ayre. Beyond the rising ground separating White Ayre from the Dock, another strip of ground bars the way of the loch from entering the Dock. Some day, perhaps, when the sea—already the greatest possessor of the earth's surface, but like the greedy earthly possessors, ever scheming to acquire more—completes its erosion, then Lingness may become a series of islets. As it is, these narrow, sand-bound necks of land and ayres do not offer too sturdy a resistance to the slow, but ceaseless encroaching sea.

Standing at the north-west corner, between loch and sea, is the crofter's house of Lingness, with adjoining office houses, its gable end in line with the North Ayre. It is built at the base of a rocky formation which rises to make a slight break from the sweep of the north-west winds. South past the house there is a breach in the rock-bound sea defences, where the sea is given an inlet, and falls on a narrow steep beach. From the house, southwards, round the loch, and encircling its edge, lie the "townsis", and cultivated land. To be in this peaceful, sea-girded retreat in the glory of a summer's day, when the surrounding water, a maze of blue and gold, laps gently its rocky defence and falls with a lazy swish on the silvery sands of the White Ayre, or with deeper ocean tone on the more exposed North Ayre; when the near-hand holms of Nesting Bay lie in summer garb, a vivid green, held in a setting of wonderful blue, and sea trims the black of many outlying reefs and skerries with a fringe of snowy white; when the hillock on the east is mirrored in the loch at its foot, and growing crops, too, peep over the edge to get a glimpse of their variegated greens; when sea-pinks roseate the dull seaboard, and screaming terns, like silver darts, dip and fly hither and thither; or again, to linger awhile, when the early autumn moon comes forth to spill her silver, laying tracks across the moving waters, holding the holms in silhouette, and borrowing the black of the skerries to

complete an effective picture of silver and black—to be in Lingness then, the true lover of nature cannot fail but to experience a pleasure, and impression not likely to be forgotten.

Viewed now after the storms have had their will, Lingness presents a scene of devastation that will long be marked. It was, perhaps, during the gale that raged on the 24th and 25th of January that the worst was done, and the residents given a harrowing experience, fraught with a great deal of anxiety. During the flood tide of Monday morning's gale they were completely marooned, their retreat being cut off at every possible place of exit. Seen from within the scope of visibility, the place presented the scene of a group of islands, set in a mad whirling sea. Those in the midst of it witnessed an awesome spectacle. Over the North Ayre into the loch, the sea rolled in one huge massive wall of green. Through the breach at the south end of the house giant waves surged, racing like chargers over the "townsis", and so into the loch, there to meet in the centre the invading seas from the north. With a clash and a leap they fought like war-maddened chargers, the one striving to overwhelm the other, spending themselves in a dense cloud of spume and spray that was borne aloft on the wings of the speeding wind. Beyond the breach where the sea rolled over the green into the loch stood an out-house, under the seeming protection of a knowe. This house was used as a smithy at the erection of the Voder beacon. Into it the inhabitants sought shelter—there to await the passing of the tide. Hardly had they settled down when a huge sea enveloped the house, half filling it with water. A hasty retreat was made to the shelter of a nearby dyke, where they had to abide for a considerable time. Attempts to reach them from the outside were found impossible. In over the narrow isthmus—the path of approach—the sea poured in a foaming cascade right into the Dock at the other side. Stones, rocks, tangles and debris yet mark its path. The extended spread of the steep, rough cast Attle Ayre is considerable. Before the rise of the evening tide, the family waded through to the safety of the neighbouring township of Eswick, having to leave all their stock and belongings to the mercy of a merciless sea. Outside the vicinity of Lingness, in the reef-infested Nesting bay, the sea was a seething, boiling cauldron, with mammoth waves rushing towards the coast at North Nesting, flinging themselves in fury against the opposing cliffs and rocks, and invading inland places hitherto unreached in living memory. The many reefs that dot the Nesting bight, and that have age long defied the sea's devouring intention, seem always to be an irritant that adds greatly to its anger when in tempest mood.

In following the wake of the gale in this vicinity, one would fancy, on viewing the havoc, that the place had been under a heavy bombardment. A stout stone wall, seven feet in height, that ran towards the loch from the corner of the house has been completely demolished. Had an aerial projectile been dropped on the

"brigstanes" it could scarcely have caused a greater upheaval. Yet wonder of wonders, with all the pounding, the house came through unscathed—revealing the great scriptural truth embodied in the parable of the house that was built upon a rock. A peat stack and cart-shed were swept into the loch. Green swards, once decked with the many hued flowers of summer, now lie neath a covering of sand and sea-carried stones. In places, one would fancy that a giant had run amok with a spade, turning up huge pieces of turf, and scattering it hither and thither. Other parts convey the impression of a mammoth plough being set to break in virgin soil, where the ground lies turned over from the channel, leaving a wide furrow. A wall-bound and concrete founded well, which lay on the east side of the loch, and reached by way of the North Ayre, was destroyed—the wall carried away and the concrete foundation wrenched from its hold, and not a vestige of it is to be seen.

North Ayre has been pushed a great distance into the loch, and lies deeply banked with tons of drift and decaying tangles. On the more exposed places, large rocks have been hewn as if by a mighty chisel, while the ground above the cliffs is littered with stones torn from the cliff face, and scattered, as if by shower. On the sea bottom, below the crags, at the north end of the North Holm lay a huge white coloured rock weighing several tons. At low water it was visible—a contrasting object against the drab of the surrounding rocks. From its bed it has been torn away and hurled up a rocky incline, where it lies wedged in a gully almost above high water mark. One can trace its course upwards, where rocks have given way, and are marked by its passage. It lies, all stuck over with the roots of sea-bed growths, and its crevices filled, in parts, with decaying cross fish. Such is the unbelievable power of the sea.

Along the coast other places have suffered as well. At Eswick, on the authority of a resident whose holding at the north end was invaded and damaged by the wild onslaught, the sea was ninety feet higher than that of the February gale of 1900. Further along at Aswick an old lodge—reputed to be over 200 years old—and which has stood on a neck of land, and must have witnessed many a gale, was entirely demolished. So one might follow and view the galemath with awe and wonder. The sea has fallen again to its normal rise and fall, after beating its achievement of thirty-seven years ago. Will it, at some future date, again arise, and hitch the moon to pull, and the wind to drive, and so attempt to break the record it holds now? We wonder and hope not.