WEATHER FOLK-LORE OF THE SEA.

THE following folk-lore on the weather has been collected for the most part from the fisher-folks along the north-east of Scotland. The village or villages in which the observation has been met with are recorded. Reference has been made to two works on folk weather-lore—viz., *Signal Service Notes*, No. ix; *Weather Proverbs*—prepared under the direction of Brigadier and Brevet Major-General W. B. Hazen, Chief Signal Officer of the Army, by H. H. C. Dunwoody, First Lieutenant, 4th Artillery, A. S. O. and Asst., quoted as *D.*, and *On the Popular Weather Prognostics of Scotland*, by Arthur Mitchell, A.M., M.D., member of Council of the Meteorological Society, etc., quoted as *M.*

I.—THE SUN.

A "low dawn"—*i.e.*, when the rays of the sun, before the sun comes above the horizon, illuminate the clouds only a little above the horizon—indicates foul weather (Pittulie). On the other hand, "a high dawn" indicates a fair day.¹

Daybreak is called "sky-casting" or "sky-making". If the "sky cast" pretty far towards the south, the day is not to be depended on (Pittulie); if well to the east, it is to be depended on.

When the sun rises "fiery" it is a sign of drought, when "white", "sick", or "sickly", of rain² (Pittulie,³ Macduff, Roschearty).

When it rises "white and sick", both wind and wet

¹ *D.*, p. 78, under "Low and High Dawn".

² *Ibid.*, p. 78, under "Pale Sunrise".

³ *D.*, p. 78.

follow, with the wind from the south or south-west (Rosehearty).

If the sun rises with a glaring, glassy sort of light accompanied with small glittering clouds, stormy weather is looked for that day.

If after the sun has risen for an hour and a half or two hours his rays appear to shoot down to the horizon, the wind in a short time blows from east by south or south-south-east. Such rays go by the name of "back-stays" (Findochty). In Macduff they are called "staanarts".

When the sun rises "red as blood" a gale is at hand, mostly from the south¹ (Rosehearty). When it appears red, but not very red, about "man-height" above the horizon, a fine day follows, with the wind from the south or south-west (Rosehearty).

If the sun comes up unclouded, shines brightly for a time, and then becomes hid by clouds, a common remark is, "He's p——, an gane t' bed". Such a thing is an indication of dull cloudy weather² (Pennan).

When the sun appears "sick and foul", that is, when the sun is covered with a grey or "aisy" (ashy) haze, rain follows in summer, and snow in winter (Rosehearty).

In rainy weather, if the sun sets behind heavy black clouds with "clear holes" in them, "roving", *i.e.*, unsettled, weather follows with the wind westerly.³

A black cloud rising in the west towards sunset is called "a growan-up", and is a precursor of a near burst of stormy weather (Pittulie).

A large black heavy cloud in the west when the sun is not far from the horizon is called "a bank", and is the forerunner of a strong breeze from the west. The following are the formulæ :—

"When the sin sets in a clear,
Wasterly win' ye needna fear;

¹ *D.*, p. 78.

² *D.*, p. 79, under "Sunrise".

³ *D.*, p. 76, under "Cloudy Sunset and Dark Clouds".

When the sin sets in a bank
Wasterly win' ye winna want." (Buckie.)

"If the sin set in a bank,
A westerly ween ye winna want ;
If she set clear
An easterly ween is near." (Macduff.)

A variant of the last line is :—

"An easterly ween will seen be here." (Pennan.)
"Fin the sin sets in a clear,
A wasterly win' ye needna fear ;
Fin the sin sets in a bank
A wasterly win' ye winna want." (Crovie.)

"A clear in the nor' never hairm nae man," said a Portessie man. It is a common opinion that all the bad weather "makes up" in the south-west (Portessie).

"When it thickens in the wast," said a man of Portessie, "it will be southerly winds in the firth."

Of a summer afternoon the rays of the sun stretch at times down to the horizon. The sun is then said to be "shaftit", and there is a formula :—

"A shaftit sin
That's the sign o' a staanin win'." (Crovie.)

Of a summer afternoon, when the sun is westering, there is at times a peculiar glassy-like glitter on the sea. Some fishermen say that it is an indication of coming stormy weather or of rain (Pittulie).

