

IX.

NOTES ON A STRAW MASQUERADE DRESS STILL USED IN SOME PARTS OF SHETLAND, AND ON CERTAIN WOOLLEN ARTICLES MANUFACTURED IN "FAIR ISLE;" ALSO OF A SUPPOSED RELIC OF THE SPANISH ARMADA. BY THOMAS EDMONDSTON OF BUNESS, ESQ., UNST, SHETLAND.

I beg to offer for the acceptance of the Society of Antiquaries for Scotland to be placed in their Museum—

*1st.* An old Chair which is stated to have belonged to Don Guzman de Medina, commander of a division of the Spanish Armada, whose ship was wrecked at the Fair Isle, which lies between the Orkney and Shetland Isles.

*2d.* Some specimens of Woollen Manufactures by the natives of "Fair Isle."

*3d.* A Masker's suit, made of straw, still worn in some of the Shetland Islands, at or about the term of Hallowmas, and at Christmas.

*1st.* As to the Admiral's chair.—My friend Professor Russell Martineau of London had some correspondence with me as to the authenticity of

this chair. It was reported to me to have been the property of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armada, the Duke de Medina Sidonia. The Professor proved, as I think satisfactorily, that the relic had been in the ship commanded by Don Guzman de Medina, commander of a division of the Spanish fleet, whose vessel was wrecked at "Fair Isle." Wishing to obtain all the information possible, I wrote to a friend in Orkney, asking that he would kindly make inquiry. He replied as follows:—"I have just come from a visit to David Balfour of Balfour, Esq., and when there I mentioned to him your wish to obtain information about the Spanish vessel wrecked at Fair Isle. He showed me a silver cup with various heraldic shields, &c., on it, and some initials thus, M S—a certain Malcolm Sinclair, who is said to have received the cup from the Spanish Admiral. A marriage with a Balfour introduced the cup into that family. Mr Balfour values the relic as an historical heir-loom, and entertains no doubt as to its authenticity. He is also possessed of an old paper, which I saw, viz., a contract between Earl Patrick Stuart and William Irving of Sabay for recovering 'the ordnance tint in the Spanyzert Schip at the Fair Isle.' '8th March 1593,' is the date of the paper. I have also heard of a *chair* (now I believe somewhere in Shetland) that had been in the Admiral's ship." On receiving this letter, I at once instituted a search as to the whereabouts of the interesting chair, a memento of a famous historical event. I ascertained that it was in possession of Mrs Budge of Seafield, and wrote making inquiry. She replied that my surmise was correct, and that her late husband placed great value upon the relic; at the same time she most generously presented it to me, on the understanding that I would take steps for ensuring its being deposited in some place of more than local fame. I consider that I have amply fulfilled the condition in proffering it to your Society.

2*d.* The woollen stockings, socks, and caps from Fair Isle show in the patterns a somewhat rude imitation of the "Arabesque," taught the Islanders no doubt by the wrecked Spaniards. The patterns are unknown to the other districts of the Shetlands. These patterns, together with the secret of dyeing the woollen yarn so many and such varied and peculiar colours, are only known to the natives of that Island.

3*d.* The straw suits are still, in some parts of the Shetland Islands, worn by the peasantry in order to disguise themselves when going from house to

house at Hallowmas or Martinmas, and at Christmas. "Those disguised are sometimes termed, as in Scotland, "gызarts," and also in some localities "skeklers," but I have not ascertained the derivation of the latter term. The straw helmet is usually ornamented with long streamers of ribbons of different colours. One of the pieces surrounds the neck and covers the shoulders, the larger covers the middle, and the narrow bits are anklets. The face is covered partially with a coloured handkerchief. The maskers go from house to house, and if possible accompanied by a fiddler, performing the most grotesque dances, expecting a dram or small gratuity. The custom is fast dying out, and it is not easy to procure a complete suit. The drésses exhibited were made in the Island of Fetlar, where until very lately the people generally had comparatively little communication with the South.

[In the specimens of woollen manufactures from Fair Isle the prevailing character of the patterns is geometric, running in separate bands, rendered rather monotonous in consequence of no masses of plain colour being left between the bands. Notwithstanding this, the general effect is rather harmonious than otherwise. The colours used are primaries, on black and white; neither the secondaries nor tertiaries being used, at least in the specimen shown. Generally, when any plain mass is left, as on the cowl, or scarf, white is observed; the colours being reserved for those parts which form the outer borders. There is no doubt that they approach nearer to the Moorish, or Spanish, than any other style of ornamentation.

Taking into account the remote Island where they are produced, and the producers being altogether removed from instruction in the art of design or colour, they are highly meritorious, and deserve more attention and publicity than they have hitherto obtained.—R. C.]