

PARISH OF RAFFORD.

PRESBYTERY OF FORRES, SYNOD OF MORAY.

THE REV. GEORGE MACKAY, A. M., MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, Boundaries, &c.—THE origin of the name of this parish is not certainly known. It has undergone so many alterations as to defy all attempts at fixing its etymology. In a charter, granted by Pope Innocent to the Bishop of Moray, in the thirteenth century, it is styled *Ratheforde*; and in another charter of the same period, *Rathefd*. In records of subsequent dates, it is designated *Rathed*, *Rathat*, *Raffart*, *Raffort*, *Raffard*, and *Rafford*; the last of which is its present orthography. If we were to hazard a conjecture amidst so much uncertainty, we would assign an origin to the name, derived from the situation of the parish, and which is in some measure sanctioned by the high authority of Chalmers. He says,* “The hill forts in Ireland, which are called *Raths* in the Irish language, were the strengths of the ancient Irish; and those raths are similar in their site and structure to the hill forts of the ancient Britons. . The raths were placed on the summits of hills.” If, therefore, we give a Celtic origin to the name, and take into consideration the eminences around this place, adapted for strengths or keeps, we may perhaps arrive at as reasonable a conjecture as may be formed on the subject.

Extent, &c.—The length of the parish is about 8 miles; its breadth varying from 3 to 5. It is bounded on the east, by the parishes of Alves and Elgin; on the north, by Kinloss and Forres; on the west, by the river Findhorn; and on the south, by Dallas and Edenkillie. It is of a very irregular figure, and is intersected near its northern extremity by a narrow neck of the parish of Forres, which stretches for two miles into the interior; while it again encroaches on what might be supposed to be the proper boundaries of that parish, and reaches a point not farther

* Chalmers's Caledonia, Vol. i. p. 95.

than a quarter of a mile from the burgh of that name. This arbitrary division can be accounted for, in this and similar instances, only by a desire on the part of the authorities of the time, not to divide the estates of the several proprietors, but to place them, in such cases as admitted of it, under one and the same spiritual jurisdiction.

Topographical Appearances.—The face of the country is very much diversified; the lower part being of a character quite distinct from the upper; the one partaking of all the characteristics of a lowland country, while the other assumes the bolder features of Highland scenery. The centre presents the appearance of an extensive undulating valley, diversified by moorland, lochs, wood, and well cultivated fields. Whilst it possesses this variety within itself, there are points affording the most extensive views of the adjacent counties. From the towers of the Castles of Burgie and Blervie, and the intended site of a new mansion-house at Altyre, the eye embraces a range more extended than is often to be met with; comprehending the counties of Banff, Inverness, Ross, Cromarty, Sutherland, and Caithness; whilst at our feet lies our own beautiful and fertile province of Moray.

Climate.—The climate of Moray is so well known for its equal temperature and salubrity, that it is unnecessary to dwell upon the subject. It may suffice to say, that it still lays claim to those virtues which Bishop Leslie, himself a Northern, and consequently qualified to draw a comparison between it and other counties around, ascribes to it—"Regio est una, prae caeteris omnibus apud nos, amenitatem celebrata." To this, certainly, this parish forms no exception, of which the following proofs may be given. The present incumbent, at one time, paid considerable attention to the registration of deaths, and the causes and ages of decease. This record he showed to a friend then visiting him, who has a name now honoured in the first of our universities, and distinguished for his philanthropy, and acquaintance with the "annals of the poor." This gentleman was struck with the frequency of cases of extreme old age recorded, and declared that he had not met with any thing so favourable to the salubrity of the climate, except in the bills of mortality in some of the valleys of Switzerland.*

* Whether it was owing to information derived from this source, or from another, is unknown, but it so happened, that, some years ago, an application was made to the same incumbent, by persons embarking in a Tontine speculation, to furnish them with some of the best lives above seventy-five. This was done, with a special recommendation in favour of one individual, although he had attained his seventy-eighth

There were at one time three individuals under one roof, whose united ages amounted to the extraordinary number of 298 years. And at present, out of the comparatively small population of the parish, we have now, or had since the commencement of the year, twelve persons, none of whom are under eighty-two years of age, and several of whom have attained to eighty-eight; while in many of those who range between seventy and eighty, there are none of the symptoms to be met with of extreme old age.

