

**VALE O CATFIRTH**  
**Birthplace of James S. Angus,**  
**Shetland Poet.**  
**BY**  
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"By simple torch, I would aspire  
To set alight for you a fire,  
To show you through a nor'land dell,  
Where yet your kindred, move and dwell.  
The place of your ancestors birth,  
Their native home—The Vale of Catfirth."

Seen from the north highway that runs for a short distance along one of the hills that dip to its valley, Catfirth does not look an imposing place. Nothing meets the eye of the passing observer to mark it as charming. After leaving the verdant and fertile valley of Tingwall, it may rightly be called drab, and unimportant looking. It can scarcely be called a valley, in the proper sense. Some of the hills that gather round to afford it protection, are guardians of low stature, with gently sloping sides. This, coupled with its fairly wide meadowland, makes it a valley of no great depth—low walled and open. Yet despite its dull, unalluring appearance, as seen from a distance, Catfirth has a charm and a warmth that is hid in its heart, but can quickly be found by the leisurely seeker.

In the Island's story, past and present, Catfirth may find place under four distinct headings. To begin with, it holds the ruins of a one-time linen mill, erected in the eighteenth century by a group of local business men in a venture to bring new industry into the islands. In the second place, it is the birth-place and early home of James Stout Angus, the well known Shetland writer and author of that charming little book of verse, "Echoes from Klingrahoole." A third noteworthy feature, is that of its almost landlocked voe, claimed by mariners to be one of the best anchorages in the islands. And in the story of later years, it will find place as an Air Base, constructed during the last years of the Great War, and left derelict at the cessation of hostilities, an uncompleted creation of huts and hangers.

Catfirth, if memory and information gleaned from some source serves me right—I find no reference to the origin of its name in the Norn in Jakobsen’s “Old Shetland Dialect and Place Names of Shetland”—takes its name from “the pastures by the firth.” As to when it was solely pastureland there is no record. That its valley was one time a loch, there is ample evidence, following geological survey and findings in connection with similar valleys which through the years have been fed by streams from the hills, with mud and earth, which they have deposited in the gathered waters of the valley, causing them to shrink, as land formed, into a meandering mid-vale stream. Such process in varied stages may be observed in different parts of the islands. The burn of Catfirth, especially when in spate is a powerful stream. It has different sources and many tributaries. Beginning away in the moors beyond the oasis of the hills—Flamister—it flows through its midst, and hurries down a sloping, winding channel fed as it runs by side stream offerings, until it enters the valley proper, where a cottage stands by the tributary burn under protecting tall, lithe willows. Their healthy, vigorous growth, denoted the suitability of the soil for their species. From here it passes through the Fitchie green—referred to in one of Angus’s poems, “To a Kittiwake”:

“Wis it no dee I saw da streen,  
Laavin’ abune da Fitchie green.”

Then on it goes, out and in, through the beautiful meadowland of the valley, until it is joined by another burn, which has a dual-source, and a wide fork shaped appearance. At the back of the hills which form the western side of the valley, called Crown, or Upper Catfirth, the burn of Crookidale runs. The waters of the Gil burn, which rise in the hills above Skurron, pass through an eye in the main road, and at a point further down are joined by that of the Crookidale burn. The Gil burn after leaving the eye in the road, has cut its way through a green-capped bank of deep moor, bringing to view the moor preserved trunks and branches of trees. Conjoined, both burns then move on, in a wandering course towards the vale, where the waters make a detour of the end of the meadowland forming a sinuous border between the brown at the base of the sloping hill-ground and the green of the meadow. The meadow here, is known as the “Bleach Field,” because of its being used as bleaching ground in connection with the linen mill which stood nearby.

