

to questions of man's response to his environment."

At the same time, there are many cultural and non-environmental factors which colour man's response to his environment — factors which this book reflects more fully for the Lowlands than for the Highlands or Islands.

Scottish Country Life has a pioneering flavour — exciting and stimulating. It cuts a swathe through the fundamental activities of rural Scotland and successfully traces a good deal of change in tools, techniques and ways of life.

In doing so, it adds a further dimension to our knowledge of man in Scotland and serves as a useful and timely introduction to the identification of ethnologically distinctive cultures within Scotland — an essential first step to knowing ourselves and to setting Scottish or British material against evidence from Northern Europe, Scandinavia and further afield.

"A Proper Wooer"

Fischer Heinesen

Islanders have strange customs.

On the northwestern side of the Faroese island of Kallsoy there is a place called the wooer's stone. By the stone there is a sheer drop of about 500 metres down to the sea.

In order to be called a proper wooer, a young man should stand on the very edge of the wooer's stone, so far out that only his heels were on the stone. Another man should, standing at a safe distance from the edge, check that the wooer was standing straight up and not leaning back. Having performed this feat the young man was called "a proper wooer".

In the Faroes it was the cliff climbers only who settled the

judgement “a proper wooer”. Whether or not the wooer was refused if he did not stand the test, the story does not tell.

If we travel some 275 nautical miles south from the wooer’s stone on Kallsoy, we come to the wooer’s stone on St Kilda, situated in a very similar position. What do we see there but a young man and a young woman climbing up the rocks! They stop, and a moment later the young man continues by himself — to the wooer’s stone. There he slowly proceeds to the edge of the stone until he is standing on the very edge, on his left heel only. He then stretches his right leg out, and then his left hand above the right leg and his right hand above his left leg. The girl watches this procedure with her hands clasped in prayer, trembling and crying. At last the ordeal is over — we have seen a proper wooer and we can breathe again.

The story of the Kallsoy wooer’s stone was told to me by a man called Poul Osterø, born in the early 1920’s in Mikladal on Kallsoy, very near the wooer’s stone — and himself “a proper wooer”. The story was told on a voyage from Klakksvik in the Faroes to Aberdeen, where we arrived on Christmas Day 1969. The St Kilda wooer I saw on a film shown at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh a few days later. Much of the scenery in the St Kilda film could equally well have been from the Faroes, but when the St Kildans climbed the cliffs they were barefooted while the Faroese wore thick woollen socks when climbing.