

**MY HOLIDAYS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649514717

My Holidays by William Chambers

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WILLIAM CHAMBERS**

**MY HOLIDAYS**





W. H. St. John, Ltd. & Co.

THE STANDING STONES OF STENNIS.

# MY HOLIDAYS

BY

THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM CHAMBERS

OF GLENORMISTON

LORD PROVOST OF EDINBURGH

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1867

## MY FIRST HOLIDAY.

---

### CHAPTER I

AN amusing peculiarity in the office of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh is the obligation of being a member of so many public bodies, that he would frequently have to give his presence at five or six places at precisely the same hour—a thing not easily done, even with the aid of a carriage and pair of horses. In circumstances of this perplexing nature, his Lordship usually compounds with his sense of duty—sometimes preferring one Board, and sometimes another, with perhaps a kind of leaning to some one in particular. In occupying the onerous position here referred to, if I have had any preference at all, it has been for the Commission of Northern Light-houses, a body invested with the duty of managing all the light-houses on the sea-coast of Scotland and Isle of Man, now amounting to nearly sixty in number (to say nothing of buoys and beacons), and involving an expenditure of eight-and-twenty thousand pounds per annum.

This Northern Commission may be accepted as a fair specimen of that little understood state of affairs in which many people, for the honour of the thing, give their time and

trouble for nothing—certainly nothing in the way of cash. A story is told of Joseph Hume having, in his virtuous indignation in parliament, described the Commission of northern luminaries as being a regular and costly job, when he was set right by the Lord Advocate of the day, who stated that the whole remuneration derived by the Commissioners for their trouble consisted in a dinner once a year—whereupon Joseph, in a state of munificent repentance, declared that they should in future have two dinners instead of one! These two dinners are now, accordingly, a settled institution in Edinburgh, the head-quarters of the Commission; and, from experience, I can say that the institution is conducted in no niggard fashion. Supposing the story to be correct, the Lord Advocate might have added, that half-a-dozen or so of the Commissioners, along with two or three guests, are indulged with an excursion, free of expense, annually in the *Pharos*, a powerful and commodious paddle-steamer belonging to the Board, which is employed in carrying stores to, and in making periodical inspections of, the several light-houses.

Who is to go in the *Pharos* is sometimes a matter of delicate consideration. The Commissioners consist of certain crown-officers, and sheriffs of maritime counties, along with some civic magistrates; and at a meeting for the purpose, the selection is properly adjusted, not a little depending on the wish of the parties, for what some may consider to be a privilege, others view as a positively irksome or impracticable duty. In 1866, my first year of office, I was honoured by being named one of the excursionists; and not disinclined to a little airy variety in the routine of public business, I ventured to give my assent. The only real pinch was how to get away. The *Pharos* was to depart for its voyage on the west coast on the 23d of July, but owing to certain civic matters of pressing



concern, I could not leave for some days later ; by these means, I lost the Clyde, Galloway, and Isle of Man part of the excursion, and had to be taken up in the harbour of Belfast, where the *Pharos* was appointed to lie tranquilly during Sunday the 29th.

Apropos of the Isle of Man—what has it to do with the Northern Commission ? Thereby hangs a tale. Light-houses, as is very reasonable, are supported from the proceeds of statutory dues payable by the ships which are presumed to benefit by them—outgoing foreign vessels paying the dues on starting, and vessels entering port paying on arrival—the whole managed in a neat way by the officers of customs. In old times—say fifty years ago—the Isle of Man had its own system of lights, which were so bad as to be complained of by the Liverpool traders ; and it became obvious that these lights should pass under the authority of one of the three Boards of the United Kingdom—the Trinity House of England, the Ballast Board of Ireland, or the Northern Lights of Scotland. The method adopted for settling the question was exceedingly rational ; it was to ask what each Board would take to light the Isle of Man, and adopt that which was cheapest. The Trinity offered to maintain the lights for twopence per ton on all vessels that passed ; while the Northern Commission declared its readiness to accept the very small sum of a farthing per ton. This was in 1815, since which time the Isle of Man, in the matter of light-houses, has been connected with Scotland. The farthing per ton was a shrewd conception. So large is the number of vessels passing the Isle of Man, that this forms the best-paying branch of revenue of the Northern Lights.

Reaching Belfast (by way of Greenock) early on the morning of Saturday 28th, and hospitably entertained and escorted

about by an esteemed citizen, I had an opportunity of visiting the more remarkable places in the town and neighbourhood, and learning some particulars worthy of note. As it was twenty years since I had seen Belfast, I was not prepared for its vast extension and numerous street improvements, or for learning that the annual income of its harbour has risen, since 1848, from £23,000 to £52,000—looking to which notable circumstances, one is inclined to feel somewhat incredulous on the score of alleged Irish poverty. Belfast, at all events, possesses one unmistakable evidence of social advancement—a fetid river and harbour; so loathsome and insalubrious were its waters, that the *Pharos* could not make out the entire Sunday at its handsome quay; and, receiving me on board, dropped down for the night to the open sea adjoining Carrickfergus.

Skirting along the north of Ireland, and then shooting across to the southern points of the Hebrides, I enjoyed my first day at sea. In passing, we took a look of the Giants' Causeway, which all on board pronounced to be a poor affair in comparison to Staffa. At the Rhins of Islay began that systematic visitation of Scottish light-houses which was pursued for the next fourteen days, among the outer and inner islands, and along the coast of the mainland as far as Cape Wrath; from which limit the vessel retraced its course southwards to Oban, leaving the east coast, and Orkney and Shetland Islands, for next season.

With the drawback of generally dull and moist weather, suggestive of an improvement of Scott's well-known lines:

O Caledonia! stern and wild,  
Wet-nurse for a poetic child—

and occasionally tossed about in a rather unceremonious way,

life glided on pleasantly in the *Pharos*; there being in it that nice blending of duty with amusement, good living, and leisurely converse, which constitutes an enviable mode of existence—at anyrate, I do not know of anything better in this world of ours. Five sheriffs, the provost of Inverness, the senior bailie of Glasgow, the secretary, and myself, made up the party—a joyous set of mortals, who, with one or two exceptions, scorned to be sea-sick, in nearly all weathers played at shovel-board on deck, and quite as regularly made their appearance at meals as they took to the boat to visit the several light-houses.

It is customary in these excursions by the *Pharos*, for one to be chosen 'commodore,' who has the high function of presiding at table, regulating the routes as well as general procedure, and of deciding what shall be the daily bill of fare—in which last capacity he has frequent serious communings with the cook. Our commodore on this occasion was the Sheriff of Forfarshire, who happily tempered power with discretion, kept all in good-humour, and deservedly received a vote of thanks for his services, not the least of which consisted in keeping a capital cuisine. Breakfast at 9 (a Scotch breakfast), lunch at 1, dinner at 6 (full dress), tea at 8, and anything you like at 9; all in bed by a little after 10. Such was the usual routine in the alimentary department—any modification in the fare, considering the amount of fresh air and hard work encountered, being quite out of the question. It added not a little to the comfort of the party, that the ship anchored in a quiet bay every evening about dinner-time—that, in my opinion, contributing materially to digestion—and did not start on a fresh cruise till 7 next morning, which allowed a walk of a couple of hours on deck, to