

## PARISH OF PETERCULTER.

PRESBYTERY OF ABERDEEN, SYNOD OF ABERDEEN.

THE REV. JOHN STIRLING, MINISTER.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name.*—THE latter part of the name of this parish is variously written, Coulter and Culture; in the oldest register of the parish, it is uniformly rendered Culter. Some think that this word is a Gaelic compound consisting of *Cul*, the back, and *tir*, the country; *i. e.*, the back country, (the parish being situated on the north side of the river Dee.) Others account for the name by what they suppose to have been the original orthography of the parish, *viz. Petri Cultura*. When Popery was the established religion, chapels were erected on the opposite sides of the river, and dedicated to the respective Saints Mary and Peter. To these saints were consecrated not only the chapels, but also the nearest wells, the one called St Mary's, and the other St Peter's well. At a small distance from the church there is a high steep bank called Peter's Heugh.

*Extent and Topographical Appearances.*—From the east, on which it is bounded by the parishes of Banchory-Devenick and New-hills, this parish extends south-west and west nearly 7 miles. Between these extreme points, on the western boundary, it is indented by the parish of Drumoak; so that its mean length does not much exceed 5 miles. It is in several places nearly 5 miles broad, its mean breadth, however, does not exceed 4 miles. Its figure is so very irregular, that it would be difficult to compute its superficial contents. It is bounded on the south by the river Dee, with the exception of the small farm of Insch, which lies beyond the river. The surface of the parish is very rugged and uneven. It is divided by the burns of Leuchar, Culter, and Murtle, into several distinct parts, and it has numerous slopes, and hollows, rocky hills, marshy and mossy flats interspersed.

The southern division, with the exception of a small district of

flat haugh, rises in a gentle slope from the banks of the river, and contains the mansion-houses of Culter, Murtle, Binghill, Countesswells, and Bielside, with their respective grounds, gardens, and woods. The situations of these are most beautiful, and the exposure excellent. The farms in this district are in a high state of cultivation. There is almost no waste land. The soil is in general of a sandy early nature. In some places, there are fields of loam with sandy subsoil.

As we retire from the river towards the centre and back of the parish, the land becomes high, hilly, rocky, and exposed, large tracts remain waste, covered with furze, broom, heath, and moss. Considerable improvements have of late years been effected, more especially towards the west, on Upper and Nether Angustown. The soil in this western division still continues of an early, thin, sandy nature, with a bottom of gravel and rock; but on the northern back district, it partakes more of moss and clay.

*Climate, &c.*—The banks of the Dee are noted for their salubrity of air, and many places on them have of late years become favourable retreats for invalids during the summer season. In this parish the variation of climate is considerable. On the banks of the river the southern exposure, the thin, dry, sandy soil, the shelter afforded by the numerous enclosures and small plantations,—all combine in giving effect to the rays of the sun, in rendering the temperature high, the air most salubrious, and the climate remarkably genial.

In the garden of Murtle, beautifully situated in a sheltered den, the peach ripens every year in the open air, and the crops are as early here as in any part of the county.

In the higher and back districts of the parish, the reverse is the case; the situation is more bleak, the land in many places damp and marshy, the temperature low, and the climate proportionably more unfavourable; the crops are consequently later, the snow is often deeper, and frost more intense than on the river side.

On the 4th of August 1829, the river Dee (which is every season subject to great and sudden floods) was flooded to an extraordinary degree. The haughs of Mill-timber and Murtle, in this parish, (though enclosed by embankments of extent and strength sufficient for the usual rises of the river,) were covered to the depth of many feet: the soil and growing crops were seriously damaged, and great quantities of hay in cocks were floated away.\*

\* See Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's Account of the Moray Floods.

*Geology, Mineralogy, &c.*—In many places large projecting rocks, and immense blocks of irregular, hard, iron stone are to be met with on the surface. These are considered fit for nothing but for building fences. In the south-west and west divisions, granite is found, both on the surface and in quarries. In the latter division, there is a quarry of considerable extent, from which formerly stones were driven to Aberdeen. This trade is now discontinued.

In the mosses, the traces and remains of forests are met with.

