

NUMBER III.

PARISH OF LATHERON.

(COUNTY AND PRESBYTERY OF CAITHNESS.—SYNOD OF
CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND).

By the Rev. Mr ROBERT GUN, Minister.

Name, Erection, and Extent.

THE antient name is LOINN, derived from *Luidhoin*, which signifies, in the Erse, or Gaelic, *lodged or bedded bear*, because the lands contiguous to the church are of a good quality, and yield excellent bear. The modern or English name is *Latheron*.—The parish was formerly divided into two parishes at least, if not more. In the title-deeds of Borg, a part of the estate of Dunbeath, it is designed the town and lands of Nether Borg, lying in the parish of Dunbeath, and shire of Inverness*.—The parish is 27 miles in length along the sea coast, and from 10 to 15 miles in breadth in different parts.

Roads.—The principal, or only proper road from the south to Caithness and Orkney, along the Ord of Caithness, which

* In the history of the wars in Scotland, there is mention made, that, in consequence of some dissensions between the Earls of SUTHERLAND and CAITHNESS, the former sent 200 men into Caithness in February 1588, who over-ran the parishes of Dunbeath and Latheron in a hostile manner.

which divides Caithness from Sutherland, passes through this parish. This road, when it comes within a mile of the minister's house, divides itself into two roads, the one passing along the sea-side to Wick, and the other crossing the country by the Caufaymire towards Thurso.

Surface, Hills, Sea Coast, Soil, &c.—The appearance of the parish is diversified, partly flat and partly hilly, or mountainous.—The coast is bold and rocky, rising perpendicular, in many parts 100 yards and upwards, above the level of the sea.—There are immense tracts of moss and muir ground.—There are three large hills or mountains (besides many smaller ones), *Morvine*, *Scarabine*, and *Maiden-Pop*. The top of *Morvine* is supposed to be more than a mile above the level of the sea. With a clear sky, one will see from it a part of 10 or 12 different shires. There is a fine spring near the top of it.—The coast is intersected by several straths, on waters running from the hilly part of the parish towards the sea. The straths are surrounded with hills or high lands, which are covered with heath or pasture, interspersed with a little brushwood. The soil in general is sharp, in some parts a strong rich clay, in others inclining to *grit*, or gravel, but in most parts interspersed with masses of detached rocks, and loose stones, the naked rock appearing often in the arable lands. The cultivated lands are generally shallow, yet productive of pretty heavy crops. What is not cultivated has in general a poor appearance, excepting the pasture and woodlands in the different straths.

Climate, Diseases, and Longevity.—The climate in general is dry and healthy.—The most prevalent diseases are fevers, fluxes, and rheumatisms. Fluxes were very prevalent among the common people in 1782 and 1783, owing, it is supposed,
to

to the unfavourable seasons, and the corns being damaged. Why rheumatisms are much more frequent among the country people now than formerly, no other causes can be assigned, than the immoderate use of spirituous liquors, and that they now wear linen next their skin, instead of a coarse kind of woollen stuff of their own making, which they formerly used to wear. Several have died lately about 90 years of age; one man in particular, HENRY CHRISTIAN in Lybster, died in 1786, who could not be less than from 110 to 120 years of age, by his own account. He was considered as an old man in the infancy of the oldest people alive in his neighbourhood.

Mineral Springs, Rivers, Lakes, &c.—There are many springs in the parish slightly impregnated with iron, though none of any great importance.—There are three small rivers, *Dunbeath, Langwall, and Berrindale*. The two last join within 100 yards of the sea. In these rivers are caught salmon and trouts.—There are two small lakes, *Ranga and Stempster*, where trouts and eels are found. In the side of the former, there are the ruins of a small fortification, and contiguous to the latter, the remains of a Druidical temple, and the arch-druid's house.