A halo¹ round the sun is called "a sin-bow", and is regarded as the forerunner of rain. The opening in the halo indicates the point from which the wind is to blow (Pittulie). It indicates foul weather (Roseheartly).

A mock-sun goes by the names of :—Dog (general), falcon (Buckie, Portessie), ferrick (general), sin-ferrick, sin-dog (general). The fishermen of Buckie speak of a

¹ *D.*, p. 77, under "Halo".

"falcon" hunting the sun, and say that it indicates stormy weather. The following rhymes give the folk-notion of its appearance and position with regard to the weather¹:—

"A sin before,
The gale is o'er ;
A sin behind,
The gale ye'll quickly find." (Buckie.)

"A sin afore
Ye see no more ;
A sin ahin'
Ye'll shortly fin'." (Crovie.)

"A sin before
You'll find no more ;
A sin behind
You're sure to find." (Port Errol.)

"One behind
You soon shall find ;
One before
You see no more."

"A dog afore
I'll gar you snore ;
A dog ahin'
I'll gar you fin'." (Roseheartly.)

At times the order is reversed :—

"A sin behind
Ye soon shall find ;
A sin before
Ye get no more." (Macduff.)

"A sin behind
Ye soon shall find ;
A sin before
Ye shall no more." (Footdee.)

¹ *D.*, p. 79, under "Sun-dogs". *M.*, p. 16 (7).

"A ferrick a-wast the sin,
 A sin a-wast the sea ;
 A'll clivv heuks t' nae man,
 An nae man 'ill clivv heuks t' me."

Inland, about Ordiquhill, among old folks the rhyme was :—

"A ferrick afore,
 Ayont the score ;
 A ferrick ahin'
 Ye'll shortly fin'."

II.—THE MOON.

"A Saiterday's meen
 An a Sunday's fill (same moon),
 Is never good,
 Nor never will."¹ (Pittulie.)

If the new moon is seen shortly after her incoming, unsettled weather is looked for (general).

The new moon lying on her back,² and having the points small, is looked upon as a bad moon (St. Comb's).

The new moon lying on her back is likened to a cup to hold water, which is emptied during her course. On the other hand, if the new moon stands well up, it is regarded as a sign of good weather (general).

When the new moon is "sharp i' the corners", the saying is: "She's nae a good moon." When she is blunt and round she is a good moon. There is another saying: "She's ower like a coo's horn to be good" (Rosehearty).

When she appears "stracht (straight) and fair-set" she is looked upon as a good moon (Rosehearty).

If there are heavy clouds about the time of moon-rise the fishermen watch what will follow. If the clouds disperse the weather remains good, but if the clouds remain there is foul weather at hand (Rosehearty).

¹ *D.*, p. 59.

² *D.*, p. 61, under "New Moon". *M.*, p. 16 (14).

A circle round the moon is called: A broch (general), meen-bow (Rosehearty, Broadsea), meen-ring, the rim (Nairn), the wheel, and the big wheel (Nairn).

In St. Comb's the expression is: "The bigger the bow, the nearer the weather"; and in Cove, "The bigger the ring, the nearer the breeze".¹

When there is much of a green colour in the circle it is an indication of rain; but if its colour is pale, windy weather is at hand (Cairnbulg).

If the inner edge of the circle is pretty bright in green and yellow, it is an indication of rain (Nairn).

Often there is an opening in it. It indicates the direction from which the wind is to blow (general).

The small halo that appears round the moon, somewhat like a corona goes, by the name of "Cock's Eye" (general) and "Keelan's Ee", *i.e.*, the eye of the small cod-fish. It is believed to indicate stormy weather.

III.—THE STARS.

When the stars twinkle much, or when they look near, a change of weather is looked for (Rosehearty).

When the stars in a calm, during weather without frost, begin to twinkle—"lamp"—with more brightness, wind is not far distant² (Pittulie).

When the stars are reflected very brightly in the pools left by the tide, and twinkle much—"lamp"—during frosty weather, it is regarded as an indication of a change of weather (Pittulie).

When a large star is near the moon stormy weather is looked upon as not far off (general). It goes by the name of "Madge" in Macduff, and the saying is: "Madge is ower near the meen."

In Portessie the position of the star is taken into account,

¹ *D.*, p. 60, under "Halo", and p. 61, under "Moon Halo". *M.*, p. 16 (6).