In a certain song, the meeting of the waters in a valley is extolled, as a thing beautiful. Where they meet in the Catfirth valley may be pleasant, but there is a tale connected with the place of their convergence, although mythical, is none the less sinister. Where a bed of “seggies” flaunt their dark green pennant by the burn edge, is a fairly deep pool known as “Tammie Sinclair’s Pow.” The story goes that a man by that name, one night belated, was making his way down the burn. He was met by a brown coloured pony, who in a friendly way began to rub itself against his person. Feeling rather tired, he mounted it, whereupon it set off at a brisk gallop. When nearing the pool in the burn which to this day bears his name, he discovered that the hair of his mount had turned into scales. He then realised he was not on the back of a pony, but a “njuggel.” Just as it was about to leap with him into the pool he drew

forth his knife, and stuck it into the creature's back which immediately disappeared from beneath him, and into the pool in a blue flame.

As a child, I remember the distance kept from this place of evil repute, and recall when courage was mustered, peering into its depths, which penetrated by strong sunlight, revealed moor fibre being kept in motion by the gently flowing water. To the youthful mind, the fibre of course, was the mane of the "njuggel." From the pool sinister, the up, and cross valley burns, together joined, make through a wider channel, their last lap to the sea. All the way, the waters flow over a vein of lime rock which strikes across their path, raising knarled bars and ledges over which they glide and purl, giving to the ear the delightful, refreshing sound of water culled music. Passing through the eye of Catfirth bridge, their second last leap is through a deep gorge, ever a stepped, lock formation, ending in a miniature waterfall, which fills a deep pool, sending a plentiful overflow to spread out, amidst rocks and boulders, and to slide down a wide rocky staircase, into the Vaddle, a noisy, peat brown, froth capped, mass of water. The gorge—hollowed by years of a water's ceaseless flow, is wider at the bottom than the top, due to the action of the water carried properties on the lime rock—an action more erosive than the effects of weathering to which parts above the water flow are exposed.

The resultant difference in the work of the two natural forces is seen in the overhanging fissured, and ledged rock sides. The gorge is called Klingrahoole, a corruption of the Norse word, meaning "the place of the roses," and is well known because of its adaptation in the title of a book of verse, by the late James S. Angus, who was born in the old Ha, whose ruins are seen close by. One does not wonder that the poet found inspiration in this beauty spot of nature. To it he must have resorted often in early life. As a child to romp around its knolls and rocks, to hunt the trout beneath its waterfall and to run bare-footed along the "sheep gates," that yet terrace its rising heights. In later years to muse where it cast its spell and from its nearby heights, varied threads of inspiration, from which he wove so many of the beautiful creations that find place in his book of verse.

"The voices of the passing years  
Awoke within me hopes and fears,  
Distrust, and faith, and sovereign love,  
From depths below and heaven above,  
And still a warning voice I hear,  
Less loud, but still distinct and clear,  
The same as on yon rising ground  
Adjacent, sportive cries resound—  
When autumn nights are calm and cool—  
From rugged, rocky Klingrahoole."

This he writes in preface—a preface whose light seems to fall on every page as we turn them over. Few, whose heart and soul is really attuned to the beauty of nature can deny the charm to be found in Klingrahoole, and its immediate surroundings. The

briar rose, from which it derived its name still adorns the north wall, with brambles and a flourishing rowan, making the best of the scanty soil from which they find their nourishment.

On the south side there are cliffs and crannies packed with soil, mist with spray from tumbling waters, which bear in season violets and vernal plantains, fern and meadow sweet, while the rocks, in places, bear the bright green velvety clumps of cushion pinks—so cushion like, and covered, when in bloom with tiny, star-like flowers of pink and white, that diffuse a honey like fragrance.

From Klingrahoole the ground rises with gentle slope to the peak of the Sneugie, this hill formation closing the south end of Catfirth Valley. In the poet's Shetland Muse, he refers to it thus:

“Where the shadow of the Sneugie falls across the  
Bretto gjo.”

