

**ANNALS OF A
SHETLAND
PARISH: DELTING**

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Annals of a Shetland Parish: Delting by P. W. Greig

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P. W. GREIG

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SHETLAND
PARISH: DELTING**

M. Mitchell
Lyon Clerk

ANNALS

OF A

SHETLAND PARISH:

DELTING.

BY

P. W. GREIG.

LERWICK: C. & A. SANDISON

1892.

P R E F A C E.

THIS Sketch, of which a portion has already appeared in a series of articles contributed to the *Shetland Times*, is now published in a more permanent form, at the request of numerous readers.

My sincere thanks are due to those friends who have afforded me much assistance by placing at my disposal material containing a store of information relating to Delting.

P. W. G.

LERWICK, *June 1892.*

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ANNALS OF A SHETLAND PARISH.



CHAPTER I.

DELTING.

FEW parishes in Shetland have got less fair treatment at the hands of writers than the Parish of Delting. Hibbert and Tudor devote but little space to it, and Cowie, in his Guide, scarcely gives it the attention it deserves. Had these writers, however, climbed the hill to the south of Moorfield, and followed the ridge to the north, terminating in the grand peak called the "Club of Mulla," over eight hundred feet high, they would have been more favourably impressed with the scenic beauties of the parish. It is true, there is little of the striking rock scenery peculiar to Shetland to be seen; but the heath-clad hills, the long winding voes reaching several miles inland, the numerous lochs glistening in the sunlight, form a most pleasing picture. There are numerous hills in Delting, but it is impossible from any one of them to get a complete view of the whole district. The scene from any of the hill-tops is grand. East, west, and north, not only is the Parish of Delting to be seen to advantage, but the neighbouring parishes—to the east Lunnasting, to the west Sandsting and Northmavine, and to the north Yell and Fetlar—are all visible in bright, clear weather. Following the hill-tops, the character of the landscape ever changes; bright, cheery spots here and there relieving the dark, deep-scarred hills. Here the arm of a voe winds its way inland until one is apt to think it is a lake, and there a small cluster of crofter houses nestle under the hill-

side, surrounded by patches of cultivated land. Standing on the hill above Laxobiggin, one sees the whole north part of the parish, from Scatsta Voe to Mioness, and from Mioness to Mossbank, hill and dale; the brown common and the verdant pasture land are spread out like a picture; little streamlets hurrying over rocky beds glance in the sunlight as they speed along, and lochs lie here and there reflecting in their unruffled bosoms the surrounding hills.

On the east side of Sullom Voe, which winds its way inland for over eight miles, and is one of the prettiest as well as the longest voe in Shetland, is Garth's Voe, running inland a short distance. To the north, and divided from the latter by a narrow neck of land, Orka Voe runs in an almost straight line for about two miles. On the west side is Caldback and Caldback Ness, on the east Crookster, at both of which places the natural barrenness of the soil is relieved by cultivation, and fields of corn wave and ripen in the autumn sun. Going farther west, one sees the Scatsta and Voxter district, a comparatively level stretch of land. At the former place stands the church, at the latter the manse, close beside the voe. Divided by a narrow neck of land from Sullom Voe, Busta Voe runs out to the south, a broad expanse of water, to the west of which can be seen the family mansion of Busta, partly hidden by lofty plane trees, an unusual sight in this part of the world; to the east there is a number of crofter houses. From Wethersta Ness a fairly good view is obtained of Olnafirth Voe, on the west side of which the cultivated land of Grobsness stands out in relief to the sombre hue of the surrounding hill. Farther up the west side is Gonfirth Voe, at the head of which stands a small school. In all these districts there are lochs and burns, where trout fishing can be had. No better view of the east side of the parish can be obtained than from the top of the East Hill of Dale. From Collafirth to Mossbank the coast line is quite clear and distinct, and Firthsness, Swinister, and Mossbank are quite close at hand. But in this district, as in the Olnafirth and Laxobiggin districts, large stretches of

fertile land, strewn with the ruins of crofter houses, are laid waste for sheep. Few things are sadder than to see the places, once the cheerful habitations of man, waste and desolate, and the homesteads heaps of ruins. While viewing such scenes one is strongly reminded that "man's inhumanity to man, makes countless thousands mourn."

Many other visitors to Delting have written an account of their experiences and impressions of that parish. A writer, sixty years ago, along with a companion, visited the district, and published an account of his tour. These "eccentrics," as they styled themselves, inspired by the Byronic high-tragedy tone of that period, described the district as one of "appalling gloom." In describing Voe, at a time, we must remember, before the roads were made, he says:—"If there be a heap of foul ulcerous mountain excrescences in nature, it is here, the ground trembles and vibrates to your tread, as though you were walking over the graves of the dropsical dead: and the scene rolls bluntly off in dismal, hunchbacked hills, which, even in daylight, weighs like a nightmare on the stomach of one's imagination, and set the millstones of horror at work within. We took a boat at night, at Millbourn [Voe], and sailed down a dark narrow voe or lake to Bray, in Delting. It was a scene of wordless gloom, and we passed through it in our little crazy skiff, all silent and shuddering, as though it was Styx, and the fog, banks of hell. On doubling one bluff cape, a mountain-gust of wind came like a fury down the brac, and half filled our boat. I felt a momentary heart-quake—I don't know how!—and then handed my friend his flute to play away the blue devils: but instead of that bell-ringing echo of the Highland hills, the sound here was mute, and muffled by bog-moss, as if it had been dropped on a dead man's ear. It was a sense, without sensation; the sound aroused an eagle in his eyrie, and, after a croaking bark to his mate, he plunged down so close overhead, that we heard his flabbing pinions buffeting the darkness, as if he smelt death, and was waiting for our carcasses to float. We landed at Bray, and sat down by