² *D.*, p. 73, under "Flickering," and p. 74, under "Twinkling".

whether "afore" or "ahin" the moon. If before the moon, *i.e.*, to the west, stormy weather follows; but if behind or to the east, fair weather; and one speaks of the "ship tow in the boat", and the "boat tow in the ship".

Shooting stars, "sheetin or fa'in starns", indicate the direction to which the wind will blow (Roseheartly).

IV.—THE RAINBOW.

"A rainbow in the morning
Bids the sailor take warning;
A rainbow at night
Is the shepherd's delight."

"A rainbow in the morning,
Sailors take warning;
A rainbow at night
Is the sailor's delight."¹ (General.)

A piece of a rainbow on the horizon is called Bleerie (Macduff). Bleeze, *i.e.*, blaze (Macduff). Bonnie thing (Macduff). Fire (Buckie). Fiery Ee (Macduff). Fiery teeth, *i.e.*, tooth (Macduff). Giltin (St. Comb's). Rawnie, *i.e.*, small roe (Macduff). Rose (Nairn). Silk-napkin (Crovie). Teeth, *i.e.*, tooth (general).

Robbie Buchan—this name was applied by an old fisherman of Broadsea, near Fraserburgh. He died about fifteen years ago, at the age of eighty. This seems, however, a mere fancy name.

Its appearance is looked upon as forecasting unsettled or "royit" weather, particularly if it is behind the sun (general).

The fishermen of Macduff believe that a breeze will blow in a short time from the quarter in which it appears. Thus they say: "There's arawn (roe) roastin' i' the nor'-wast; we'll hae a breeze shortly."²

If a "rose" appears in the south-east with a flood tide, *i.e.*, a flowing tide, and the wind blowing from south-west,

¹ *D.*, p. 71, under "Night and Morning Rainbow". *M.*, p. 16 (8).

² *M.*, p. 16 (13).

the wind shortly blows from S.E. If the tide is ebbing the wind will blow from north-west, with rain (Naim).

V.—THE AURORA BOREALIS.

The Aurora Borealis is called Dancers, Merry Dancers, Northern Lights—*i.e.*, Lights and Streamers.

If the Aurora appears during spring, some fishermen (Macduff) observe that soon after the wind blows "into it", that is, from the opposite quarter. When it appears in autumn the wind blows from the quarter in which it makes its appearance.¹

The Aurora is the forerunner of southerly winds (Rosehearty).

If it remains pretty low on the northern horizon, it indicates no change of weather, but, in the opinion of some, with the wind from the north. If it rises high, and passes "the line", *i.e.*, the zenith (Pittulie), or "the crap o' the air", towards the south-west, stormy weather follows (Pittulie, St. Comb's), with wind from the south according to some.

If the sky is dark below the Aurora, some fishermen assert that southerly winds are at hand.

VI.—LIGHTNING.

Lightning at night without thunder is commonly called "fire flaucht", and is looked upon as the precursor of windy weather (general), "flauchty weather" (Pittulie). About the month of September it indicates a westerly breeze, and within no long time after its appearance. Thus if it appears early in the evening the breeze springs up by morning.²

VII.—THUNDER.

Thunder in the forenoon is said to be followed by a breeze from the north or north-east. Thunder in the afternoon is followed by fine warm weather (Rosehearty).

¹ *M.*, p. 16 (9).

² *M.*, p. 16 (11).

VIII.—THE SKY.

"A strong sky" is when great clouds—cumulus—rise along the horizon. The sky is then said "to be growin", and a breeze is looked upon as at hand. The clouds themselves go by the name of "a growan up" (Pittulie).

"A greasy sky" is the indication of stormy weather within a short time (general). The sky has a peculiar glitter all along the horizon, and for a few degrees above it, and is flecked with light-coloured confused clouds having the same glitter. My own observation confirms this weather-sign.

"A stiff sky" is when it is filled up with large white clouds having their edges tinged with red, and indicates unsettled weather.

Forecasts are drawn from the colour of the sky at sunrise and sunset, as the following formula shows:—

"A red sky at night
Is the sailor's delight;
A red sky in the morning
Is the sailor's good warning."¹ (Nairn.)

"An evening red and a morning grey
Are certain signs o' a bonnie day."²
(Rosehearty.)

IX.—CLOUDS.