Perhaps he had its heights in mind—for it affords a very fine view—when he wrote in the “Sailor's Return,”

“Once more upon this rugged height,”

and then:

“I see the distant, slumbering isles  
In the hazy sunlight lie,  
The jutting headlands near and far,  
The white mew flitting by;  
I hear the sad-toned voice of the burn,  
Singing a quiet song  
To the breeze that kisses its sedgy banks  
As it swiftly glides along.”

To the south of the valley the ground becomes gradually elevated, and takes into its formation a number of knolls, flats and dimples. The meadow and burn border its west side, while on the east side lies a dale which ends at the old Boad near the sea, called Segadaal. Through it runs a crystal stream whose source is the copious spring of the Segadaal well, mentioned in “Heddledrossie”:

“Frae da limped spring o da Segadaal wal.”

Behind the shelter of a knoll, in the midst of this rising ground of braes and hollows, and looking over Catfirth Voe, stands the remains of the once sturdily built, Old Ha', the poet's birthplace. Its surroundings are considered the valley's prettiest part. Here the knolls and braes showing an outcrop of lime rock, are beautifully verdant, holding in their rich soil faces, clefts and dimples, floral gems of varied orders, and of many hues. In this rock grouping Klingrahoole finds place—the sweetest place of all. Within sound of its waters, to quote an explanatory note in the preface to his book of poems, the author was born and brought up.

Nature here afforded him, in the setting of a charming creation of hers, a school in which to develop his latent abilities—abilities evinced in his effusions—many of which are penned to her praise, revealing how ardently he loved her manifold creations, her changing moods and secret ways. If we had not his confession in “Nature’s Voice,” there is ample evidence in other pieces, to show that he was truly nature’s child.

Descend the grassy stairway that leads down into the rock walled hall of Klingrahoole in the cool and quite of a late summer evening when the moon in the east has mounted the heavens a goodly height and with her light has made an effective draping of surrounding rocks and heights in patchy patterns of light and shade. Behold the shimmering, silvery path across the quiet waters of the voe and the shadow-edged Vaddle, with the centre of its tide filled basin an oval of silver sheen. Watch the rippling waters from the pool beneath the waterfall, slip away among rocks and boulders with the moonlight playing on their broken bubbling flow, making it look like a stream of glittering molten metal, escaping from a dark cauldron. Listen to the song of the waterfall, caught by the scooped rock-sides, and thrown upwards to float on the still night air, one of nature’s sweetest songs—so pleasant to the ear—the song of falling, rushing thirst-appeasing waters. And you will see and hear, as oft times did the poet, and by chance may gather something of the beauty and wonder that enthralled him so.

The Old Ha’ of Catfirth was built in the eighteenth century as a linen mill. Local gentlemen formed the company with a capital of £1,000. Mill-like the building had many windows, and before each window was placed a weaving loom. There can still be seen the unrequired windows that were built up, when the building ceased to be a mill, and was converted into a dwelling house, for a member of the Bruce family, who were then proprietors.

To obtain an ample water supply for the “walk Mill”—the site is known by that name to this day—which stood at the bottom of the valley, a water duct, was made leading from Sandwater Loch. Part of the cutting, now bog filled, can be seen on either aide of the main road, which crosses it near Sandwater. This place is still called locally —“Da Canal.” To raise the water of the loch to a desired level, the south end, where the burn begins its course down Stromfirth valley, was dammed.

One night in August with a Lammas spate of unusual weight, the dam burst, releasing the imprisoned waters, which swept down the valley, a devastating torrent, clearing in their mad rush many of the near-burn rigs of their growing crops. The venture in the linen business was unfortunately not a success. The company went into liquidation, and the mill was converted to a dwelling house.

While aboard the ship “Commodore Perry”, at Chincha Islands, we find the poet writing, on receipt of a letter from his home, which has awakened hidden longings, verses containing a stanza thus:

“Ah! Well I remember the mill in the valley  
And the old grey cot at the head of the Voe,

The field by the burn, where summer hours dally,  
The banks and the beach where the sweet-willims grow.”

