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Sword - Dance
Of - -
Papa Stour, Shetland

A SURVIVING NORSE DRAMA.

By
Alex. Johnson.

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Published by JOHNSON & GREIG, "Shetland Times" Office.

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FOREWORD.

THE following account of an old Shetland custom, which now survives only in the island of Papa Stour, is written by a native of that island, who has also taken part in the performance here described.

The Sword-Dance dates back hundreds of years in the history of the Shetlands, to the time when the Norse colonists occupied these islands. and has since that time, and with few intermissions, been rehearsed and performed on this little island, where it still continues to hold its ground.

Fortunately, an old manuscript containing the words and actions of the dance came into the possession of William Henderson, jun., of Papa Stour, who, in 1788, transcribed a copy therefrom. It is primarily owing to Mr. Henderson's interest and consideration that we still have the Sword-Dance preserved.

This booklet is fundamentally based on Henderson's MS.

Two friends of mine deserve my whole-hearted thanks for suggestions and inducement.

ALEX. JOHNSON.

Papa Stour, May, 1926.

CHAPTER I.

THE fertile and romantic little island of Papa Stour lies at the entrance to St. Magnus Bay, on the west of Shetland. Papa Sound a little more than a mile wide, separates it from Sandness on the mainland, which is the nearest district. Crossing the Sound in the small four-oared boats which carry mails, passengers, and goods to and from the mainland, often in very rough weather, and with the strong tide running, demands the greatest caution and dexterity on the part of the native boatmen who handle these little crafts. It is expressly owing to these men's native acumen and experience that no disasters have been known to occur during the innumerable crossings effected.

Exposed to the incessant attacks of the Atlantic Ocean, the west coast of the island is formed into shapes strikingly wild and picturesque. The numerous caves around the coast are designated the finest in Great Britain, with the possible exception of Fingal's Cave in the island of Staffa. Christie's Hole, locally known as Kirstan Hole, is the largest, and is said to extend seventy or eighty yards underneath the island, terminating in a beach. The cliff scenery all round the island affords wonder and delight to excursionists who visit Papa Stour, particularly in summer.

It was on this island that the Honourable Edwin Lindsay, "scion of a noble family," was confined a prisoner for the protracted period of twenty-six years, during the early part of the nineteenth century. Banished by his father, an exile on this lonely storm-swept island, under the rigid keeping of Gideon Henderson, who was a landlord's factor, Lindsay, as he was locally called, must have led a very abject existence. Henderson, as factor, was not by any means a desirable functionary among the poor crofting and fishing population of the island. He assumed despotic power over the hard-working people, inflicting hardship and oppression on the subject tenants under his imperious jurisdiction.

A spring of water at the seashore, on the south side of the island, near which Lindsay used habitually to bathe, is still known as "Lindsay's Well." A graphic account of Lindsay's

escape from the island, and the difficulties involved is narrated in the little booklet, "The Prisoner of Papa Stour," by John Nicolson.

Papa Stour, the *Papey Stora*, or "big priest isle" of the Norsemen, is the last place in Shetland to observe the ancient Norse drama, the Sword-Dance, which still continues to survive in the precincts of this little island.

The dance, which is unique with its Seven Champions, is still being rehearsed and performed, as occasion offers, on the island; and it is questionable whether any other sword-dance throughout Britain can rival this ancient Scandinavian performance.

In Shetland, two at least of the old Norse customs survive: the Sword-Dance of Papa Stour, of which a description is given in the subsequent pages of this booklet, and the annual festival of Up-Helly-A'.

The latter, Up-Helly-A', or the Four-and-Twentieth-Night of the Northmen, is celebrated each year in Lerwick, and some of the surrounding country districts, with a grand torch-light procession, and a bonfire, followed by dancing and merry-making.

This festival is symbolical of the sacrifices and offerings to the Sun, which the Pagan Northmen were wont to observe each year at the end of winter, when the Sun returned from his farthest south point and the spring began.

Prior to 1892, the Sword-Dance in Papa Stour had lapsed for a period of between twenty and thirty years.