Fisheries.—There are no fewer than 20 different species of fish caught on this coast. Besides the various kinds of fish consumed by the inhabitants, such as turbot, skate, haddocks, whittings, cuddings, sellags, dog-fish, mackerels, flounders, &c. there are three fishings carried on for exportation, the cod and ling, the herring, and the lobster. The cod fishing has been carried on for many years. The stations are *Dunbeath, Toise, and Clyth*. The herring fishing was only attempted within these four years, and promises to be successful.

ful. The stations are Dunbeath and Clyth. It is commonly about the beginning or middle of July, before they appear in such shoals as to induce the fishermen to shoot their nets. This fishing continues to the beginning, or even the middle of September. The lobster fishing only commenced last spring, (1792), and such numbers do they catch, that many of them die before the smacks take them away, the chests being so full. The stations are Dunbeath and Lybster. Two English companies have sent boats and crews to fish this season. The inhabitants propose to carry on the lobster fishing against next season. These companies have a concern in the cod and herring fisheries. There are from 40 to 50 boats of different sizes in the parish.

Proposed Harbours, &c.—In order to improve the fisheries on this coast, nothing would be of greater importance than having two or three good harbours. Dunbeath and Lybster seem to be the places best calculated for this purpose. Something might also be done at Clyth and Berrindale, at a moderate expence. It would likewise be of advantage to get some fishermen to settle from other parts, and to have the present fishers confined to a house and garden, instead of labouring small tacks, as they do at present, which makes the fishing but a secondary consideration with them.

Population.—As the records have not been regularly kept, the antient state of the population cannot be precisely ascertained. This much, however, is pretty certain, that there are nearly double the number of inhabitants now, that there were about 70 years ago, when Mr Andrew Sutherland, the then incumbent, obtained an augmentation to his living.

POPULA-

POPULATION TABLE OF THE PARISH OF LATHERON.

Number of males in 1791	-	-	1742
----- Females -----	-	-	2264
			<hr/>
Total number of Souls	-	-	4006
Ditto in 1755, as returned to Dr Webster			3675
			<hr/>
		Increase	331
Number of families	+	-	796
Average of baptisms	-	-	101
Ditto of marriages *	-	-	23
			<hr/>
Persons below 10 years of age	-	-	1042
----- between 10 and 20	-	-	645
----- 20 and 50	-	-	1744
----- 50 and 60	-	-	424
----- aged 60 and upwards	-	-	151
			<hr/>
Number of resident heritors	-	-	4006
----- non-resident ditto	-	-	4
Families of Seceders (Antiburghers)	-	-	20
Ditto of Roman Catholics	-	-	1
Number of weavers †	-	-	20
----- Shoemakers	-	-	15
----- Taylors	-	-	16
----- Wrights	-	-	4
----- Masons	-	-	7
----- Smiths	-	-	6
----- Shop-keepers	-	-	4
			<hr/>
			Number

* The number of deaths cannot be ascertained, as there are 8 different burial places in the parish.

† Most of the tradesmen have small tacks of land, in the cultivation of which a good deal of their time is taken up.

Number of Inn-keepers and whisky sellers	-	30
———— Men servants	- - -	114
———— Women ditto	- - -	223

Church.—The present incumbent was settled in September 1775. The stipend has been lately augmented, and now amounts to 1000 merks Scotch, besides 60 l. Scotch for communion elements, and 6 chalders of victual, half meal half bear. There is also a glebe consisting of 6 acres arable ground, and some grass. Both church and manse were built about 60 years ago. They were repaired soon after the present incumbent's admission. They are at present undergoing a trifling reparation.—Miss Scot of Scotstarvet is patron.—There is a missionary at present employed, between the extremities of this parish and the parish of Halkirk, who is principally supported by the people who have the benefit of hearing him.—Excepting the few families above mentioned, all the inhabitants belong to the established church.

Schools.—There is a parochial school. The master's salary is 100 merks Scotch, with 20 l. Scotch for officiating as session clerk and precentor. He has also 6 d. for every baptism, 6 d. for each certificate, and 1 s. 7 d. each for marriages.—There are 2 schools established here by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. There are 3 or 4 other schools in distant parts of the parish, supported by the inhabitants.