The fact that the letter was from home leaves no doubt as to the place he had in view. The mill, which later became known as the Ha' had as its first occupier a man by the name of John Bruce whose spouse was an individual of haughty, domineering and violent temperament who was feared and hated by the people around. Then when death had claimed her, and she lay awaiting burial, the ill-treated servants avowed that she haunted the room, and that they could see her eye— “Lik a lowin Kaandle”—watching them through the key hole. A son, because of his mother's unbearable ways, ran away from home at an early age.

Many years afterwards, a vessel came into Catfirth Voe to take away a salvaged cargo of casks containing a bituminous substance that lay at the Booth. From the Ha' an invitation was sent to the ship's officers, asking them to the house to be entertained. While allowing the others, the captain refused to go. When, however, they had reached the house, he ordered a boat to put him ashore. Through the winding “gaets” and by a “short cut”, known only to the inhabitants, the captain made his way to North Catfirth, to the house of an old man by the name of Goudie. As they conversed Goudie realised that he spoke to no stranger. But the visitor never disclosed his identity. Only when he had left did the people of the house tumble to the fact that he could have been none other than the run-away son of the Ha'.

Hercules Angus, the father of the poet, became the next occupier of the Ha' when the Bruces vacated it. He came from Deltin and his wife Janet Stout and the older members of the family. He founded a general dealer's business there, utilising part of the roomy building for that purpose. The business rapidly grew and flourished. The Ha' was the Mecca of the people of all the surrounding districts who came to buy and sell. The goods were brought from Lerwick by boat and landed at the pier, yet seen at the old Booth. Angus was a generous noble hearted man, who held a simple trust in his fellows—a trust let it be said that was unfairly taken advantage of, particularly by one in whom he had placed implicit faith. Angus's wife was a refined, kind and saintly woman. Through her Methodism came to Nesting. The large kitchen of the Ha' was used as a meeting place and always packed with listeners.

It was here, while a minister was making an appeal for foreign missions, that a rather ready tongued individual said in an undertone “I ken du's a guid beggar.” but the minister heard, and back came the quick retort, “And I hope you'll be a cheerful giver.”

In a hollow on the top of the hill—“Da Ha' Knowe”—behind which the Ha' stands, open air meetings were held in the summer time. As a mark of their being held there is to be seen Carroway plants, growing from seeds spilled by listeners, who during the service chewed this aromatic, culinary flavouring, as some people do peppermints and such like concoctions today, oft times no doubt to lessen the boredom.

Near the Ha', at the back of the present dwelling house, stands a knoll, known as, "Da Duss," meaning a cairn or stone-heap. According to tradition this used to be the abiding place of "da peerie folk," or "trows." When the quarrying operations began on this knoll for stones with which to build the mill, or Ha', the place became untenable for this mythical little people. They decided to leave for a habitation more congenial where man in his progressive march would not reach them for a while. On the night that they left for their decided haven, a man crossing the valley from Crown, saw them pass. Apparently the feelings given to mortals when leaving an old place of abode were theirs, for in their lamentations, they deplored their forced quittance, and were heard to say that surely they would find peace in their new destination" Bjaelaroom," a rocky formation beyond the heights of Crown.

It was many years afterwards that an intellectual book vendor, a victim of astigmatism, expressed the desire to make the acquaintance of the "trows" place of retirement. He took as his guide, a native of the valley who led him to the place, and pointing to a hole in the rock said "Dares whaar dey went." His knowledge, without doubt, was gleaned from the realms of fancy, but it served the purpose of impressing the visitor, who to the amusement of his guide put his eye—so short of sight—to the opening and looked in earnestly as if to catch sight of the little folk within. That he was satisfied may be judged from the fact that he gave his guide a six-pence.