At the above mentioned date, it was usual, during the long winter evenings, for the young people of the island to gather together at some agreed place of meeting for the purpose of enjoying themselves. Eventually, a crofter's cottage, standing near the centre of the inhabited side of the island, was suggested, which became the frequent if not the nightly rendezvous of these young men and women. The genial hospitality of this crofter-fisherman's fireside was cheerfully accorded, which in no small measure, pleased the hopeful visitants. Many interesting stories of bygone days would be related by the old man and his wife, including many "trowie" and spectral yarns, the latter genus, credulously listened to, imbuing many with recurring doubtfulness as to their homeward journey in the dark. Besides, the old man was an adept on the violin, as most Shetlanders, as a rule, are, and he would often add to the night's entertainment by playing a few old "Shetlan' springs" on his fiddle: "Huxter ida Soond," "Da Shaalds o' Foola," "Da Smugglers gaain' ta Hollan'," and many other Shetland tunes, too numerous to mention, soon helped to while away the dreary hours of a long winter's evening.

In this same cottage, the Sword-Dance was revived by seven native enthusiasts in the winter of 1892-93. It was rather difficult to learn as none of the would-be participants had ever seen it done, but under the guidance of their kindly host, they practised and soon learned it, eventually giving a display of the dance before a large gathering of natives in this cottage. A vacant space in the centre of the butt-end, or living room, was left for the dancers, while the onlookers gathered into every available space accessible to them, to obtain a view of this ancient yet novel performance. The Sword-Dance this time was gladly welcomed and appreciated as was evident from the large gathering which assembled to witness it, representing every house on the island.

As some of the performers of this time went from home, to follow a seafaring career, the Sword-Dance again lapsed, but this time, only for a brief period. Another squad of seven young native aspirants practised and duly exhibited the performance before a local audience in the same cottage as their antecessors had done a few years previous. These young men kept it up, until their various duties in life, which in some cases necessitated their being away from home, caused the Sword-Dance to again lapse.

The music to which the Sword-Dance is performed is the original and traditional music of our ancestors, retained in Papa Stour through the agency of musically disposed natives, such as the old man mentioned above, who produced the music on the occasions briefly intimated.

In the winter of 1921-22, eight native young men suggested the idea of resuscitating the Sword-Dance after a few years of complete extinction. Seven of these youths were to represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, and the eighth to produce the music required for the performance. One of their number soon procured a copy of Sir Walter Scott's *Pirate*, where the words and a description of the performance is given. By the aid of this description, and the guidance of three participants of former years, they soon had it aptly practised, and in due course gave a display in the island school-room, which was kindly granted for the occasion by the governing school body. A good assemblage of people gathered to see it, and were delighted, as they had been on similar occasional gatherings of this kind. Again, owing to lack of numbers to perform it, it had lapsed until this year, 1926, when it was again exhibited before a gathering of people of the district, composed of almost every individual on the island that could be expected to appear.

CHAPTER II.

IN this chapter, a detailed description of the Sword-Dance, as was witnessed on Papa Stour in the winter of 1921-22, and in February, 1926, is given.

It will be noticeable to perceive the many subordinate points of the description which have differentiated since the early part of last century, when Sir Walter Scott and Dr. Samuel Hibbert obtained and recorded two respective versions of the drama. However, the system of the performance has not been altered, and to the average onlooker it has the appearance of an intricate process of unusual character.

Seven young men representing the Seven Champions of Christendom, accompanied by an eighth person—the violinist—are the personae in the Sword-Dance, and are as follows:—

The violinist, or “minstrel man,” St. George of England, St. James of Spain, St. Dennis of France, St. David of Wales, St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Anthony of Italy, and St. Andrew of Scotland.

The costume of the above named Champions consist of the following: Each knight, or Champion, throws off his coat and vest prior to entering the apartment where the performance is to be displayed. Over each knight's shirt is worn a broad brilliantly coloured sash (the respective sashes being of different shades) which passes over the right shoulder, the ends being pinned in the form of a bow at his waist on the left side. St. George wears, in addition, a blue knot on his breast. Each Champion carries a sword at his side, rudely composed of a piece of iron hooping of about 3ft. 2ins. in length, and an inch in width.