Poor.—The number of persons commonly on the poor's roll is from 70 to 80.—The only funds are the Sunday collections, and the fines paid by delinquents; the former is very trifling, being scarcely 3 l. Sterling. The consequence is,
that

that such of them as are able to walk about, go from door to door, not only within the bounds of the parish where they reside, but also in the neighbouring parishes. Two causes may be assigned for the collections being so small, namely, too great a disregard to public worship among those of a *superior Station*, and the poverty of the common classes, together with their being too fond of drinking whisky.

Rent.—The real rent is about 1900 l. Sterling. The valued rent, in Scotch money, is 3940 l. 14 s. 5 d.

Agriculture and Produce.—There is a good deal of grain raised in, and exported from this parish.—There are three kinds of oats, white, black, and grey, besides beans, potatoes, and pease.—Sowing of grass and turnips is only in its infancy. This is no doubt partly owing to the shortness of the leases, and partly to the want of inclosures. The seed time commences commonly about the end of March, or beginning of April, and the harvest about the beginning of September. The crops on some of the strath grounds, at a distance from the sea, are very apt to be hurt by frosts, blasting, or mildew, particularly on the Highland estate of Braemore. The inhabitants in these parts suffered very much in 1782 and 1784. The common mode of farming among the tenantry is to sow bear and oats alternately, excepting what ground they lay down with potatoes. If the land in this parish had the same justice done to it, which other parts have, by being rested, and raising green crops, there is no doubt that it would yield as luxuriant crops as most parts of Scotland. But the cattle being small, little is done by the plough. They go four a-breast, and the driver goes backward, with his face to the ploughman and the cattle.

Cattle, &c.—In the Highland part of the parish the cattle are small and hardy; there is much room for the improvement of them. The sheep and horses are also of a small kind, excepting Sir JOHN SINCLAIR's flock at Langwall.

Number of black cattle in the parish	-	-	-	-	4055
————— Sheep, exclusive of Sir JOHN SINCLAIR's flock	-	-	-	-	2555
————— Sir JOHN SINCLAIR's flock of Cheviot sheep					2200
————— Houses	-	-	-	-	1492
————— Ploughs	-	-	-	-	343
————— Carts	-	-	-	-	45

Prices of Labour and Provisions.—These two articles are greatly increased of late years. A day-labourer gets from 8 d. to 1 s. a day; women 4 d. and 5 d. Men servants from 3 l. to 4 l. besides 6 bolls of meal, or their maintenance in the house; women servants, besides maintenance, receive from 30 s. to 40 s. a year.—Pork and mutton sell commonly at 3 d. the pound, and even beef in some seasons of the year. There is no market in the parish, nor any one nearer than 20 or 30 miles. The gentlemen, for the most part, must therefore kill for their own use.

Services.—It were greatly to be wished that services were entirely abolished, as they are much against industry and improvement. However, according to the present mode of farming, some sort of services may be absolutely necessary. Although unlimited services are wearing out by degrees, yet they are still continued in sundry respects, which is both slavish and detrimental to the tenants. They have a tendency to hurt their morals, as well as to hinder industry and improvement.

Antiquities.

Antiquities.—There are several old castles along this coast, at *Berrindale**, *Dunbeath*, (still inhabited), *Knackinnon*. *Latheron*,

* According to tradition, WILLIAM SUTHERLAND was the last who possessed the castle of Berrindale. He was called WILLIAM MORE MACKEHIN, *i. e.* Big WILLIAM, the son of HECTOR, implying that he was of a gigantic size. He went to Orkney with one of the Earls of CAITHNESS, and was killed in a skirmish there. Before he set out on this expedition, it is said he was prepossessed with the opinion, that he never would return to his native country. He lay down on the ground above Berrindale inn, contiguous to the burial place, and caused the length of his body to be cut out in the form of a grave, which to this day retains the name of the long grave, and measures about 9 feet 5 inches.

The following Memoir respecting the gigantic WILLIAM, grandson to HECTOR MORE of LANGWELL, has been communicated by another hand.