When the many burns that deposit their waters in the basin of the valley are in spate the gathering is so great, and the overflow so extensive, that the valley takes on the appearance of a large loch. To gauge something of the volume of water that passed over the falls at Klingrahoole, at least on two occasions in recent years, one has to view the height of Catfirth Bridge and fancy the water pouring over the roadway at the lower side of its crossing. The thunder of the falling waters after such a spate can be heard quite a distance away. Thus when it is angry. But catch the rise and fall of its melodious voice, in its lazy meander, on an eve, so beautifully expressed in the poet's "Simmer Dim." Here we have the valley where play the soft breezes.

"O da breeze! Da beautiful breeze!  
Hit souchs trough the gills an da seggy lees,  
Hit flotts da clouds and it waves da coarn,  
Hit nüns ta da sang of da smootin burn;"

Catch it thus. Lend eye and ear to it awhile, and you will understand why the poet in "Nature's Voice" says:

"These are my poetry and music."

East along the shore of Catfirth Voe, and past the former proprietor's residence, which overlooks its waters, and has a nursery of healthy young trees growing up, another burn crossed by the Brig o da Quoys, is arrived at. A beautiful burn this with high walls leading almost to its source near Flamister, and with two flourishing willows just above the bridge. Here at the voe and with a low tide the water recedes a great distance, leaving a wide ayre river which the burn's flow spreads out. Catfirth Voe, as

aforestated, is known as one of the best anchorages in the islands. Proof of this may be seen from the large number of local fishing boats that harbour there during the fishing vacation. On a still night these vessels in their quiet hill-locked haven present a beautiful picture.

The voe is almost land locked. At its entrance, proper, lies the isle of Littleholm, Between this holm and the Brunthammarland side—a place known as Skjotaing and referred to in the poet's verses "Winter,"

"Bit Johnie o Skjotaings Gibbie."

—is a deep narrow entrance called "Da Mine". Outside this lies the water of the sound with an arm that becomes Vassa Voe, and holds the Pictish Broch of Railsbroch. Allusion to the sound is made in "Simmer Dim."

"O, da. Sound! Da beautiful sound!  
Whaar da tide rins straught an da wind gengs roond,  
Whaar da piltiks bool, and da tirricks dip,  
An da ember sails lek a laden ship."

Seen from Catfirth the waters of the voe, and sound beyond, stretch away until the Isle of Bressay closes them. No outside sea connection is seen, and the stretch of water has the appearance of a long narrow lake, so reminiscent of some Scottish Loch. In the vista is seen jutting out from the Nesting side the Taing, like a mammoth bird with its head stretched out, while directly opposite, on the Tingwall side, protrudes in like appearance the Point of Wadbister, Both headlands convey the impression of two huge birds facing each other for combat.

In the days when tall ships graced the seas with their billowy snow white canvas set to woo the fickle winds, Catfirth Voe, on several occasions, afforded refuge to some of them from the fury of the winter gales. An old inhabitant could recall boarding one as a boy and receiving from the master "a nyaeptin fou o raisins." Another dumped part of a cargo of chalk and fragments of this substance could be found not so many years ago, when digging in the low-ebb for "Smislins." To another, who had sought shelter, an old native put off with the intent to barter. Coming alongside he shouted "What's yer cargo?" "Coke." came a grumpy reply from the bridge. "What?" returned the would be borderer, who probably never had heard the word before, and uttered too in a strange tongue. "Coke." came the reply again. The old man turned ashore. Met on the beach someone asked, "An what's his cargo?" "Cocks," replied the old man, "Cocks and hens."

Just outside Catfirth Voe, in the cliffs of the Lang Hill, a vessel ran ashore in a storm. Her bowsprit got wedged in the cliff face, and over it the crew made good their escape. Tradition has it that several of them, after crossing the hill, perished in Girlsta Loch, on the other side, near—and let us quote the poet again—

"The Holm where Geix'hilda sleeps."