Supposing the audience to be seated, a large space is left vacant in the centre of the room for the dancers. The violinist enters and seats himself preparatory to supplying the music for the performance. St. George enters, followed by St. James, St. Dennis and the others in their respective order, each knight's sword being carried at his side. St. George's followers retire to

a side, while he steps forward, bows to the assembled audience, and then commences to deliver the following recitation in bold, emphatic accents:—

Brave gentles all, within this boor,¹
If ye delight in any sport,
Come, see me dance upon this floor,
Which to you all shall yield comfort;
Then shall I dance in such a sort,
As possible I may or can;
You, minstrel man (*addressing the violinist*) play me
a porte,²

That I on this floor may prove a man.

(*The “minstrel man” plays a few bars of music, called in Papa Stour the “Trip,” presumably an old Norn air, whereupon St. George dances a few steps, and then goes on to describe, in an ostentatious manner, his war-like feats, in the following verses*):

Now have I danced with heart and hand,
Brave gentles all, as you may see,
For I've been tried in many a land
As yet the truth can testify;
In England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy and
Spain,

Have I been tried with that good sword of steel;
(*Draws and brandishes his sword*)

Yet I deny that ever a man did make me yield,
For in my body there is strength,
As by my manhood may be seen;
And I with that good sword of length

(*He again brandishes his weapon*)
Have oftentimes in perils been;
And over Champions I was king (*denoting his followers*);

And by the strength of this right hand (*extends his right hand*)

Once in a day I killed fifteen,
And left them dead upon the land.

(*Here St. George briefly pauses, and then in a slightly lowered tone of voice, he addresses the audience thus*):—

Although my strength makes you abased,
Brave gentles all, be not afraid,
For here are six Champions (*indicating his followers*)
with me staid,
All by my manhood I have raised.

1. Bower. O.N. *bür*.

2. In Gaelic, *port* signifies a tune.

(He again turns round and commands the minstrel, as follows, to play to him):—

Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care,
But play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

(*Music playing, St. George dances*).

Since I have danced, I think it best
To call my brethren in your sight,
That I may have a little rest,
And they may dance with all their might;
With heart and hand as they are knights,
And shake their swords of steel so bright,
(*The knights clank their swords together*)
And show their main strength on this floor,
For we shall have another bout,
Before we pass out of this boor.

(He again addresses the violinist thus):—

Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care
To play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

(*Music as before, St. George again dances*).

(He then introduces his followers to the audience, indicating each, in turn, by means of his sword, when he proceeds to emphasise their respective attributions in the following couplets):

St. James of Spain, both tried and stour,¹
Thine acts are known full well indeed;
And champion Dennis, a French knight,
Who stout and bold is to be seen;
And David, a Welshman born,
Who is come of noble blood;
And Patrick also, who blew the horn,
An Irish knight amongst the wood;
Of Italy, brave Anthony the good;
And Andrew of Scotland, king;
St. George of England (*denoting himself*) brave indeed,
Who to the Jews wrought muckle tinte²
Away with this! Let us come to sport
Since that ye have a mind to war,
Since that ye have this bargain sought,
Come, let us fight and do not fear

1. Stour—big; O.N. *Stora*. 2. tinte—loss or damage. O.N. *tyna*, to lose.

(St. George again addresses the violinist as formerly, thus)

Therefore, brave minstrels do not care
To play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

(*Music as before. St. George dances*).

(St. George now advances to St. James of Spain and addresses him as follows:—

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,
Thine acts are known full well indeed,
Present thyself upon this floor,
Without either fear or dread;
Count not for favour nor for feid³,
Since of thine acts thou hast been sure;
Brave James of Spain, I will thee lead.

(St. George extends his right hand towards St. James, the latter grasping it and suffering himself to be led forward a few paces).

To prove thy manhood on this floor.

(*Music as before. St. James bows to the audience, draws his sword and dances a few steps*).

And Champion Dennis, a French knight,
Who stout and bold is to be seen;
Present thyself here in our sight (*St. Dennis advances*)
Thou brave French knight who bold hast been,
Since thou such valiant acts hast done.
Come let us see some of them now;
With courtesy, thou brave French knight,
Draw out thy sword of noble hue.

(St. Dennis draws out his sword, bows and dances. *Music as before*).