*Wood, &c.*—Large tracts of the parish are under wood. The late Colonel Duff of Culter, and the late Mr Gammel of Countesswells, planted a great extent of surface on their respective estates. These plantations are very thriving, and consist chiefly of the larch and Scotch fir, to which the soil seems most congenial. Around Culter House there is a cluster of beech, chestnut, oak, ash, plane, and pine trees,—perhaps the oldest, largest, and most beautiful that is anywhere to be met with in this or in any of the neighbouring counties. One of the beeches measures round its trunk 14 feet, rises between 80 and 90 feet high, and spreads its branches 75 feet. A few of these trees have been lately cut down.

Along the avenue to Countesswells, here is likewise a double row of remarkably fine old spruce trees. In the garden of Murtle there is a line of Athenian poplars, and one of *Arbor vitæ* worthy of notice for their unusual size; being planted about thirty-five years ago. The old and large trees around the mansion-houses are principally hard-wood: the later and more extensive plantations consist chiefly of the fir tribes; the former are in general remarkably large; the latter are very thriving and promising—so it may be concluded that the soil is well adapted for both.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

*Parochial Registers.*—Regular registers of the baptisms, marriages, and deaths are kept, the earliest of which commences in the year 1674.

*Proprietors.*—The parish is now held by eight proprietors. Formerly about two-thirds of it belonged to Col. R. W. Duff of Culter. Part of the Culter estate, called Cantlaw, comprising nearly 1000 acres, is now held by the heirs of the late Mr Symmers of Culter. The remainder of this estate, (being still more than a-half of the parish,) belongs now to Mr Robert Duff, son and heir to the late Colonel R. W. Duff. The estate of Countesswells, now possessed by Mr

Andrew Gammel, contains considerably more than a-sixth part of the parish. The greatest share of the barony of Murtle, formerly belonging to the town of Aberdeen, comprised the remaining sixth part. This property has been divided into several lots or feus. That part still called Murtle has passed through several hands, and is now possessed by Mr Thurburn. The lot of Binghill belongs to Captain Kyle,—that of Bielside to Mr Corbet, and that of Oldfold to Mr Anderson; part of the farm of Miltown of Drum lies in this parish, and belongs to Mr Irvine of Drum.

*Mansion Houses.*—The mansion-houses of Culter and Countesswells are large and commodious structures. The former is a very old antiquated building; it has no date upon it, but is believed to be about 200 years old. The latter is of more modern architecture. Neither of them is inhabited by the proprietor. They are both occasionally let to families from Aberdeen. The house of Countesswells is presently occupied by Mr Hadden.

The mansion-house of Murtle, the residence of Mr Thurburn, is of modern architecture, and of considerable elegance, in the Grecian style; it stands on a commanding position, having a delightful view of the river Dee, the surrounding scenery along its banks, the more distant Grampians, including Lochnagar, &c.

On the properties of Binghill and Bielside, the present proprietors have built neat substantial country seats, at which they reside.

*Antiquities.*—The remains of the military work mentioned in the former Statistical Account of this parish are now almost entirely obliterated; a small part of the dike and ditch still remains, and forms part of the fence of an adjoining field. This work is usually called in popular tradition the Norman dikes. In the former account of the parish, its erection is attributed to the Danes or to William the Norman; but late investigations of the work have exploded this idea.\* (See Chalmers's Caledonia, Vol. i. Chap. iv. page 120.)

\* Colonel Shand, who was intimately acquainted with the fortifications of the Romans north of the firths, examined this camp in 1801, and came to the conclusion, that the profiles, and other dimensions of the ditch and ramparts are the same as those of the camps of Ury battle dikes, and the other camps in Strathmore.

This work has since been examined by Mr Irvine of Drum, Captain Henderson of the 29th Regiment, and Professor Stewart, who agree in thinking it to be a Roman camp. It is of an oblong rectangular form, 938 yards long, and 548 yards broad, comprehending an area of 46 Scotch acres. It stood on the north side of the river Dee, on the south-west corner of the parish, on a high ground of moderate elevation, opposite to several fords of the river, which, no doubt, it was intended to cover. It is supposed to have been erected by Lollius Urbicus, in one of his marches northwards.

In one of the plantations on Bingham, there is a Druid's temple enclosed with a common stone dike; and near to it there is a large tumulus, which is said to have been once the burying-place of the family of Drum, a property in a neighbouring parish, where the descendants of that family now reside.