In the holm there are graves, but whose? It was in the waters of Catfirth Voe that



William, the poet's younger brother and father's favourite, perished crossing over to Rainsbroch, in a boat manned by David and Theodore Kay—a father and son. Near Valness a squall struck the boat and capsized it, throwing the occupants into the water. David Kay was rescued clinging to the boat keel, but both the others were drowned, their bodies later recovered locked together. To add to the poignancy of the tragedy, it was witnessed by William's father. Almost beside himself he rushed into the house, and into the room where his wife lay on a bed of sickness. Frantically he tore through the room, and to his wife's query as to what was wrong, he replied, "Ah lookin fir a dreg ta dreg fir ma sweet William," Thus to the mother, so near death, was imparted the awful news.

On the east side of Catfirth Voe, on the flat ground known as the "Fauld," several building foundations may be seen, which were part of the Air Base, erected there during the first world-war. In those days of strange happenings, quiet, out-of-the-way Catfirth, suddenly became a place on the map. In connection with the construction of the Air Base, men could be met drawn from all parts of Britain, their unit being the A.C.C. Many of them were from well to do families, and many in private life followed callings of a professional nature. Apart from service red tape, they enjoyed the experience of being in Shetland, and quickly made friends with the people around, whom they praised for their hospitality. While in training with the Guards, at their depot at Caterham, Surrey, some of these men whose homes were in London, and nearby districts called to see me, when on leave from Catfirth. I recall one, just down, telling me that he had been over at my mother's house for tea a few evenings before and had helped her drive the cows. The idea of a London Post Office official—for such he was—helping a Shetland crofter woman "ta pit in da kye," was amusing as I pictured dignity and humility hand in hand. But in war time class was outside the paling—and should be there yet—and people of all sorts, walked one common ground, having in view the one great purpose.

For two centuries the name of Goudie has been connected with Catfirth. All the families in the dale, through this name were related. According to a handed down statement, the first Goudie came to Catfirth from Dunrossness, as a teacher. In Grant's "Zetland Family Histories" under the heading of Goudie of Braefield, paragraph V, it is recorded, that Magnus, son of Gavin Goudie, removed to Catfirth, in Nesting, the said Gavin Goudie being a direct descendant of Gawane Gadie, who resisted the oppression of Lord Robert Stuart, Earl of the Islands. One of Magnus's descendants, John Goudie (John of Flamister) resided at Flamister at the top of the valley. He had nine sons, seven of them were fiddlers, hence the local saying "Da fiddlers of Flamister," also mentioned in a rhyme:

"Da fiddlers o Flamister,  
Da butter lumps of Croon,  
Da kirners o Catfirth,  
An a da burn doon."

The other lines of the doggerel may be taken to show the richness of Crown pasture,

in producing “butter lumps”, while that of Catfirth—the township proper, and the other sides of the valley would imply being of a nature that commanded much kirnin for little butter.

John Goudie was my grandfather. As a boy he could well remember going from Crown on visits to Flamister, where his grandfather resided. His reminiscences portrayed a prosperous holding with flocks of sheep, a large number of cattle, and swine herds that roamed the hills, and a larder that contained home prepared victuals from flesh, fish, and fowl, bearing names associated with Shetland’s past and today unknown.

Flamister is a place of the hills, nestling at the upper end of the valley beneath the high protecting hill of the Dud, it is separated from Catfirth by a stretch of hill pastures. Although isolated it is a pretty place, with flat land through which a burn flows. In the east hill of Flamister is a cavernous place—now lost trace of—where in the days of the Press Gang, the Goudies of Flamister and Catfirth hid. The entrance to it was very small, and could be closed by a single “fjale.” Many of the Goudies emigrated to Australia and other places, and are known to have made good in the lands of their adoption, while yet a greater number followed the call of the sea, which took toll of some of them.