Hydrography.—There are several lochs in the parish. The most important, and certainly the most interesting, is the Loch of the Romach, which forms a part of the southern boundary of the parish. Its extreme length is about a mile, whilst its breadth may be about one-eighth of a mile; but what it wants in space is compensated by the romantic nature of its situation. It is formed by very precipitous banks on both sides, in a district naturally wild and desolate, and lies entirely concealed till it bursts upon the view, and the visitor finds himself at once translated to a region where he may recreate himself according to his mood, either in wandering along the well-formed walks, or in pursuing his pastime of fishing for the trout, in which the loch abounds. A streamlet issues from it, which takes the name of the Back Burn, and which, afterwards increased, winds down the valley of Pluscarden, famed for its fertility and stately priory. The loch of the Blairs, or loch of the moss, also on the estate of Altyre, has been considerably enlarged by the proprietor, and, having been stocked with trout, is now rendered useful as well as ornamental to his grounds. The loch of Tulloch, on the estate of Blervie, has, on the other hand, of late years, been much reduced in size, it having been found necessary to drain it for the purpose of reclaiming a flat of moss which surrounds it. The Findhorn, we have already said, bounds the parish, and is the only river in it. That portion of it to which we have to refer, is that where its devastating power has been least felt, whilst its beauties are here principally concentrated. Being confined by lofty and precipitous rocks, it rushes through the narrow passes, boiling and tumultuous, or reposes in the dark and deep pools it has formed; while plants, and shrubs, and lofty trees crown the steep heights, and finely contrast their

year; and the minister had the satisfaction, in consequence of this person being selected, to attest for many succeeding years his firm tenure of life; while he himself was unconscious that any interest was attached to its duration beyond his own humble sphere. At length his good old friend could keep his hold no longer, and with him ended this episode in our parish history.

variegated foliage with the deep-red of the cliffs on which they grow. It is here also that this river has gained a notoriety for being the most rapid and dangerous of any in Scotland, oftentimes after rain coming down from the gorges above breast-high, and overtaking the passenger before he is aware of the danger. The burns of Altyre and Rafford partake very much of the same character. The declivities through which they pass are so rapid, and their course lies so much through deposits of gravel, that they are continually inundating the plains below with debris, which is a constant annoyance and expense to those through whose lands they run. On the 6th August 1838, the whole region of the source and course of the latter burn was visited by a water-spout, more appalling, and more destructive in its effects, than any thing ever witnessed in the memory of any one now living amongst us. Sweeping bridges in its progress, and breaking down the banks, it covered the plain below with sand and gravel to the extent of several acres, and, in some places, to the depth of four feet. By this overwhelming calamity, the glebe, then bearing a beautiful crop of wheat, was rendered useless; and, but for the liberality of the heritors, who at a great expense carried away in part, and in part trenched down the deposit, it would have been for ever lost to the cure.

Geology and Mineralogy.—The geology of the parish has, in common with the rest of the province, been lately defined in a map which accompanies “Sketches of the Geology of Moray by Patrick Duff, Esq.” This unpretending but very able manual has appeared seasonably for the guidance of the uninitiated in that science, which is now occupying so much of the attention of the learned, and for prosecuting which this province offers so favourable a field. The parish does not differ in its formations from the surrounding district, lying either on a bed of gneiss, or of grey and red sandstone. There is one point on the burn of Altyre where these different formations are seen to unite, and which lately attracted the observation of M. Agassiz, who visited the spot. We believe that the future will open new discoveries of an important nature in this department, through the zeal and talent of Lady Gordon Cumming, who has already done much for the interests of this science; and of whom it has been well said, “that, while others may advance it by their graphic descriptions, hers has been the higher accomplishment of delineating, with unrivalled skill,

ELGIN.

Q

the fossil remains of a former world, and exhibiting them to the senses and mind in their primitive forms and colours."

