

## PARISH OF SKENE.

PRESBYTERY OF ABERDEEN, SYNOD OF ABERDEEN.

THE REV. GEORGE MACKENZIE, MINISTER.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name.*—THE name of the parish is said to be derived from the Gaelic *sgian*, (or *skian*), "the dagger, or knife," that weapon having been used by the man who killed a wild boar which had attacked King Malcolm (Canmore) whilst hunting within the bounds of the parish, then supposed to be part of the King's forest. For which service, the same tradition says, the young Highlander, was rewarded by a grant of the whole land in the parish.\*

*Extent, &c.*—The extent of the parish is nearly 6 miles by 4. It is bounded by the parishes of Kinellar, Newhills, Peterculter, Echt, Cluny, Kemnay, and Kintore.

*Hydrography.*—The Loch of Skene is nearly three miles in circumference, situated near the west boundary of the parish. Its greatest depth does not exceed twelve feet. It is supplied by several small streams, and is the reservoir which supplies water for one of the meal mills in the parish, and for the works of Messrs Hadden and Sons (a wool manufactory) at Garlogie mills.

*Geology.*—The soil is various, from the undulating nature of the grounds in the parish; several of the ridges (although they can scarcely be called hills) rising to a considerable height, and, with two excepted, which are planted, cultivated to the tops. There are some rich and fertile fields; but few comparatively; the greater part of the land being either light or cold. The sub-soil is chiefly clay, part sand or gravel, and there is a considerable extent of moss.

There has been a great improvement, by means of plantation, since the time of the last Statistical Account. Almost every he-

\* The reward offered by the King is said to have been a hound's chase or a hawk's sight. The latter was preferred.

ritor in the parish has planted to a greater or less extent on his property. There are some fine old trees around the house of Skene, particularly a chestnut tree on the lawn, and some silver-firs in the line of the west approach to the house.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

*Land-owners.*—There are fourteen heritors in the parish. Their lands are, Skene, Easterskene, Kirkville, Leddach, Blackhills, Kinmundy, Concraig, Auchenclech, Newton, Fiddie, Easter Ord, Wester Ord, Easter Carnie, and Garlogie Mills. The original charter of the lands of Skene, granted by King Robert Bruce,\* is still preserved. But the family and name of Skene, as lairds of Skene, after long possessing the lands in the direct line, became extinct in 1827. The lands are now in the management of trustees. The Earl of Fife is heir of entail.

*Parochial Registers.*—The oldest session record begins in the year 1676, and continues to 1696; the second, from 1709 to 1714; the third, from 1720 to 1744; after which year they have been regularly kept to the present time. The register of baptisms begins in 1726, and has been carried on to the present time. The register of marriages begins in 1756, and is continued to 1793; then there is a blank of twenty years; and from 1813, it has been regularly kept. A cash-book of the distribution of the poor's funds has been kept from the year 1744; and minutes of the meetings of heritors, for the last ten years, have been regularly kept.

*Mansion-Houses.*—The House of Skene consists of two buildings united. The oldest has evidently stood for several centuries, from the style of building and strength of the walls. The date is not known. The other part of the house is comparatively modern,—the interior having been completed only a few years ago. There are some fine old paintings in the house, and an extensive library of books, upwards of 6000 volumes in ancient and modern literature, well arranged, and carefully kept.

The House of Easterskene, built by the present proprietor, William M'Combie, Esq., is a spacious modern building of the Tudor (or Elizabethan) style, surrounded by thriving young plantations and belts of wood, and commanding an extensive prospect, having the Loch of Skene and the lower range of the Grampians in the front view.

\* The expression in the charter is "confirmasse," seeming to imply that the king had renewed the grant of the lands, as formerly held.

Kirkville House, belonging to William Knowles, Esq. is of modern date, having been built within the last twenty years: it is in the cottage style.

*Antiquities.*—Besides the Druidical temples and tumuli noticed in the former Account, with the Hill of Keir, the top of which seems to have been well adapted for a watch-tower in former days, we have now to mention two Roman urns and a Roman sword, and the points of two spears, which have been lately found near the line of the Roman road, passing through the parish from the river Dee to the Don. These relics are in the possession of the proprietor of Kirkville, on whose lands they were found. Among the antiquities may also be noticed some valuable manuscripts in the library at Skene House, beautifully written previous to the invention of printing; and, not less valuable to the proprietors of the lands of Skene, the *identical skian* by which the lands were won, said to be in the possession of a relative of the family. A stone,\* bearing the inscription, “Drum stone, Harlaw, 1411,” stands on a height upon the lands of Easterskene.