In connection with the Goudies, there is a tale which although pertaining to the supernatural, which is pooh-poohed by the majority of to-day’s enlightened generation, is, I think worth relating. My grandfather, William Goudie, and his eldest son both psychically gifted, featured in the witnessing of this strange phenomena, and the narrative is my grandfather’s, corroborated by others.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1861, there drove ashore at Stavaness, North Nesting, the brigantine “Nordstern”, from Rostock, bound for Newcastle from Memel with a cargo of timber. The crew apparently had been taken off at sea. A timber-laden vessel a wreck, in those days, might have had but one cause for regret—the loss of life, if any. Otherwise, did it not come as a boon to the natives, who had no qualms in helping themselves, when darkness gave cover to their raiding with impunity. The wreck at Stavaness was an attraction even for many from afar who came to carry away wood from the densely littered shore. One dark night about this time there set out from Catfirth to the scene of the wreck, William Goudie, his son William and his brother Hay, together with Thorvald Tait and Laurence Laursen, two neighbours. They arrived at Stavaness, found nobody there, each picking what wood he thought fit to carry, and so with their burdens began their homeward journey. The distance from Stavaness to Catfirth, as the crow flies, is approximately six miles. The way lies through a stretch of dreary hills, the monotony unbroken by any near hand habitation, The path these men followed is to-day bisected by the road that crosses the hill leading to Billister from which road there is immediately seen on the left a loch bearing this township name. All went well until the men reached the south end of the loch. There beneath the shelter of a heather-cushioned bank, they laid down their burdens to rest awhile. The night was moonless, but relieved from utter darkness by

the gathered light of stars that twinkled coldly in a sparsely clouded firmament, while the wind blew softly but eerily around. They sat close together, and had produced their pipes to have a smoke, when the younger William Goudie, who sat next to his father exclaimed, "What men are these?" "Where?" inquired one of the party. "Right here in front of us," replied Goudie. "Where can they be going following this way?" said another. "Unless they be Weisdale men," said Goudie's father, "this way they might come," —"But I see none." "Nor I." answered another. At this moment, Goudie, who was the only one, so far, to see any appearance of men, laid hold of his father. As he did this related the father, "I never got such a fright in all my life, for right in front of us, almost within reach, stood a group of men, each one distinct, and no sooner had I got my eyes on them than each dispersed in a soaring light." Rooted in terror, these men, before immune to fear, saw this weird phenomena repeat itself. The dark body of men approached them, and when within a short distance the first stood still until the rear came up, and they grouped together, thereafter to dispel upwards in flying lights. Only those who made contact with the medium who first saw—and here may be noticed the rule of contact observed in psychic manifestations—witnessed this supernatural occurrence. One man—Thorvald Tait—refused contact, and saw nothing of the weird manifestation. All through the night the men sat there, chilled with fear, afraid to move, watching this unearthly happening again and again repeat itself. And when morning came, and light was breaking they could still see the light around the Wart. "Lik." to quote their word, "as mony lowin caandles." "It's bune sheep," said Thorvald to the ghost-harried others, on the way home. "Sheep," replied Laurenson, angrily, refuting the other's unwanted solution, "Sheep wi fire ta der tails."

It was from this wreck, on another occasion, that the same William Goudie, with his brother, Laurence, were followed by a company of phantom men. Between them and the dark group, they asserted, walked two figures in white, and so near that their hands and fingers were quite visible. To William, endowed with a profound gift of second-sight, daring and unafraid, the vision presented no alarm, but it was with difficulty that he got his brother home, who as a result of his experience was confined to bed for many days.

While dealing with the super-natural, here is another tale often related by Laurenson, who features in the previous, and who died over forty years ago, a very old man. As a young man, while employed with others at Crulis—a croft in the upper valley of Catfirth—digging away moor to clear a foundation for a house, they found embedded in the peat, human remains. The preserving qualities of peat moor is well known, as witness the exhibits from these islands in the Scottish Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh. In this case all the clothing was in a wonderful state of preservation, and from the description of it, dated from a century back when breeches were in vogue. The remains indicated a person of giant proportions, and at the size of the bones, Laurenson, to promote fun, passed mocking remarks. That night he averred, always with great solemnity, the owner came to him, told him that which he never would reveal and admonished him strongly for his thoughtless mockery. All through life he never forgot his visitation from the realms of the unknown, and always was strangely

affected when relating his experiences.