### III.—POPULATION.

In the year 1755, the population of the parish was 755			
1793,	-	-	1002
1811,	-	-	1010
1821,	-	-	1098
1831,	males, 593;	females, 630	- 1223

The increase of the paper manufactory, to be afterwards mentioned, having attracted to it 60 work people with their families, may account in part for this small increase in population. Other local causes are likewise assignable, such as the reclaiming of waste lands, &c.

The yearly average of births for the last 7 years is about	-	90
deaths,	-	18
marriages,	-	11
Average number of persons under 15 years of age is	-	403
between 15 and 30	-	352
30 and 50	-	263
50 and 70	-	156
above 70	-	49
Number of families in the parish in 1831 was,	-	255
chiefly employed in agriculture,	-	118
in trade, manufactures, or handicraft,	-	61
inhabited houses,	-	245
uninhabited houses,	-	7

### IV.—INDUSTRY.

*Agriculture.*—Though it is impossible to estimate exactly (owing to the want of recent measurements and plans of the various estates,) the number of acres of cultivated and uncultivated surface in the parish, as well as the number under wood, yet the following statement has been prepared with considerable care, and may be taken as near the truth :

Number of acres cultivated,	-	5686 Imperial.
uncultivated,	-	2404
under wood, planted,	-	1600

*Rent.*—The rent of land varies very much from 15s. to L. 3 per Scotch acre, the average may be from L. 1 to L. 1, 15s. per Scotch acre. The average rent of grazing a full-grown ox or cow and keep during the year is about L. 6.

*Live-Stock.*—The common breed of black-cattle is a cross of the Aberdeenshire with the polled Angus and Galloway breeds.

There are no sheep, with the exception of a few of the English breeds kept for domestic use, chiefly on account of their wool.

*Husbandry.*—The system of husbandry pursued in the lower parts of the parish is a five years, and in the higher parts a seven years rotation.

The crops raised are oats, barley, hay, turnips, and potatoes. There is very little wheat raised, the soil being in general too thin. It has, however, of late years been cultivated at Murtle with success after ley.

The breadth of turnips, for which the soil is well adapted, has been increasing every year since the introduction of bone dust as a manure.

A great deal of waste land has been brought under cultivation within these last twenty years, and improvements are still making in trenching, ditching, and draining low-lying land—a considerable breadth of which is still susceptible of being reclaimed.

The leases are of nineteen years' duration; in some cases they are granted for twenty-seven years, when waste land is required to be improved during the lease.

Farm-buildings are in general substantially built of stone and lime, and belong exclusively to the proprietors, being held by the tenants on dead inventory. The cottages are neat and comfortable; and the fields are inclosed with stone fences.

*Fisheries.*—The salmon-fisheries on the Dee, since the introduction of the stake-nets at the mouth of the river, have greatly diminished in value, barely remunerating the labours of the fishermen, though formerly they yielded a considerable rent to the proprietors.

*Produce.*—The average gross amount and value of raw produce yearly raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, may be as follows :

1895 acres of oats and barley, at L. 5, 10s. per acre, imperial,	L. 10,422	10	0
949 ditto turnips and potatoes, at L. 7 per acre,	6636	0	0
948 do. hay, at L. 4 per acre,	3792	0	0
1895 do. pasture, at L. 1, 10s. per acre,	2842	10	0
Total amount,	L. 23,693	0	0

*Manufactures.*—The manufactories in the parish are three in number.

1st. On the burn of Culter, near its junction with the river Dee, is situated a snuff-manufactory, belonging to William M'Combie, Esq. of Easter Skene. It is a small low square thatched building. The internal machinery is driven by a water-wheel of

eight horse power. About three hundred weight of snuff are ground per week. The services of only one man are required.

2d. Several hundred yards farther up the burn-side is situated the large paper manufactory of Messrs Arbuthnott and M'Combie, who purchased it about two years ago. This establishment was the first of the kind in the north, being begun in 1751 on comparatively a small scale, and has ever since been in active operation. The present proprietors entered with it in 1821. They have very materially enlarged the work, and added the new improvements in their branch of manufacture, so that, in proportion to its extent, which is not exceeded in many instances in Scotland, it is not inferior to any for the same purposes. It consists of a large chaste pile of the necessary buildings, in excellen repair; its internal machinery is of the most approved modern description. The necessary movements in the machinery are produced by two large powerful water-wheels—the one placed a little above the other—and both turned by the same stream, brought from an artificial reservoir by a wooden aqueduct. The papers made at this work are browns, cartridges, and all sorts of wrapping papers, &c. It yields a large revenue to Government, and gives employment to upwards of 60 people, whose comforts are in every respect attended to, and in general they appear sensible of this. This mill is beautifully situated on a flat haugh of several acres, surrounded on the west, north-west, and north, by a very steep hill, the front of which seems to consist of the segments of different circles; the steep appears almost perpendicular; it is in some places nearly 400 feet high, and is covered with young wood. On the east and south the ground is not so high. There are large projecting rocks or crags on each side of the burn, both above and below the flat where the mill stands, at both of which places there is a bridge thrown across between the opposite rocks—the one on the old, the other on the new line of road to Aberdeen.