Brave David a bow must string
And with awe,
Set up a wand upon a stand,
And that brave David will cleave in twa.

(St. David bows, draws, and dances; *music as before*).

Here is, I think, an Irish knight
Who does not fear, or does not fright,
To prove thyself a valiant man;
As thou hast done full often bright,
Brave Patrick dance if that thou can.

(St. Patrick bows, draws, and dances; *music as before*).

3. feid—possibly feud, a quarrel.

Thou stout Italian come thou here,
 Thy name is Anthony most stout;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear (*Anthony draws*)
 And do thou fight without any doubt;
 Thy leg thou shake (*Anthony shakes his leg*),
 Thy neck thou lout (*Anthony bows his head*),
 And show some courtesy on this floor,
 For we shall have another bout
 Before we pass out of this boor.

(*Music as before; St. Anthony bows and dances*)

Thou kindly Scotsman come thou here,
 Thy name is Andrew of fair Scotland;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear

(*Andrew draws his sword*),

And fight for the King with thy right hand;
 And aye as long as thou canst stand,
 Fight for the King with all thy heart,
 And then for to confirm his band,
 Make all his enemies for to smart.

(*Music as before; St. Andrew bows and dances*).

THE SWORD-DANCE.

St. George's recital of the foregoing prologue being at an end, the music of the Sword-Dance proper commences. The champions are all standing in rank with their swords held in their right hands, and reclining on their right shoulders. St. George steps forward and taps St. James's sword with his sword, and passing down the rank taps each knight's sword in succession. This is the leader's signal for them to step out of rank, which they do, forming themselves and the master into a circle, St. James being on St. George's right hand and St. Andrew on his left. Each knight, holding his own sword in his right hand, grasps the point of his (left hand) neighbour's sword with his left.

FIG. 1.—In the manner already described, holding point and hilt, they dance twice round in a circle, after which each champion resumes his former place. FIG. 2.—St. George now lifts up his sword, which St. James, turning to the left, passes out underneath, and dances down on the outside of the circle. St. George's sword is thus extended at arms length over the heads of the champions. St. Dennis following close behind St. James, passes under the arch thus formed, and raising the point of St. James' sword over his head, he turns to the right, following St. George, who has naturally been moving downwards on the outside

of the circle. Thus, another sword has been added to the arch. St. David following close behind St. Dennis, passes under the arch. As he emerges at the upper end of the circle, he raises the point of St. Dennis' sword above his head, and turning abruptly to the left, he follows St. James. Thus, a third sword has been added to the arch. St. Patrick following close behind St. David, passing out underneath the arch, lifts the point of St. David's sword over his head, and by a corresponding movement to the right as the others, follows St. Dennis. St. Anthony following St. Patrick does likewise, turning to the left and following St. David. St. Andrew following St. Anthony, turns to the right and follows St. Patrick. St. George following St. Andrew stoops under the arch of swords, and emerging at the upper end, accordingly lifts the point of St. Andrew's sword over his head, and (this time) turns to the left and follows St. Anthony. Each knight, in turn, does likewise, and on passing out of the clew turns to alternate sides from the one in front. All through the evolutionary performance of this figure, the swords are held point and hilt. The figure described is continued for a discretionary length of time, no performer making a pause until the violinist sounds the warning by two beats behind the bridge of his violin, when the champions resume their former places in the circle.

FIG. 3.—They now step over their respective left-hand swords each champion being with his back to the circle, which posture they disentangle by raising their right-hand swords simultaneously over their heads, and turning sharply on their heels, thus facing the circle again. They dance twice round in a circle.

FIG. 4.—The leader (St. George), now dances down the midst of the circle, and passes under the sword opposite (that between St. David and St. Patrick), which he steps over backwards. St. James passing under the same sword does likewise, then St. Andrew does the same; then St. Dennis, and lastly, St. Anthony, while St. David and St. Patrick extricate themselves by raising the sword betwixt them over their heads and turning sharply round.