Of the two quarries mentioned in the former Account, one, that of freestone, which is of a coarse gritty texture, is still wrought, and furnishes materials for common rubble work; the other, that of gray slate, though not exhausted, is now not used,—the coarse slate which it furnished, and which was at that time very commonly used in roofing, being now superseded by the imported Easdale or Ballachulish blue slate. The writer is not aware that any attempts have been made to ascertain the existence of marl in the bottom of those mosses which were formerly under water; but, if he were to conclude from corresponding indications witnessed elsewhere, he would say that it was by no means improbable, that the experiment might be followed with success. A small sum expended in boring might put within reach a manure admirably adapted to the prevailing soil of the district.

The soils are various, consisting of a deep rich clay, a light sand, a black loam on rock, moss, and the more common brown shallow mould lying on what is called "Moray coast," which is a compact stratum of upheaved attrite gravel. Of the moss land, considerable tracts have been recovered, within these thirty years. Some of these have well repaid the improvement. The writer has had, on a portion of moss thus recovered, wheat weighing 63 lbs. per bushel; and, although these moss lands are by no means equally productive, yet there can be no doubt that their recovery from water and waste tend much to the value of property, inasmuch as the draining necessary to them has served to carry off the superfluous water of the higher lands. In these mosses, large logs of oak and fir are everywhere to be found, evidently indicating that they had grown from the original soil before the moss began to be formed,—the remains of the *Sylva Caledonia* of Tacitus, and the retreat of wolves and other wild beasts before men ventured to contest the possession with them. We must not omit, in speaking of soils, a peculiarity more marked in this parish than in any place round, although not confined to it. It is that, contrary to the usual case of the heights feeding the valleys below, the deeper soils are to be met with in the lands placed at the highest elevation. This is to be seen at the Castles of Bargo and Blervie, the lands of Cluny, belonging to Lord Moray, and of Phorp, on the estate of Altyre; in each of which

the disadvantages of climate, in consequence of a high elevation, are more than compensated by the fertility of the soil. What may be still more difficult of explanation is, that, in such cases, the more fertile lands lie generally to the north, shaded from those genial influences to which we are accustomed to ascribe fertility and abundance.

Zoology.—We are not aware that any very rare animals haunt or frequent the parish. The red-deer or stag is occasionally to be seen. The roe-deer is frequently to be met with, and parties of sportsmen are sometimes formed for a battle.

We must be content to give only a few of the most remarkable birds. Of a predatory nature, we have the kite, the buzzard, the moor-harrier, the hen-harrier, the merlin, the kestrel, the sparrow-hawk, the raven, the carrion-crow, the hooded-crow, the rook, the jack-daw, and the magpie. Of owls, we have the long-eared owl, the short-eared owl, and the white owl. Of the legitimate objects of interest to sportsmen, we have the pheasant, no longer so rare as to be considered sacred; blackcock, an occasional visitant, when driven by deep snow from his alpine retreats; red grouse or moorfowl, the partridge, the golden plover, the lapwing, and the curlew. Of water-fowl, we have the wild-goose, now merely halting on their way to well known remote lochs, or passing over our heads, in regular array; the heron, which may be seen wading in pursuit of prey in solitary marshes, or flapping his way towards his social home in the Findhorn; the wild-duck, the woodcock, the water-rail, the water-hen, &c.

There is no variety of fishes beyond what is common to all small lakes or lochs, although the trout of each has its peculiar character of shape and colour. They may all be said to be remarkably delicate.

Adders are sometimes to be met with in the woods; they may, however, be said to be scarce. The largest specimens occurring are about two feet in length. They are considered venomous.

Botany.—Mr Gordon's *Collectanea for the Flora of Moray*, published in 1839, which is the most obvious source of information respecting the localities of Morayshire plants, mentions very few stations within the parish of Rafford. In the absence of other materials, the names of a few have been selected from that work; they are known to be indigenous, or found in the parish, though scarcely entitled to be called rare.

Veronica montana	Convolvulus arvensis	Erysimum Alliaria
Circaea alpina	Myrrhis odorata	Geranium sanguineum
Bromus secalinus	Adoxa moschatellina	Astragalus glycyphyllos
Borago officinalis	Chrysosplenium alternifolium	Petasites vulgaris
Primula veris	Arenaria trinervis	Sparganium natans
Solanum Dulcamara	Potentilla Fragariastrum	

The hills, moors, marshes, old woods, &c. of the parish, if accurately explored, would, undoubtedly, furnish a much longer list of plants, possessing greater interest to the botanist than those mentioned above.