About the end of the 15th century, HECTOR SUTHERLAND, commonly called HECTOR MORE, or *Meikle Hector*, was proprietor of the estate of LANGWELL. He was descended of the family of DUFFUS, and resided in a castle on the rock at the water mouth of Berrydale, the ruins of which are still visible. He built a house at Langwell, for his eldest son William, who married a beautiful woman, and resided there.—Some little time afterwards, William's wife was in child bed of her first child, and Robert Gun, tacksman of Braemore, came over the hills to Langwell, accompanied by some of his clan, on a hunting party. Robert Gun proposed to his friends, that they would pay a visit to Hector More's son, and his young wife, which they accordingly did. Robert Gun, upon seeing the woman in bed, fancied her. Upon their way home, Gun declared to his companions, that he would have William Sutherland's wife to himself, and that the only means by which he could accomplish his design, was to take away her husband's life. His friends, whose consciences were not more strait laced than his own, having approved of his intention, they accompanied him the next day over the hills, and lay in ambush in the woods near William Sutherland's house, until they observed him come out to his garden,

theron, Forfs, Swinzee, and Clyth. These were places of strength in the days of rapine and violence. Most of these castles

garden, when Robert Gun shot him with an arrow from his bow.—They went immediately into his house, took his wife out of bed, and carried her and her infant child in a large basket they had prepared for that purpose, to Braemore, where Gun resided. How soon the mother recovered, she was reconciled to Robert Gun, notwithstanding of his murdering her husband. She begged of him to call her infant son William, after his deceased father, though she knew, had her husband been alive, he would have named him HECTOR, after his own father Hector More. Robert Gun held the lands of Braemore of the Earl of Caithness in tack, but he would pay no rent to his Lordship. After being much in arrears to the Earl, his Lordship sent John Sinclair of Stircock, with a party of men under arms, to compel Gun to make payment; but Gun convened his clan, and they defeated John Sinclair with his party. Several were killed, and John Sinclair was wounded in the engagement. This shews that Robert Gun was both a *tyrant* and an *usurper*. Young William's mother lived the remainder of her life with Robert Gun, and had two sons by him.—After these sons had arrived at maturity, young William and they went one day a hunting; and William, being more successful than the other two, killed a roe, which he desired his two brothers to carry home. They objected to this drudgery, and said that he might carry home his own prey himself. But William, who by this time had heard of his father's tragical end, told them, with a menacing aspect, that, if they would not carry home the roe, he would revenge some of their father's actions upon them, which intimidated them greatly, (though they were ignorant of the cause of his threatening), as they knew he had more personal strength than them both, he being then about 9 feet high, and stout in proportion; they accordingly carried home the roe, and told their mother that William had threatened them in such a manner. She communicated this circumstance to their father Robert Gun, adding, that she suspected William had heard of his father's death. Robert Gun being afraid of young William's personal strength, wished to be in friendship with him, and proposed that he should marry his (Gun's) sister, who resided with them in the character of a house-keeper. William did not relish the match, and would not accept of her. Soon afterwards Robert Gun made a feast at his house, where he collected

castles stood on a high rock above the sea, and cut off from the land by a deep ditch with a draw-bridge. Part of the walls

lected several of his friends, and by some means or other got young William so much intoxicated, that he was carried to bed, and Robert Gun put his sister to bed with him.—When William awakened next morning, he was surprised to find Gun's sister in bed with him.—She told him, he might recollect that the ceremonies of marriage past betwixt them the preceding evening, and that she was now his lawful spouse. He got up in a passion, and declared that he was imposed upon, and that he would hold no such bargain.

Robert Gun flattered him, and said, that as he was now married to his sister, he would make the match as agreeable to him as possible, by putting him in possession of the estate of Langwell; and, in order to accomplish his promise, he, with a few of his connections, concealed themselves near Hector More's castle on the said rock, until early in the morning when the draw-bridge was let down, they forced their way into the castle, and carried Hector More (who was then an old feeble man) out of his castle, and left him in a cot-house in the neighbourhood, where he remained for some little time, and afterwards went to Sutherland, and passed the remainder of his days with one of his relations, Sutherland of Rearchar.