If black clouds, shaped somewhat like a whale, and lying in one direction, appear to westward, a breeze from the west shortly follows (Pittulie).

Large blackish clouds on the southern horizon, with a few clouds or clear sky towards the north, *i.e.*, over the sea, indicate a north wind. This sign holds good chiefly in spring and summer. If the sky in the morning is overcast, with the wind from north or north-west, and if there appears on the wind a small space of blue sky,

¹ *M.*, p. 13 (3).

² *D.*, p. 44, under "Evening and Morning".

"as much as make a Hielan' man's kilt" (Dumbarton), the clouds soon disperse, and the day proves fine¹ (general).

Small clouds coming up from the horizon in the early morning are called "pack-merchants", and are looked upon as an indication of a breeze from the quarter from which the clouds rise (Pittulie).

There is a kind of cirro-stratus that stretches from a point in each horizon, always widening to the zenith. Some say the wind will in a short time blow along it from one of the ends. If it lies north and south, the wind will shortly blow from the south, according to others; whilst, according to others (Rosehearty), it will blow from either end. There is at times a break in it, which is said to indicate the quarter from which the wind will shortly blow (Rosehearty).

In Shetland it is believed that if it lies from north-east to south-west in the morning the day will prove fine, but if it lies from south-east to north-west the day will be stormy.²

It goes by various names: Horn (Macduff), Purse moo (mouth), Skull gab, Skull i' the sky (Pennan), Weather-head (Shetland), Wind-bow (Rosehearty).

The cloud called "Mare's tail" goes by the names of Goat's hair (general), Vapour (Nairn).

Such clouds are looked upon as a sure indication of stormy weather. They for the most part rise towards the south and south-west, no matter from what quarter the wind blows. The storm may not come for two or three days, "as the sin conquers the clouds". For example, as my informants (Findochty) said, if they make their appearance on Monday, then on Wednesday, or at farthest on Thursday, between 11 and 12 at night, the bad weather comes.³

¹ *D.*, p. 43, under "Blue Sky".

² Compare *D.*, p. 47, under "Salmon Clouds".

³ *M.*, p. 14 (5).

The cloud "Mare's tail", accompanied by "mackerel-back" clouds, indicates stormy weather :—

"Mackerel backs and mares' tails
Makes lofty ships carry low sails."¹

There is a particular form of the "Mare's tail" cloud called by the fishermen about Peterhead "the white mare's tail", which they look upon as the sure indication of a coming gale.

When "the sky upsets" towards the north, that is, when large masses of cloud of different hues rise towards the north, or, according to an expression sometimes used, "when rawns are roastin'", from the reddish hues in the clouds, with the wind from the south, the wind for a time overcomes the clouds; but the saying is: "There's warin' atween the north an the south, an there 'ill be nae peace till the north get the victory." The wind goes round to the north, and blows a breeze, it may be for a day or two. When it appears as a big solid mass—as some call it "a kiltin"—and, as it were, not far off, the storm is close at hand² (Rosehearty).

When a haze covers the whole sky during moonlight, so as to partially darken the moon, the saying is: "The meen's wydin'" (wading)—rain follows, or snow, if during winter (Keith, inland).

X.—MIST.

A black, wetting mist always goes off with a breeze (Rosehearty).

When mist appears on Mormond, the saying is: "Mormond hiz on's caip (cap) and rain is near at hand" (Pit-tulie), particularly if the wind blows from the south.

When mist appears on the Knock and Bin, two hills in Banffshire some miles inland, during spring and summer,

¹ *D.*, p. 45, under "Mackerel Clouds".

² *D.*, p. 42, under "Black Clouds".

with the wind blowing from the north-west, the wind commonly goes out to the north.

Mist on Troup Head, a high headland in the parish of Gamrie, Banffshire, with the wind from the south or south-east, indicates a standing wind (Macduff).

XI.—SEASONS, ETC.

A common saying is: "As lang foul, as lang fair." It is a general belief that a severe winter is followed by a fine summer.

The wind blows for three months from the same quarter from which it blows at twelve o'clock on the Rood Day. This refers to O.S. As the fisherman said: "Man may change and styles, but not seasons" (St. Comb's).

During the month of March the saying is, that however long the wind blows from the south-east the north-west pays it back (Pittulie).

