

**COUNTY FOLK-LORE. VOL. III.
PRINTED EXTRACTS NO. 5.
EXAMPLES OF PRINTED FOLK-
LORE CONCERNING THE ORKNEY
& SHETLAND ISLANDS**

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G. F. BLACK & NORTHCOTE W. THOMAS

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VOL. III.

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EXAMPLES OF PRINTED FOLK-LORE

CONCERNING THE

ORKNEY & SHETLAND ISLANDS

COLLECTED BY

G. F. BLACK

AND EDITED BY

NORTHCOTE W. THOMAS

"What kind of a country of guisards and gyre-carlines is this?"

SCOTT, *The Pirate.*

61078

19.10.03

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1903

PREFACE.

THE material for the following pages was brought together some years ago by Mr. G. F. Black, and would have been passed through the press by him but for his absence from England. Mr. Black having gone to reside in the United States since he placed his collections in the hands of the Council for publication, the Society is indebted to Mr. N. W. Thomas for undertaking the duty of editing the MSS., as well as for some additional matter, and for the care he has bestowed on the whole work. The Council desire to express their thanks to the compilers of the volume, to Mr. Gilbert Goudie, Mr. A. K. Williamson, and the Rev. Thomas Mathewson, for notes communicated to Mr. Black, and to those owners of copyright works who have permitted extracts therefrom to appear in the ensuing pages.

It may perhaps be well to remind members of the scope and object of the series of County Folklore volumes; namely, to bring together in an accessible form the scattered notices of local folklore which occur in local records, old topographies, travellers' diaries, miscellaneous periodicals, and other such out-of-the-way sources. It is designed to form a record of the past, not a description of the present. Hence information from oral or modern sources is only exceptionally used or quoted in its pages.

The present volume, therefore, borrows nothing from the interesting little work on *Shetland Folklore* by Mr. John Spence, F.E.I.S., of the Schoolhouse, Vassa, Shetland (Lerwick: Johnson and Greig, 1899), reviewed in *Folklore*, XII, 330. The two books illustrate and supplement each other. Besides information about the prehistoric antiquities of the Shetlands, Mr. Spence gives a detailed account of the superstitions and customs connected with fishing, anecdotes of trows, selkies, witches, and Finns, some notices of festival customs, and a good deal on medical magic, with some incantations and word-charms, and upwards of a hundred and fifty proverbs. He informs us (p. 168), that "Forker's Pig," the bowl stolen from the Trows, described by Mr. Edmondston and Mrs. Saxby in the passage quoted *infra*, p. 30, is now in his possession, but he does not mention the belief recorded by them, that the ointment in the "pig" was never exhausted.

One curious point about the folklore of the islands may be noted. With two exceptions only (*infra*, pp. 35, 141), no item of plant-lore has been recorded by any writer consulted.