The plantations are chiefly of Scotch fir, (*Pinus sylvestris*); and larch, (*Larix*); to both of which, particularly the latter, the soil seems well adapted, and both attain to a considerable size. There are larches planted by the late Sir Alexander Cumming of Altyre, now standing; the value of which, at the usual rate at which the cubic foot is sold, is about L.5; and the present Baronet, who has, for the last thirty years, been faithfully obeying the dying advice of the Scotch laird to his son,* has the satisfaction of seeing, in the large plantations of this valuable wood, formed by himself, trees of 20 inches diameter at the root, and tapering in beautiful proportion to a height of 40 feet. The oaks, of the same age, are commonly 12 inches. If, as Dr Johnson says, "that man is the greatest benefactor of his species, who makes two stalks of corn to grow where there was only one," some praise may be due to one, who, yet in his prime, has redeemed from waste, either to the culture of the plough, or the scarce less profitable appliance of planting every foot of his patrimonial inheritance. Of old wood, there are some noble specimens in the parish. In the garden of Burgie, there is a large sycamore (*Acer-Pseudo-platanus*), measuring 14 feet in girth; while the diameter of its ramification, which is equally clustering and umbrageous on every side, is fully 80 feet. Such a "monarch of the woods" is rarely to be seen. In the same place, there is an oak (*Quercus robur*), the circumference of which measures 11 feet. But perhaps the most noble specimens of former ages, are the beeches, which surround the remains of that baronial hold, as if in proud mockery of the degeneracy of the present age. Of these there are several rows; each tree, on an average, having a trunk of 10 feet, with fitting head and arms. It is cause of regret, that, when a modern house was judged necessary to be built, a site so begirt with the pomp and circumstance of former times should have been abandon-

* "Be eye sticking in a tree, Jock; it will be growing whilst you are sleeping."

ed, and one preferred which does not distinguish it from the inglorious erections of the present day.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

The parish of Rafford, at one time, comprehended part of that of Kinloss, the latter being formed, partly from Rafford, partly from Alves. In 1661, Altyre, then a distinct parish belonging to the parsonage of Dollas, was by Act of Parliament annexed to Rafford. In the days of Episcopacy, Rafford was the seat of the subchanter of Moray. Reference is made to the parish in the records of the Presbytery of Forres, which commence in 1651. Those of the parish commence in 1668; but are defective during the periods between 1709 and 1722, and between 1733 and 1738. They bear evidence of a discipline more strict than would be tolerated in this age, when all who are disaffected to the Established Church, or feel aggrieved by her discipline, can obtain privileges from Dissenting bodies. Frequent reference is made in them to charges of witchcraft, malison, and exorcism, indicating the prevalence of a superstition, which, we regret to say, is not yet wholly extirpated. The register of births commences in 1682, and is wanting from 1730 to 1738. It cannot be said that any disinclination is evinced to register the births, unless it be in a rare instance among the poorer classes, arising from a wish to evade the small fee.

Eminent Characters.—Dr Alexander Adam, for many years Rector of the High School of Edinburgh, and author of “Roman Antiquities,” “Classical Biography,” &c. was a native of this parish, and received the first rudiments of his education at the parish school. Dr Duncan Shaw, son of the well-known author of the History of the Province of Moray, was minister of the parish from 1753 to 1783. Towards the latter end of that period, he was elected to the Moderatorship of the General Assembly, and was translated to the East Church of Aberdeen, in which charge he died. He was a man of cultivated mind, and of pleasing manners, possessing in no ordinary degree the affections of the people. He published several works, which are respectable proofs of his literary research and taste, viz. “A comparative View of the several methods of promoting Religious Instruction,” 2 vols.—“the History of Gamaliel”—“the History of the Jews”—“the Centurion.”*

* Although not of eminence, yet if respect and honour, beyond the ordinary lot of men, the consequence of unblemished character and useful exertion, claim notice in a record of this kind, a place is due here to Mr George Fiddes, long the laborious and successful schoolmaster of this parish. Besides doing much for the cultivation

Land-owners.—The land-owners are, according to their valued rent, Robert Tulloch, Esq. of Burgie; Sir William G. G. Cumming of Altyre and Gordonston, Bart.; the Earl of Moray; and the Earl of Fife. The valued rent is L.2628, 4s. 11d.; the real rental about L.3784.