Of such happenings of the unreal the modern mind is more or less sceptical. They belong to a past where the lamp of knowledge burned dimly in the dark of superstition and the dusk of unnatural beliefs, they say. Now-a-days they crop up once a while, as say recently in the uncanny experiences of Sir Alexander H. Seton, of Edinburgh, and his household, in a case which focussed a great deal of attention, and which was graphically and authentically presented with unbiased views by Sir Alexander himself, in the issue of a noted periodical of recent date. Placed against the scepticism to which we are all prone to lean, we cannot but give due attention to findings in these matters from a purely scientific point of view, and expounded to us by men of great knowledge, who aver that in the branch of science pertaining to the psychic they have but touched the border line of a field of great possible discoveries. With an open mind we leave it thus, until the truth of it all has been better sifted, when we can voice as true, perhaps, the saying of Shakespeare in Hamlet, that "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

The guiding fire I have set alight burns low. Perhaps I have used it too much to follow unnecessary bye-paths, but each path you will note as we have come along leads into the main one—the object of my theme—Catfirth. Before we turn our backs on it let's view it in the dying light of the guiding fire. It is here yet, with nothing of its natural charm ruined or made less. The "smootin" burn glides, a-murmuring down the old, old course until its waters plunge over Klingrahoole in an echoed, floating euphony, that melts into a cadenza as it nears to join the waters where the ebb-tide flows. The knowes—the braes—are just as pretty in a draping of verdant sheen, with grey, gold lichen spotted rocks here and there, that shelter the flower gems that cover and adorn their heights and crannies. To the song of the burn, the breeze still "mines" and "soughs" through the "seggie lea", with its "peerie, purling crystal stripe whose source is the Wal o' Segadal". It floats the cloud, but alas it finds little corn to wave and thereby hangs a tale—a tale of blight that falls slowly but surely over those beloved islands of ours—the blight of depopulation that leaves behind the crumbling walls of many a homestead, and gives back to nature the corn-rigs, to grow her wild grasses, to make fat sheep and kine. We see the broad valley meadowland where people delved from February to April to produce the staff of life, now reverting to bog-land, from which it was taken, again rearing "floss" and other coarse, bog-land grasses. We get a glimpse of the once cultivated valley sides—the rigs, contracted into patches now, or barren, which tell their own tale of dwindling life, or feeble old age in occupation. The voice of youth in the valley is heard no longer. It mingles with adapted accent where move the motley of the cities and far away places and thus a vale—and the pity of it, not only—once the nursery of a sturdy race, now found planted throughout an empire, grows vacant, with mother wild preparing to take it into her fold. The canker of desertion with the years grows apace, while the powers that hold a nation's trust sit indifferent, too sleepy to investigate the cause and to apply a remedy. But the time will surely come when the rule of state will be held in hands, whose policy it will be to make an effective cure of this and other ills that beset the

struggling masses, in a land whose plenty is so unfairly shared.

“Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay,  
Princes and Lords may flourish or may fade,  
A breath can make them as a breath has made.  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.”

The fire burns low. In its waning light I turn the last page of a book with a musty, uninteresting outside appearance to the passer by, perhaps, but containing nevertheless within its boards much to give pleasure to the admirers of one of our best known local poets, in following the haunts of his youth and gathering for themselves something of the lasting beauty and charm of the place that instilled in him a love for nature, and so inspired so many of his delightful effusions. With the pages of picture and annal closed, there comes in departing the thought, with regret, that when a quiet little vale like Catfirth can present such pictures from its past what might not other island places do. And the regret is that, so much of the past—so rich in interest—and forming part of an islands story, should pass with the years, unrecorded, into the limbo of forgotten things.