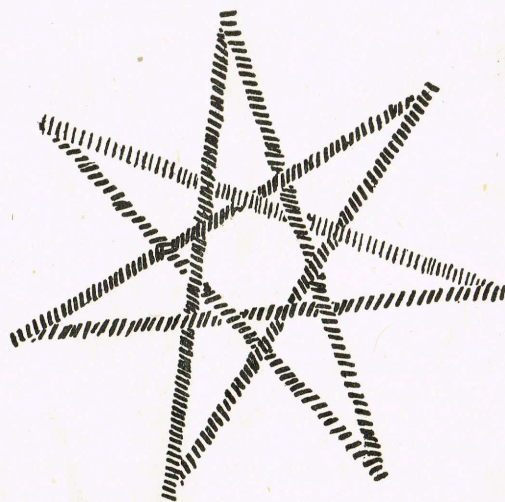
FIG. 5.—A repetition of Fig. 2.

FIG. 6.—Again having resumed their former places in response to the "warning note," each knight steps over his left hand sword, thus being again with his back to the circle. In this posture they dance round in circuit until St. George calls *Loose*, when each knight immediately responds by passing under his right hand sword and consequently faces the circle again.

FIG. 7.—At this stage it may be mentioned that hitherto the swords have been held, point and hilt, without any one letting go

for a moment. In this figure St. Andrew lays down his sword, and St. George passes out under St. David's sword. He turns to the left, lifting his own sword over his head, which St. James, following close behind, passes under and turns to the right. Each champion following in proximity to the one in front, turns to alternate sides and passes up the right or left, on the outside of the circle. This figure is a counter-evolutionary series of movements to Figs. 2 and 5, and is performed for any desired length of time until the warning is sounded.

FIG. 8.—St. Andrew again picks up his sword. Each knight lets go the point of his neighbour's sword, and turns abruptly to the right with his back to the circle. He then grasps the point of his left hand neighbour's sword. St. George instead of holding the point of St. Andrew's sword is now holding the point of St. James's, and in like manner the rest. They all simultaneously turn sharply round to the left, at the same time lifting their right hand swords over their heads. This movement places the hilt of each knight's own sword over the point of his neighbour's sword (held in the left hand). By pressing the swords gradually and simultaneously towards the centre, and interlacing one sword with the other, they form a shape resembling a seven pointed star, as is illustrated in the accompanying diagram reproduced below.



This is known as the shield, and is made so compact that each champion, in turn, dances round with it held aloft by two points; the remaining champions forming a circle round him, by holding each other's hands, and dancing round. When each knight has danced with the shield above his head, the last to do so throws the shield forcibly to the floor, which cause the swords to jump apart. Each knight picks up his sword and falls into rank. The music ceases, and St. George steps forward, and in measured clear toned sentences delivers the following epilogue:—

Mars doth rule, he bends his brows,
He makes us all aghast;
After the few hours that we stay here,
Venus shall rule at last.
Farewell, farewell, brave gentles all,
That herein do remain;
We wish you health and happiness
Till we return again.

(Exeunt).

CHAPTER III.

THE fact that the personae involved in this drama, personating the Seven Champions of Christendom with no representative for Scandinavia, and the words of the recitation being English and not Norse, seems to belie the statement that the Sword-Dance is a survival of the Norse occupation of the Shetland Isles.

Presumably, the original characters in the Sword-Dance may have been the pagan gods of the Northmen such as Odin, Thor, etc., or the Northern Saints, as St. Olaf, St. Magnus, and others, the entire cast of characters being changed along with the words of the prologue at the time of the Reformation, or perhaps earlier. There is little doubt but what the dance itself has been an old custom indulged in by a fighting people.

Sir Walter Scott, in his novel *The Pirate*, Note VII., says that Olaus Magnus "seems to have considered" the Sword-Dance "as peculiar to the Norwegians, from whom it may have passed to the Orkney-men and Zetlanders, with other northern customs." Sir Walter goes on to quote Olaus Magnus' description of the Swedish sword-dance as follows:—

"Of their Dancing in Arms."