### III.—POPULATION.

The population in 1801, was	1140
1811,	1297
1821,	1440
1831,	1677
1835,	1734
1841,	1846

The number of male heads of families in Established church, 236  
Average number of marriages in the year, 15—of baptisms in do. 50

### IV.—INDUSTRY.

The parish contains about 9393 imperial acres, of which are,

Arable,	6349
In woods,	1258
Uncultivated,	1240
Mosses,	267
Loch,	279
Total,	9393

### Produce.—

Grain, oats, and bear, (with potatoes),	L.10,925 0 0
Cattle, including grasses and turnips,	6,340 0 0

L.16,665 0 0

*Live-Stock.*—Number of cattle, 2200; and of horses, 230. Very few sheep are now kept in the parish, as the greater part of the moorland is either improved or planted with wood. Considerable attention is paid by farmers to improving the breed of cattle, as also to the feeding. Some of the best oxen have been

\* It is said that Mr Irvine, the laird of Drum, rested on this stone, (his men drawn up in line near by,) whilst on his march to the field of Harlaw, where he fell fighting hand to hand with M'Lean of Coll.

sent to the London market, for several years past, from the port of Aberdeen, particularly by Mr Milne at Fornet of Skene, who occupies an extensive farm.

*Rent.*—The rental of the whole parish is about L.6410. The average rent per acre is L.1. Valued rent, L.2500, 6s. 8d. Scots.

The length of leases is generally nineteen years.

A general improvement in agriculture has taken place since last Account; and of late, furrow-draining has been introduced, which must ameliorate the soil in several parts of the parish, where the ordinary mode of draining had little effect in preventing the injury done to the land by surface water. Most of the fields are inclosed with dry-stone fences, as there is a superabundance of material for this purpose throughout the parish. A good specimen of these inclosures presents itself to the eye of the traveller on the Skene turnpike road, upon the lands of Easterskene, where the proprietor has furnished employment to the labourer for several years past, in trenching the land, and in building dikes.

A considerable extent of waste land has been brought into cultivation (above 1000 acres) since last Account, particularly on the lands of Ord, Fiddie, Carnies, Easterskene, Leddach, Blackhills, Kinmundy, Concraig, Newton, and Auchenclech. The late proprietor of Kirkville added (by draining) two new farms, with farmsteadings, where farm had never been before, on the haughs (rather bogs) of the Leuchar Burn, on his lands of Hillcairnie. This he effected by straightening, cutting, and deepening the burn at considerable expense, part of which, of course, was borne by the heritors on the opposite side of the Leuchar.

*Manufactures.*—At Garlogie, there is a spinning manufactory\* for wool, belonging to Messrs Hadden and Sons in Aberdeen, where about 120 people, old and young, are generally employed. Steam power is occasionally added when the supply of water from the Loch of Skene falls short. Gas has been introduced of late for lighting the works in the winter season. The Company are very attentive to the comfort of the families employed at the work: they have built neat cottages for their accommodation, and give them garden ground attached, all divided and inclosed. A commodious school-house has been added, which is attended by about 50 scholars during the day, consisting of the younger children, and by nearly as many of the older children in the evening, after the work of the day is over in the mill. The school-room is also occu-

\* Part of the worsted spun at Garlogie is manufactured at Aberdeen by the same Company into carpets of excellent quality.

pied every alternate Sabbath evening as a place of worship for the families in the place, as they have not sittings in the parish church. On the other Sabbath evenings, the younger branches of the families attend for instruction in the Sabbath school, under the care of the schoolmaster of the place, with three assistants connected with the works.

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Means of Communication.*—There are two branches of turnpike-road leading to the west from Aberdeen, (which is distant only six miles from their junction at the east boundary of the parish), the one branch running nearly through the middle of the parish towards Alford and Strathdon; the other, more to the south, towards Tarland and Kincardine. A stage-coach passes by the former line, every alternate day, from Aberdeen to Alford. A mail-gig runs daily on the same line; and there is a sub-post-office near the centre of the parish. The disposable produce of this and the surrounding parishes finds a ready market in the town of Aberdeen. Coals, lime, and bone-manure are brought from Aberdeen. The commutation-roads are now kept in a much better state of repair than formerly.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The church was built in 1801; has been lately repaired by the heritors; is centrally placed for the parishioners; but is now rather small, being seated for 700, whilst there are 800 communicants; and the preceding table of the population shows an increase of 706 since the year in which the church was built. The manse was built in 1779, and contained only four rooms and two small attics; but, with an addition lately given by the heritors, without solicitation, it is now amply commodious. The glebe contains ten acres of land, part of which was brought into cultivation by the last incumbent, having been formerly pasture or grass glebe. The stipend is one of the small livings, made up to L.150 by the Exchequer. In some years it exceeds this amount, as some of the heritors pay their proportions by the fiars' prices.