Antiquities.—The most remarkable piece of antiquity in the parish is the celebrated obelisk called Sweno's Stone, which stands on the property of the Earl of Moray, about half a mile eastward of the town of Forres. It has been so often described, and its origin has been the subject of so many conjectures, that nothing new can now be advanced. Warlike instruments of various kinds have been dug up in the field where it stands; but no distinct tradition exists of a battle having been fought on or near the spot. The following accurate description of the obelisk is taken from Rhynd's "Past and present State of Moray, (pages 127, 128, and 129).

"The Forres Pillar, commonly called Sweno's Stone, is situated about half a mile to the east of Forres, on the north side of the highway, and occupies the position in which, in all probability, it originally was placed. The stone steps around the base are modern, and were placed as supports to the pillar by a late Countess of Moray, Lady Anne Campbell. It has a hard sandstone 23 feet in height above ground, and said to be 12 feet more below ground. The breadth at the base is 4 feet; the thickness about 15 inches. On the south side there are five divisions, each filled up by numerous figures cut in relief.

"The first division represents a number of persons as if engaged in deep council, and holding conversation, in groups, probably the back ground representing the walls of some hall or fortification. The second division exhibits an army of horse and foot on the march, the cavalry being in the van, and at full gallop, the infantry following with spears in their hands, and shields. In the third division are appearances of a battle, both single combats, and general fighting. In one corner are several decapitated bodies lying, piled the one on the other; while at the top of this division troops are seen entering the gates of a city, or it may be besieging it. The

of the youth in the place, his school was resorted to by great numbers from Forres, many of whom have since done credit to his training by their advancement in the world, and occupying places of trust; whilst his piety and wisdom secured to him, among the people, a measure of moral influence rarely attained even by the ministerial character. He is here held up principally with the view of proving to those in smaller situations, how much good may possibly be done within their sphere, and how certain is the reward of exertion, not confined to their official duty, but embracing every object connected with the spiritual good of the community.

fourth division shows a number of captives bound together, some naked, and apparently females, others clothed in short jackets; while a row of warriors above, with unsheathed swords, are shouting victory. The last division is very obscure; but it gives indications of horsemen either returning as conquerors from the battle, or retreating as beaten fugitives.

“ The other, or north side of the stone, has only three divisions. Below are two figures with human heads, though their bodies are rather of grotesque forms, typical, perhaps, of priests bending over something, as in an attitude of prayer; while a smaller human figure stands behind each. All these figures have a broad cap on their heads, while the warriors on the other side are all bareheaded. In the division above, is a long cross, the arms at the top being within a circle. The cross, and the entire spaces of the middle division, are filled up by the most ingenious carving, representing the intricate and endless convolutions of the Runic knot. The edges of the stone are also occupied by these Runic knots, and evidently show the elaborate art of the sculptors. At the base of one of the edges of the stone are several figures, apparently females.” The following extract from Gordon’s “ *Itinerarium Septentrionale* ” will show the most generally received opinion of the date and origin of this curious relic of the olden time, page 159. “ That these obelisks were erected for victories gain’d over the Danes, I have very good reason to believe, but cannot, from the history of their invasions on Scotland, learn that any victory was ever gain’d by the Scots in that country: On the contrary, we have already shown, that in the reign of Malcomb, when Olavus Scandianus, and Enecus, the Danish generals, were sent into Scotland by Sueno, they pitched their camp in Murray, and gain’d a very considerable victory over the Scots, taking possession of the castles of Nairn, Forres, and Elgin, which obliged Malcomb to retire into other parts of the kingdom. Why this obelisk was rais’d, or how to explain the several figures thereon, I am at a loss, but cannot forbear thinking that it was erected by the Scots after the battle of Murtloch; for the Danes having gain’d the afore-mention’d victory in Murray, design’d to settle themselves, and families, in that country, being one of the pleasantest and most fruitful provinces of Scotland; and accordingly sent their ships back to bring their wives and children over. But their affairs taking a different turn, by the battle of Murtlach, they were oblig’d not only to leave all thoughts of settling there, but entire-

ly to quit the kingdom. The Scots, therefore, seem to have erected this obelisk, as a monument not only of the battle of Murtloch, which oblig'd their enemies to quit the kingdom, but as an evidence of the disappointment the Danes met with, in their hopes of settling in that particular corner of Scotland. The tradition concerning this stone favours my conjecture, it being still call'd King Sueno's Stone; Olavus and Enecus, the Danish generals at Murtloch, being sent thither by Sueno."