"Moreover, the northern Goths and Swedes had another sport to exercise youth withal, that they will dance and skip amongst naked swords and dangerous weapons; and this they will do after the manner of masters of defence, as they are taught from their youth by skilful teachers, that dance before them, and sing to it. And this play is showed especially about Shrovetide, called in Italian *Macchararum*. For, before carnivals, all the youth for eight days together, holding their swords up, but within the scabbards, for three times turning about; and then they do it with their naked swords lifted up. After this, turning more moderately, taking the points and pummels one of the other, they change ranks, and place themselves in a triangular figure, and this they call *Rosam*; and presently they dissolve it by drawing back their swords and lifting them up, that upon every one's head there may be made a square Rosa, and then by a most nimbly whisking

their swords about collaterally, they quickly leap back, and end the sport, which they guide with pipes and songs, or both together; first by a more heavy, then by a more vehement, and lastly, by a most vehement dancing. But this speculation is scarce to be understood but by those who look on, how comely and decent it is, when at one word, or one commanding, the whole armed multitude is directed to fall to fight, and clergymen may exercise themselves, and mingle amongst others at this sport, because it is all guided by most wise reason."

From a comparison of the description of the Swedish sword-dance by Olaus Magnus, and that of the Sword-Dance of Papa Stour, many points of similarity are noticed, therefore we may assume that the dance still surviving in Papa Stour is, at any rate, parts of an ancient Norse amusement.

Some people think that the Church Reformation in Shetland was the cause of the suppression of many Northern customs throughout the islands, including this drama. Owing to there being no Reformed church ministers in Papa Stour at that time, the inhabitants were at liberty to keep up the old customs of their forefathers, and as a result of this freedom, the Sword-Dance had the chance of surviving here, when extinct elsewhere in the Shetland group. This is, although perhaps an unsatisfactory solution, a plausible reason why the Sword-Dance is now peculiar to Papa Stour alone.

W. F. Kirby, in a review of Mr A. W. Johnston's brochure, "The Sword-Dance, Papa Stour, Shetland, and Four Shetland Airds," says that the origin of this Sword-Dance "appears to be rather obscure." He further states that it "is evidently connected, directly or indirectly, with the English romance published by Richard Johnson, under the title of 'The Famous Historie of the Seven Champions of Christendom—St. George of England, St. Dennis of France, St. James of Spain, St. Anthony of Italy, St. Andrew of Scotland, St. Patrick of Ireland, and St. David of Wales.'"

(The chief resemblance, however, lies in the names and attributions of the champions).

"The first part was published in quarto black letter, and the earliest known copy is dated 1597, but it is supposed to be the second edition as the book was entered at Stationers' Hall in 1596.

"It would be interesting to discover whether Johnson had any traditional or legendary sources for the history of the Seven Champions themselves, as apart from the classical and medieval Italian sources, including Marco Polo, which he certainly made use of. If the story does not date back beyond Richard Johnson in 1597, it is curious that we should find it thoroughly naturalised in far-off Shetland (where it was actually taken down in writing

in 1788), and having the appearance there of an ancient ceremonial dance. . . . Except the names of the champions, however, the sword-dance shows little reference to Johnson, except that St. George speaks of "raising the champions by his manhood."—*Old Lore Miscellany*, No. 37, Vol. V., Part IV.

Sir Walter Scott informs us regarding his version of the drama, that "the manuscript from which it was copied was transcribed from from a very old one, by Mr. William Henderson, jun., of Papa Stour, in Zetland. Mr. Henderson's copy is not dated, but bears his own signature, and from various circumstances, it is known to have been written about the year 1788."—*The Pirate*, by Sir Walter Scott, Bart.

We learn from the above that an old manuscript containing the recitation and procedure of the Sword-Dance came into the possession of Mr. William Henderson, jun., of Gardie, Papa Stour, from which he made a transcription about 1788.

It is possible that had it not been for the said Mr. Henderson's interest in preserving, and eventually transcribing this MS., the Sword-Dance would undoubtedly have gradually been extinguished in Papa Stour, as elsewhere.

William Henderson, jun., mentioned above (born 1770, died 1796), was son of William Henderson of Papa Stour (who died 1799), and a descendant of Henrich Henrichson, who was Great Fowde and Lawman, in Shetland, sometime in the 16th century—see—*Zetland Family Histories*, by F. J. Grant.

Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Dr. Samuel Hibbert, and other writers of the nineteenth century, refer to the Sword-Dance of Papa Stour, which proved their interest and curiosity with regard to this antique and dramatic performance.