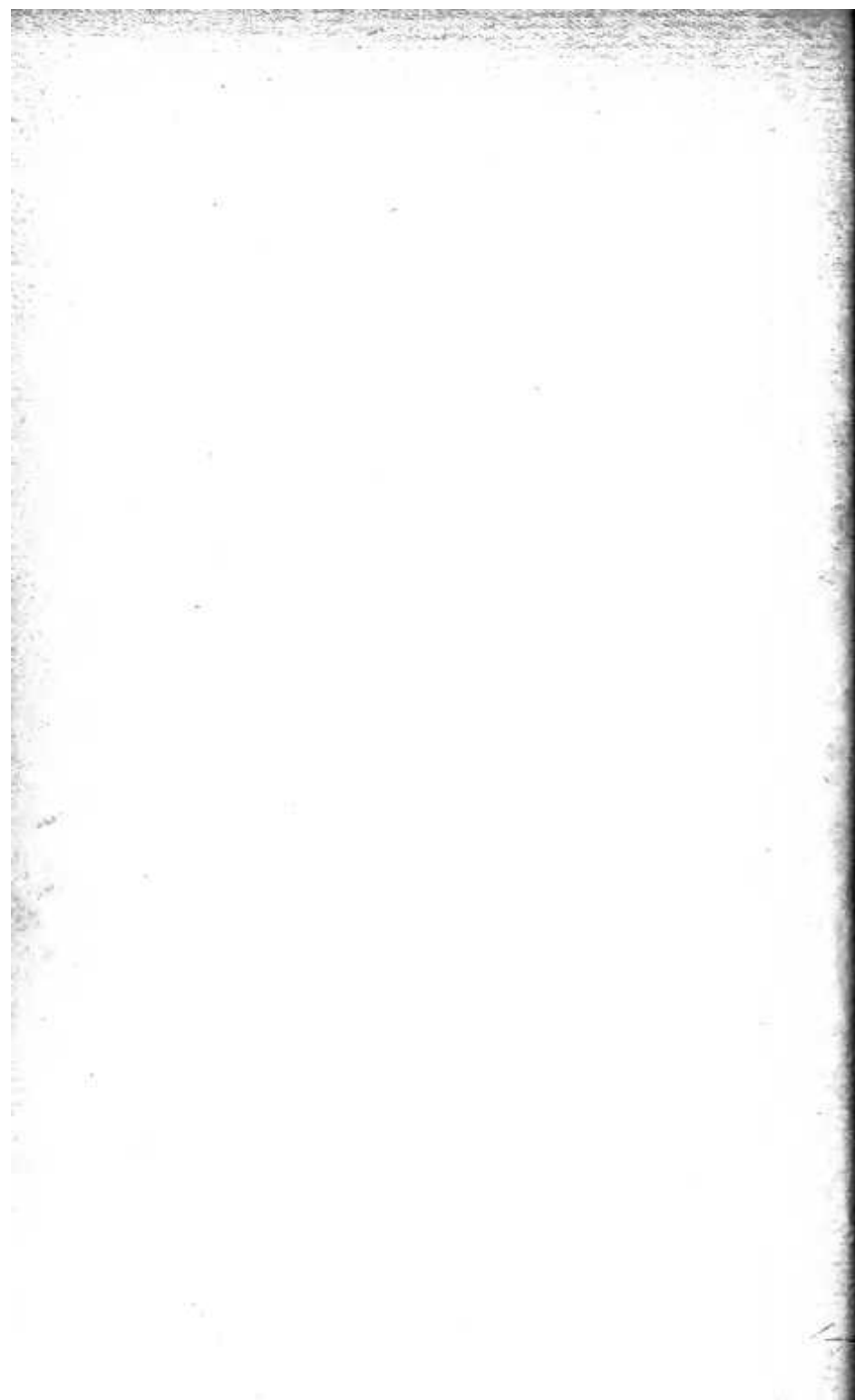
The Norwegian Earldom of Orkney and Shetland, mainly inhabited by a Scandinavian population since the time of its colonisation from Norway in the ninth century, was not annexed to Scotland till the fifteenth. The Norn language continued to be the ordinary speech of the people during the sixteenth century, lingering in Orkney to the end of the seventeenth, and in Shetland to the middle of the eighteenth. We find the witch-trials of the seventeenth century conducted in the native *Law-ting*, and the *dooms* pronounced by the native *Dempster*, though the official

record of the proceedings is couched in literary Lowland Scottish. Even to this day the old Norn Yule-tide festival prevails over the Scottish Hogmanay. With a past so simple, so well ascertained, and differing so entirely from that of any other part of the United Kingdom, the modern parliamentary "county" of Orkney and Shetland affords a singularly favourable field for the investigation of that ethnological side of folklore, to elucidate which is the principal object of the County Series.

By order of the Council.

E. W. BRABROOK, *President 1901.*

* * * For an account of the Uphelly A' or Yule-tide festival as now celebrated at Lerwick, see *Folklore*, vol. xiv., p. 74.



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