There is a stone of a similar description at Altyre, found, it is said, about Duffus, and now placed in the grounds here. It contains simply a cross crosslet, resembling Sueno's stone in having its middle part greatly elongated. There appear to be faint marks of Runic knots on this stone, or other carvings. Its height is fifteen feet.

On the height immediately north of the manse stand the remains of the ancient Castle of Blervie, the seat of a branch of the once powerful family of the Dunbars. Its name, some centuries ago, was written Blare; and it has subsequently undergone the various alterations of Blarie, Blarvie, Blairvie, and Blervie. It consisted of an oblong building, with a square tower at its west corner. In one of the angles between these a spiral stair led up to the top of the tower. Over the fire-place of the old hall is the date 1398. The tower, of five stories, and the staircase, are now all that remain. The principal part of the building was taken down to build the present house of Blervie. At the height of a few feet from the ground, a breach of about a foot was made all round in the building, and its place filled with turf and other combustibles. The latter were then set on fire and consumed; but such was the strength of the old masonry, that the large pile of building, attached but by one corner to the tower, stood for three hours afterwards without falling. Although at one period the whole district of Moray belonged to the Dunbars, there is no tradition respecting the family of Blervie. The property about the beginning of the last century was purchased by Alexander Mackintosh, who was "Laird of Blairie" in 1713 and 1724. From him it was purchased by William, Earl of Fife, and is now the property of the Earl of that name.

The Castle of Burgie bears the date "1602 zeiris," with the family armorial bearings, and the initials of the laird and lady of that day on the mantel of what was the great hall. The estate came to the Dunbars by Katherine Reid, niece of the last Abbo of Kinloss,

who was married to Alexander Dunbar, first laird of Burgie of that name. To the castle a more commodious house was added in 1702; but along with the original great hall, it was, in 1802, taken down to build the present mansion-house. The strength of the building was such, that the detaching of the stone from the mortar or lime cost more than the quarrying of new materials would have done. A square tower similar to that of Blervie, but more elegant, still remains.

On the Burgie estate have been discovered several ancient coffins, each formed of five slabs of undressed freestone. The last was found in 1841. Its length was three feet, breadth two feet, and depth two feet one inch. It contained a skeleton, in a sitting posture, the head resting on the knees, which, on exposure to the air, fell to pieces. It contained also, as did the others discovered, an urn of clay, of very rough workmanship, rudely ornamented with the representation of spiral shells, ten inches by seven. In this coffin alone were found ornaments, of a jet black substance, resembling cannel coal. Two rhomboidal pieces measured two inches by one, and an eighth of an inch in thickness. These, with two smaller pieces of the same shape, and two of a triangular form, had small holes neatly drilled in them, through which appear to have passed cords, attaching them to about 100 large beads; the whole fixed to a ring two-and-a-half inches in diameter. The appearance of the bones and the ornaments seemed to indicate that the grave had been that of a female of rank. None of these graves were surmounted by cairns, of which, notwithstanding, there are many in the parish. Small mounds occur in various places, composed of pieces of stone, about the size of road-metal, and having the appearance of exposure to the action of fire. Mixed with these is a very black mould, which, on minute inspection, is found to contain small pieces of burnt wood. On removing one of these, on a warm summer morning, the workmen were sensible of a heavy sickening smell, like that which is sometimes felt on opening a grave. The cairns are found in the higher parts of the parish, and are by the common people thought to mark out the former rude attempts of agriculture, when these stones were gathered, in order to lay the circumjacent parts under cultivation; it being farther supposed, that only these patches of the higher ground were cultivated, whilst the valleys were covered with wood. This, however, is disproved by the fact, that, when opened, they present the relics of human bodies. Their origin is entirely un-

known. Near Blervie Castle, are four large stones, erect, and forming a square; they are known by the name of the Temple Stones, and are evidently the remains of a Druidical temple. In a piece of soft moss ground, on the Burgie estate, a number of ancient querns were found, probably hid there, when multures and thirlage were enforced by law, and the use of the quern forbidden.