Robert Gun then returned in triumph to Braemore, and conducted William Sutherland and his espoused wife to the said castle, and gave them also possession of the estate of Langwell.—William being very much dissatisfied with Robert Gun's conduct, and not liking the company of his sister as a spouse, went and complained of his grievances to the Earl of Caithness, who promised him redress as soon as he returned from the Orkneys, where he was going to quell a rebellion, along with the Baron of Roslin, and wished that he, (William) being a very stout man, would accompany him. William consented to do so; and returned to Berrydale to bid his friends farewell before he would go on so dangerous an expedition. Just as he was parting with them at the burial ground on the Breas, on the east side of the water of Berrydale, he told his friends that he suspected he never would return from Orkney; he then laid himself down on the heath near the said burial ground, and desired his companions to fix two stones in the ground, the one at his head, and the other at his feet, in order to shew to posterity his uncommon stature; which stones remain there still, and the exact

walls of the old castle at *Achafstal* still remains entire *, and human bones are occasionally found in the ruins.—There are also the remains of many pictish castles to be found interspersed throughout this parish, and likewise several artificial cairns, some of a square form, others circular. They are now covered with grass or heath. Some of them are so high within,

exact distance between them is 9 feet 5 inches. Tradition also mentions his height to have been above 9 feet. He went with Lord Caithness, &c. to the Orkneys, where he, as well as the Earl and his son, were killed. This happened in the year 1530. The cause of the said rebellion was this:—In the year 1530, King James V. granted the islands of Orkney to his natural brother James Earl of Murray, and his heirs-male. The inhabitants took umbrage that an over-lord should be interposed between them and the sovereign, and rose in arms under the command of Sir James Sinclair of Sandy. Lord Sinclair Baron of Roslin, and ——— Sinclair Earl of Caithness, were sent with a party of men to quell the rebels; but the Islanders defeated them, and the Earl with his son, and William More Sutherland, who accompanied them, were killed. The Caithness men who survived, carried back the Earl of Caithness's head, to be interred in his Lordships burial place in Caithness.

* The old castle at Achafstal was built and possessed by John Beg, third son to the Earl of Sutherland. In those times parties of robbers or freebooters used to infest this county. A party of these came to John Beg's house, and insisted that he should pay a certain sum in name of tribute to them, otherwise they would plunder his house, and carry away his cattle. John Beg seemed very passive to them, and entertained them very sumptuously, until he got them all intoxicated, by strong ale mixed with the juice of *nightshade*, when he ordered them to be conveyed to the upper apartments of his castle. He then removed his family and furniture, and put them on board a vessel at the water mouth of Berrydale; and having collected a great quantity of straw and brush-wood into the lower part of his house, he set fire to it, which soon destroyed the robbers, and consumed all the castle, excepting a part of the walls. John Beg returned, with his family, to Sutherland. Tradition gives no account of the time in which these transactions happened.

within, that a person of an ordinary size may almost stand erect. The walls are well built, and covered with flags.

Caves, &c.—A great many caves are to be met with on this coast, some of which run up so far under ground, that none have been able to get to the end of them. They are inhabited by vast numbers of seals, many of which are killed by the inhabitants in the month of November, in their subterraneous habitations. The employment, however, is dangerous; for should the wind blow hard from the sea, these adventurers are in danger of being lost.