The reservoir contains one of the largest artificially collected bodies of water any where to be met with. It is confined in the den above the bridge by a large dike at its mouth, between its opposing rocky sides. When full, it is nearly 20 feet deep, and extends in length nearly half a mile. Above the surface of the water the braes are steep and inaccessible, (except by artificial walks,) and are covered with wood. When the burn is flooded, and the water runs over the top of the dike, the cascade down its front is beautiful. The aqueduct from this reservoir to the mill

wheel is a work of considerable extent, and deserves notice. It is composed of wood, is 700 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 2 feet deep, and is supported on stone pillars neatly built, with iron and wooden pillars between. It passes below the bridge crossing the burn, about 10 feet above its surface, and conveys a large body of water.

The beauty of the situation and scenery of this establishment is much admired. The extent of artificial works, the large pile of buildings on the left, the spacious reservoir on the right, with an occasional cascade over its dike; the aqueduct, supported in the air, with its large column of rolling water passing under the spacious bridge, with the surrounding rocks and woods,—all at this point burst upon the eye of the traveller, and present to his view a combination of the beauties of nature and the works of art in a variety and to an extent seldom if ever to be met with in so narrow a compass.

*Sd.* Nearly a mile farther up the hollow, on the burn of Leuchar, in 1831, a mill was erected for carding and spinning wool, and for manufacturing coarse woollen cloth. This establishment is increasing. It at present gives employment to 16 persons.

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Market-Town.*—Our nearest market and post-town is Aberdeen.

*Means of Communication.*—The Dee side turnpike, one of the best public roads in the north, runs through the southern district of the parish nearly four miles. The mail-coach to and from Aberdeen and the Castletown of Braemar passes daily, with one other public coach, which runs between Aberdeen and Banchory in summer. These are principally employed by visitors from Aberdeen to the various favourite residences on Dee side, more especially to Ballater, near to which place are the famous wells of Pannanich. The Skene turnpike runs through the back part of the parish about a mile. The cross accommodation roads are sufficiently good.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The parish church was built in 1779: it contains 550 sittings; is a neat substantial building, in a thorough state of repair; is situated on the bank of the river, near the middle of the southern boundary of the parish; and is very well attended. The manse is 150 years old, and has undergone considerable repairs and alterations. In 1826, an addition of two rooms was made to it, which makes it sufficiently comfortable and commodious. The offices are old and thatched, but in an ordinary state of repair. The glebe, including the garden and the stance of

manse and offices, contains the legal number of acres, along with nearly an acre of pasture. The stipend by the last augmentation in 1812 is in meal, 54 bolls, 2 firlots,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lippies; in bear, 51 bolls, 3 firlots; and in money, L. 113, 8s. 2d. All the people are of the Established Church, with the exception of five families. The average number of communicants in the Established Church is 500.

*Education.*—There are 4 schools in the parish, all of which are well attended. The parochial school is a very handsome, commodious, and expensive building, capable of containing upwards of 120 scholars, and is numerously attended. The salary is L. 28, with what annual allowance the Trustees of the late James Dick, Esq. may judge proper to allocate for this parish, and some small mortifications for the education of poor children and for teaching a Sabbath school. The amount of fees varies from L. 26 to L. 29 per annum. The branches taught are, English, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, mathematics, Latin, and Greek. In the other schools, the same branches are taught, with the exception of mathematics, Greek, and Latin. In all of them the scholars receive religious instruction on Sabbath. Small mortifications were bequeathed for the support of three Sabbath schools in this parish by the late Mr Gordon of Murtle.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—Collections at the church for the poor amount to about L. 35 per annum. The number of poor on the roll is 30, and each receives about L. 1, 10s. from the collections and interest of money.

*January 1840.*