

A succession of similar stories ensued, all tending to prove that the Shetland rockmen are fit to be rope-dancers at Astley's; but nothing interested me more than hearing a description of the cradle at Noss. It was formed by a celebrated climber from the Isle of Fowlar, who heard that off the point at Noss, a detached perpendicular pillar stood one hundred and sixty feet high, and being perfectly aloof from the shore, was considered quite inaccessible. Determined to do the impossible, and establish his fame for pre-eminence on the rocks, besides being bribed with the promise of a cow, if successful, he with great difficulty scrambled from a boat to the summit of this lofty point, where he fixed a pulley, and suspended a basket, which could be drawn across to the mainland, carrying sheep or men in comparative safety over a chasm of sixty yards wide, and four hundred feet deep. Fancy yourself performing an excursion, in this way, between the top of St. Paul's and the monument: but that is not half high enough! Where shall we place you then! Suppose yourself swinging in an arm chair between the summit of Snowdon, and the peak of Cader Idris! After this curious enterprise had been successfully achieved, the poor man forgetting how much more difficult it is to go safely down than to ascend a precipice, unfortunately did not take advantage of his own spider-like bridge, but in trying to regain the boat his foot slipped, and he fell headlong down, where his body was never seen again! a hero dying in the arms of victory.

The Governor mentioned, that lately at Ferøe, a fowler descended safely by the usual conveyance of a rope, but when about to be drawn up again, owing to some awkward entanglement, he arrived at the surface with his feet upwards. His alarmed friends thought his head had been cut off, and felt so relieved to discover their mistake, that the whole party burst into a simultaneous peal of laughter, while the adventurer was very glad he had any face to put on the matter at all, and laughed heartily also.

The upper part of these cliffs generally overhangs the base; therefore the rockmen, when desirous to obtain a footing, are obliged to swing themselves many yards out in the air, that the re-action may shoot them back in contact with the precipice, when they instantly cling to any little projection that offers, and, after landing on it, anchor the end of their rope to a stone, and proceed with a small hand-net, stretched on a hoop, to spoon the eggs out of their nests, depositing them carefully in a sack which they carry behind; and when the unlucky bird sees her loss inevitable, by a curious instinct she often pushes out the egg to save herself. An enterprising fowler, standing on a projection once, with a sheer precipice both above and below him of several hundred feet, observed the end of his rope become suddenly disengaged from its moorings, and swing like a pendulum far into the distant space. If it escaped entirely away, he knew that death, either by a fall, or by the slower and more dreadful process of starvation, must become inevitable; therefore, perceiving that the rope, before it finally settled, would swing once more almost within his grasp, he earnestly watched the moment of its return, made a desperate spring forward in the air, clutched it in his hand and was saved.

To this we add the following description of the hospitality of the inhabitants of these frozen regions:—

Before inns were invented at Lerwick, the proprietors and merchants kept open house for all strangers without exception, and must often, I should guess, have found occasion to look over the inventory of their plate, when exercising such boundless hospitality. A party of well-dressed, plausible looking foreigners, arrived here once, and having previously ascertained the names and connections of all the chief inhabitants, they passed muster during several weeks, living at the principal house on the island. One Sunday, however, their hospitable host was privately beckoned aside by a friend, who had observed his companions in the pew at church, and recognized them as a party of well-known black-legs from Paris! He recommended their being ejected from the house, in the most expeditious manner possible, but their entertainer replied, with characteristic liberality, that, "though he would now be on his guard against imposition, yet while his guests continued to behave like gentlemen he would persevere to treat them as such." Previous to departing, the ungrateful visitors attempted some swindling transactions, which were, of course, counteracted, owing to this timely detection, and they were opprobriously dismissed from Shetland; but, unfortunately, their schemes prospered better in Orkney, where they afterwards cheated some merchants to a large amount; and it was a curious termination of the whole affair, that upon leaving Kirkwall, they very handsomely transmitted to the parish clergyman £5 for the poor! This was an amusing sort of Robin Hood generosity, but some who deem it right to refuse money collected for charitable purposes, unless they approve of the means by which it has been raised, would be rather perplexed how to dispose of such a donation.

Among countless instances of peculiar hospitality, it may be mentioned, that a Mr. Bruce received into his house some years ago, forty Russian shipwrecked sailors, maintained them during the whole winter, and sent the entire crew, at his own expense, back to their native country. He declined receiving any recompense, but the Empress Catherine privately obtained an impression of his family seal, sent it overland to Chinn, and ordered a magnificent dinner service of the finest porcelain to be manufactured for him