Advantages and Disadvantages.—This parish has several advantages. The sea coast, as has been observed, abounds with great variety of fish. The prices of labour and provisions, although increased of late years, are still reasonable in comparison of most other parts of the kingdom. As an act of Parliament has lately been obtained to convert the statute labour into money, it is to be expected that good roads and bridges, of which there is much need, will be the happy consequence. The want of harbours is a very great disadvantage. There is not a proper one from Cromarty to Orkney. And the want of proper markets for the productions of the parish is another. The shortness of leases, and the want of inclosures, are also great impediments to industry and improvements in agriculture.—There are by far too many whisky houses in the parish, which is a great incitement to the lower classes of people, to hurt their health and morals, and to consume their time and substance. The want of justices of the peace is another great disadvantage. There is only one gentleman who acts in that capacity, in this very populous and extensive parish. The consequence of this is, that the police is very much neglected. If the case were
other-

otherwise, many grievances would be redressed, and many disputes settled, without going before the sheriff-court.— There is an old practice, which still prevails in some places, and which is very detrimental to husbandry. It is commonly termed *rig and rennet*. A number of tenants have their houses perhaps close to one another. Instead of every one having his land in one place, it is scattered here and there, several tenants having different shares in one field, or a rig a piece alternately. Besides stopping the progress of improvement, wrangling and strife among neighbours, in sowing and reaping, are often the consequences. If some manufactures were established on this extensive and populous coast, they would be of great consequence to the inhabitants. If they drank more beer, and less whisky, it would contribute greatly to their happiness and comfort. These, and some other disadvantages, under which the inhabitants labour, will no doubt be remedied in due time*.

* As the boundaries between Caithness and Sutherland lie in this parish, it may not be improper to give the following account of them, as inserted in M'Farlane's Geographical Collections, (A. M. S. in the Advocates Library) vol. I p. 198, where there is a description of the parish of Latheron.

“ The hill of the Ord is that which divides Sutherland and
 “ Caithness. *The march is a small rivulet, called the Burn of the*
 “ *Ord, which takes its rise from some springs near the top of*
 “ *the hill. The south side of the hill is very steep, sloping all*
 “ *along to the top of a rock, which is many fathoms high.*
 “ *Cross the south side of this hill is the common passage to and*
 “ *from this country. The road hath not been so very dange-*
 “ *rous as at first view it would appear to the traveller, for the*
 “ *whole face of the hill to the top of the rock has been covered*
 “ *with heath, so that though a person's-foot might slip, he was*
 “ *not in great danger; but whether through moor burning, or*
 “ *some other accident, it hath happened some few years ago,*
 “ *that the heath was all burnt, and now it looks more frightful*
 “ *than formerly, but the road, by the pains of Sir James Sin-*
 “ *clair of Dunbeath, is made so broad that 3 horses can conve-*
 “ *niently*

“ niently ride it abreast. *A little to the east of the Burn of the Ord, which is the march,* there is a pleasant green moat, called the Dunglass, as high as the top of the rock. Since the heath was burnt, passengers, who observe, may see the vestiges of a ditch, digged up from the said Dun, all along the top of the rock, until it come to a burn, near the top of the Ord, called Aultnuder, a small rivulet rising from the morasses about a mile above the top of the foresaid rock. The top of the Ord is large 9 miles of bad road to the south-west of the church.”

This seems to put the matter beyond all doubt, in addition to which it may be observed, that the mountain of the Ord is expressly included in the charters of Langwell.

The people of Sutherland are ready to acknowledge that the burn of the Ord is the boundary, but some in the neighbourhood pretend, that they have acquired a servitude of common over the ground in the neighbourhood, though situated in the county of Caithness. But it seems impossible that charters, *restricted to lands in the county of Sutherland,* can be the means of acquiring even a right of common, over lands in another county, that of Caithness.

The Burn of the Ord is certainly the natural division between the two counties; and until the roads were made, the cattle and sheep of Sutherland could hardly get into Caithness at that place.

When the roads were made, it was agreed by both parties to begin at the burn of the Ord, as the point of division between the two counties.

The point was incidentally decided at the Circuit Court, when the bridge was ordered to be built over the Burn of the Ord, as being the boundary.

Within these few years, Mr Howison, who rents the kelp shores on the east coast of Sutherland, as is asserted on the authority of Mr Gordon, late of Aufdaie, quarrelled his men for going farther than the Burn of the Ord, being beyond their right and privilege.

Many old men now living can sufficiently prove the boundary in question. William Campbell, late of Aufdale, an old man above 80, knew it well.

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