

long slender filaments from off a piece of moss-fir. He was employed in preparing these ligneous fibres for the manufacture of a primitive kind of cordage, in large use among the fishermen, and which possessed a strength and flexibility that could scarce have been expected from materials of such venerable age and rigidity as the roots and trunks of ancient trees, that had been locked up in the peat-mosses of the district for mayhap a thousand years. Like the ordinary cordage of the rope-maker, it consisted of three strands, and was employed for haulers, the cork-bauks of herring nets, and the lacing of sails. Most of the sails themselves were made, not of canvass, but of a woollen stuff, the thread of which, greatly harder and stouter than that of common plaid, had been spun on the distaff and spindle. As hemp and flax must have been as rare commodities of old in the western Highlands, and the Hebrides generally, as they both were thirty years ago in Gairloch, whereas moss-fir must have been abundant, and sheep, however coarse their fleeces, common enough, it seems not improbable that the old Highland fleets that fought in the "Battle of the Bloody Bay," or that, in troublous times, when Donald quarrelled with the king, ravaged the coasts of Arran and Ayrshire, may have been equipped with similar sails and cordage. Scott describes the fleet of the "Lord of the Isles," in the days of the Bruce, as consisting of "proud galleys," "streamered with silk and tricked with gold." I suspect he would have approved himself a truer antiquary, though, mayhap, worse poet, had he described it as composed of very rude carvels, caulked with moss, furnished with sails of dun-colored woollen stuff still redolent of the oil, and rigged out with brown cordage formed of the twisted fibres of moss-fir. The distaff and spindle was still, as I have said, in extensive use in the district. In a scattered village in the neighborhood of our barrack, in which all the adult females were ceaselessly engaged in the manufacture of yarn, there was not a single spinning-wheel. Nor, though all its cottages had their little pieces of tillage, did it boast its horse or plow. The cottars turned up the soil with the old Highland implement, the *cass chrom* ;