There is a small Congregational chapel in the parish, seated for 200 hearers, the members\* of which belong partly to this and partly to the adjoining parishes. Their present pastor is well educated, and is an acceptable and faithful labourer among his people.

*Education.*—The parish school is centrally situated. There is an average attendance of from 80 to 90 scholars in winter, and from 40 to 50 in summer. The ordinary branches of education are

\* There are not above twelve families members within the parish.

taught, including Latin, geography and book-keeping. The salary is L.30, with an allowance of L.2 for a garden. The teacher has the benefit of the Dick Bequest, and also L.20 yearly from the funds of the late Dr Milne of Bombay, for teaching 25 poor scholars.

Since the time of the great increase of the population, there have been two private or unendowed schools set on foot by the parishioners, one in the east, and the other in the west end of the parish. The average attendance of scholars at both these schools is from 60 to 70 throughout the year. There are also two small schools taught by female teachers, attended by about 50 younger children. The school at Garlogie mills has been already noticed. There are seven Sabbath schools in the parish, well attended. These facts prove that the people generally are fully sensible of the benefits of useful and religious instruction to their children.

*Libraries.*—There is a parish library, supported by regular annual contributions of 1s. by each reader. There are now upwards of 600 volumes. There is also a library connected with the Sabbath schools, supported by an annual contribution of sixpence from each member of the society. There are now upwards of 900 small volumes entered upon the catalogue. The books are given out to the scholars by the teachers at a monthly exchange.

*Society.*—There is a Juvenile Missionary and Bible Society in the parish, which has contributed about L.12 yearly for the last three years to the Assembly's Schemes, besides giving a donation to the Aberdeen Bible Society, and Bibles and New Testaments to the poor children within the parish.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—The average number of poor on the roll is 36, besides orphan children, and others who receive occasional assistance. The ordinary poor receive from 6s. to 10s. quarterly. A few bed-ridden paupers have received from 2s. to 3s. 6d. weekly. The sources of supply are, collections in the church, L.50 in the year; interest of money, L.16; proclamation of banns and mortcloth dues, from L.2 to L.3; all of which having been found insufficient, the heritors have for several years past made up the deficiency by a voluntary contribution of from L.45 to L.60 a year. Part of the allowance to the poor on the roll is given in meal, and the rest in money.

*Inns, &c.*—There are two inns on the middle line of turnpike-road, where travellers and carriers may be comfortably accommodated. There are 6 grocers' shops within the parish, and 4 meal-mills. There are 3 blacksmiths, 6 cart and plough-wrights, and 1 mill-wright.

*Fuel.*—There is, as has already been stated, abundance of moss in the parish, so that most of the parishioners are well supplied with peats. Wood is occasionally got from thinning of the young plantations; and coals are brought from Aberdeen.

January 1843.

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## PARISH OF LEOCHEL AND CUSHNIE.

PRESBYTERY OF ALFORD, SYNOD OF ABERDEEN.

THE REV. ALEXANDER TAYLOR, MINISTER.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name.*—THE present parish of Leochel and Cushnie consists of the two old parishes of these names, with the addition, ecclesiastically, of the lands of Corse, which are civilly in the parish of Coull. In ancient documents, the following varieties of spelling are found: Loychel, Loquhell, Lochel, Lochal, Leuchell, and Leochell: Cussenin, Cusschene, Cusseny, Cuischnie, Cusney, and Cushney. The etymology of Leochel, given in the former Statistical Account, is evidently untenable. It is there derived from *Leath-Chuil*, signifying the "half of Coull." But there is no trace of the termination *oul* in any of the ancient forms of the word, and the separate and independent existence of the parish of Leochel can be established from about the year 1165, the beginning of the reign of William the Lion. A much more probable account is, that, as the parish takes its name from the burn or water of Leochel, and as this stream rises from a cleft or hollow in the Hill of Cushnie, near an eminence called Crag-Leoch, Leochel, or Leochal, is compounded of *Leoch*, the name of this crag, and *ale*, signifying a "clear stream." But perhaps the most probable derivation of all is from the Celtic *Lli*, signifying a "stream," and *uchel*, signifying "high," a character very applicable, in consequence of the elevated ground from which the Leochel descends in its course to the Don. Cussenin, the oldest form of Cushnie, seems to be derived from *Cosh*, foot, and *Fainn*, height, in composition *Coshnainn*, "the foot of the height or hill," which is exactly descriptive of the place.

*Extent and Boundaries.*—The form of the parish is irregular. The middle portion may be considered as approaching to the figure