If the wind does not change on Easter Sunday, "Paiss Sunday", the wind will blow for six weeks from the same quarter (Pittulie).

The first twelve days of January indicate the kind of weather for each month of the year (Pitsligo, inland).

XII.—WIND.

When a soft, warm wind blows from the south in the Moray Firth, the wind will shortly veer to the west and rise to a breeze.

In fine weather with a land wind, if the "sang o' the sea" arise and come towards the land, that is, against the wind, and if the wind "answers the sang an' goes roon t' the back o' the sang", that is, goes out to seaward after the course of the sun, fair weather follows next day. If the wind does not "answer the sang", then a breeze is at hand (Pittulie).

If the wind backs at sunrise, which the fishermen of Pittulie call "harsin the sin", a breeze follows (Pittulie).

If the wind blows from the west or north-west, and towards evening goes to the north, it is called the "wife that goes out at even", and soon springs up into a breeze (Macduff).

If the wind blows from the south-west, with blackness in the west and a bank of cloud to the east, the wind backs to the south before the blackness in the west, and rises to a breeze (Pittulie).

XIII.—FROST.

If hoar frost, or "white frost", continues for two days, it commonly ends on the third day with foul weather.

"Three white frosts all in a row
Ends either in frost or snow",

is a Kincardineshire rhyme. It is looked upon as a fore-runner of a breeze (Roseheart).

The fishermen have a saying that frost "grips doon, or conquers, the ween and the sea" (general).

XIV.—HILLS.

If distant hills are seen clearly, rain is not far off.

When the hills on the north side of the Moray Firth are seen from the south side in Banff and Aberdeenshire, a change of weather is looked for within a short time (general).

XV.—LIVING CREATURES.

The dog¹ eating grass, and the cat washing its face,² are indications of rain not far off (general, inland).

The "louper-dog" (the porpoise) plunging through the sea indicates approaching stormy weather (St. Comb's, Pittulie, etc.). It goes against the wind.

¹ *D.*, pp. 29, 30, 31, under "Cats and Dogs".

² *M.*, p. 20 (B.) (4). *Biblioteca de las Tradiciones Españolas*, vol. iv, pp. 87, 89.

When sea-birds fly high stormy weather is not far off (Portessie).

When sea-birds fly high and wheel round and round before the wind, a breeze is not far off. When the breeze comes the birds face it (Macduff).

When sea-birds fly high in circles stormy weather is at hand. When they fly to sea eastward it is a sign of settled weather (St. Comb's).

Birds flying high and wheeling round and round indicate a "changin win" (Pittulie).

If the scratt (cormorant) fly through the wind at night it is an indication of fair weather, but, if the bird fly before it, stormy weather is looked for (Macduff).

When the mawr or queet, in the early morning, utters out at sea the notes ur-r-r-r, "a fine easterly haar is comin up" (Pittulie).

When gulls fly high "in the top of the air" a northerly breeze is not far off (Macduff).

If ducks dart through the pond they are swimming in and flap their wings, it is looked upon as indicating a coming breeze (Keith, inland). When doing so, they are said to be "leukin for ween."¹

When swallows fly low stormy weather is at hand.²

A larger number of midges than ordinary is an indication of rain.

When herring rise and swim in shoals on the surface, which some fishermen (Macduff) call "brushin", the saying is: "The herrin's brushin; they'll get a gale i' their tail."

When mackerel rise to the surface and rush through the water flapping their tails, a breeze is approaching (Pittulie, Rosehearty).

If salmon are seen leaping in numbers a breeze is approaching (Macduff).

When the "saithe"—the young of the cod-fish—comes to the surface in shoals, a breeze is looked for (Rosehearty).

¹ *D.*, p. 40, under "Waterfowl".

² *D.*, p. 40, under "Swallow"; *M.*, p. 20 (7).

APPENDIX.

The Milky Way is called "The White Strip" (Nairn).

John Stro is the name of the "Man in the Moon". He is the Jew that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day in the Wilderness, and was stoned to death (Keith); and he is spoken of as "the man wi' the birn o' sticks on 's back".

The three stars of Orion's Belt bear the name of "The Lady's Elvan" (ell-wand); and the Hyades that of "The Sawen Starns" (Keith).

Venus, as the Morning Star, is called "The Star of Bethlehem" (Nairn).

WALTER GREGOR.