Sir Walter Scott, who visited Shetland in the early part of the nineteenth century, writes in his diary thus:—

"August 7th, 1814.—At Scalloway my curiosity was gratified by an account of the Sword-Dance, now almost lost, but still practised in the island of Papa, belonging to Mr. Scott. There are eight performers, seven of whom represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, who enter one by one with their swords drawn, and are presented to the eighth personage who is not named. Some rude couplets are spoken (in English, not Norse), containing a sort of panegyric upon each Champion as he is presented. They then dance a sort of cotillion, as the ladies described it, going through a number of evolutions with their swords. One of my three Mrs. Scotts readily promised to procure me the lines, the rhymes and the form of the dance. I regret much that young Mr. Scott was absent during this visit; he is described as a reader and an enthusiast in poetry. Probably I might have interested him in preserving the dance, by causing

young persons to learn it. A few years since a party of Papa men came to dance the Sword-Dance at Lerwick as a public exhibition, with great applause."

Dr. Hibbert who, also, visited Shetland in 1817 and 1819, gives the following account of the Sword-Dance in his *Description of the Shetland Islands*, published in 1822:—

"Papa Stour is the only island in the country where the ancient Norwegian amusement of the Sword-Dance has been preserved, and where it still continues in Thule, to beguile the tediousness of a long winter's evening. . . . We shall suppose Yule to be arrived, which is always announced at break of day by the fiddles striking up the *Day-Dawn*, an ancient Norwegian tune, that, being associated with gaiety and festivity, is never heard without emotions of delight. As the evening approaches, piles of turf are lighted up in the apartment where wassail is to be kept; young and old of each sex make their appearance. . . . The company then seat themselves on the forms, tubs, beds and benches, that serve the place of chairs, leaving a large space in the middle of the room for the exhibition. The fiddle strikes up a Norn melody, and at the sound of it a warrior enters in the character of St. George, or the master of the Seven Champions of Christendom, a white hempen shirt being thrown over his clothes, intended to represent the ancient shirt of mail that the Northmen wore, and a formidable looking sword being girt to his side, constructed from the iron hoop of a barrel. St. George then stalks forward and makes his bow, the music ceasing while he delivers his epilogue."

Another writer, Mr. James Wilson, states that the Sword-Dance was performed before him, by special request, in Papa Stour, on August 30th, 1841. He describes part of the evolutionary movements of the dance, as they appeared to the eyes of his friends and himself, in the following loquacious sentence:—"Of the many thousand steps which we saw danced, one of them may have been that which conducts from the sublime to the ridiculous." Throughout the performance, he tells us, the dancers "give utterance to wild, unearthly cries, or sudden shouts or screams, and such a turmoil takes place that we at one time deemed ourselves rather in Bedlam than in Papa Stour." "The exhibition," he further alludes, "was really an animating one, and not deficient in a certain wild gracefulness, in spite of the occasional prevalence of exuberant and uncouth glee."—*A Voyage Round the Coasts of Scotland and the Isles*, Edinburgh, 1842.

To-day, none of the wild whooping and hilarious mirth which the Sword-Dancers gave vent to, when Wilson witnessed the performance, is to be observed. Instead, the music given by the skilful violinist can be distinctly heard, with the steady, quiet

rhythmic beat of the dancers' feet as they keep pace with the music. This, with the variegated colouring, made by the sashes of different brilliant shades worn by the Champions, coupled with their evolutionary movements, agility, and gracefulness, makes this dance the pleasing, effective spectacle that it is.

Dr. Robert Cowie also mentions the Sword-Dance in his *Shetland*, Aberdeen, 1879. He says that "until within the last twenty years, the Sword-Dance continued to be performed during the long winter evenings in Papa Stour.

It is evidently the impression of many that the Sword-Dance has been extinct in later years on Papa Stour, surviving now only as a memory of some antique performance associated with the island. The fact that the time-to-time performance of it has never been published is entirely to blame for this ignorance of its existence. The Sword-Dance invariably holds its ground, and it is to be hoped that it will continue to be performed as frequently as possible on the island in time to come.