Family of Cumming of Altyre.—The family of the Cummings of Altyre can be traced to a very ancient date, and, at one time, held very large possessions in this country. Pont, or Gordon of Straloch, who, on Pont's decease, was engaged to complete the *Theatrum Scotiæ*, gives this testimony as to their former power. "Altyr ad Cuminios spectans, quæ gens ante trecentos annos omnium Scotiæ nobilium, et supra omnes Scotorum proceres potentissima et numerissima." And he goes on to describe the extent of their possessions. "Tenuerat ea gens Buquhaniæ maximam partem, Strathbogiam universam, Balvanian, Badenochiam, Lochabriam, Atholiam multaque alia in his oris. Multaque quoque in australibus nostri regni provinciis, quæ mihi non nunc occurrunt." The family of the Cummings, or Comyns, were settled in Britain before the Conquest. The first Scotch nobleman of the name on record, is Robert Comyn, who fell along with his sovereign, Malcolm Canmore, in 1093. There are references to this family, continuously, in charters to which we have access. In 1296, July 26, Sir Alexander Cumyn, Knight, swore fealty to Edward apud Elgin, in Moravia. On 4th September 1296, Edward I. assigned thirty merks of legal extent to Alexander Cumyn of Badenoch. This Alexander was slain at Dumfries, by Robert Bruce, with his brother, John Cumyn of Badenoch, on the 10th February 1306.

His family seem, at that time, to have resided at Darnaway; as, in 1368, a charter is given by David to Richard Comyn of the office of forest of Tarnaway, &c.; and, in 1671, at a court held at Perth by Robert II. Richard Comyn resigns the Castle of Tarnaway to Thomas the Graunt, -son of John the Graunt, in the presence of the King, for their faithful and praiseworthy service to Thomas Ranulph, Earl of Moray, and Thomas and John, his sons, Earl of Moray, our cousin; "et quas terras, &c. per compositionem amicabilem finaliter concordati, non vi aut metu ducti, nec errore lapsi, sed mera spontanea concordia et unanimi voluntate."

It would appear, that, about this time, the family settled at Altyre, inasmuch as, that, in 1398, Alexander Comyn is witness to an excambion of the lands of Mondole, Balnageith, &c. for the lands of Leuchars in Fife, by the Duke of Albany. 1408, Alexander Cumyne gives a band man rent to Thomas Dunbar Earl of Moray, for his guid will to his marriage with his sister Euphemia. In 1456, Thomas Comyn surrendered the mill of Altyre to the Prior of Pluscarden, on being threatened with excommunication, though he had always been informed that it previously belonged to him, *jure hereditario*.

In 1672, Robert Cuming, laird of Altyre, gave his band to the Council of Scotland, for the peace of the Highlands.

In 1657, he married Lucy Gordon, daughter of Sir Ludovick of Gordonston, through whom the estate of Gordonston devolved on Alexander Penrose Cumming of Altyre, on the death of Sir William Gordon of Gordonston, Bart. in 1795.

He thereupon assumed the name and arms of Gordonston, and was created a Baronet of Great Britain in 1804. This succession was afterwards confirmed by the House of Lords, after a long and ineffectual litigation. The family is now represented by Sir William G. G. Cumming, his son.

There is a hill at Altyre which still goes by the name of the Gallow-Hill, where, in former times, the sentences passed at the Baron Court of Altyre were executed. An examination of the "Barron Court" Book serves, however, to show that the proceedings partook more of the observance of form and of dispassionate endeavours to investigate the truth than we are wont to ascribe to this court, and that, although punishment was inflicted in a way so prompt and summary as to stand in bold contrast with the lenity of the judicial code of this day, yet the accused was not altogether without protection. They do not appear to have attained to the perfection of "Jeddart justice." We subjoin a judgment of the "Barron Court of Altyre, holden near the place thereof, be the Right Honorable Alexander Cuming of Altyre, and William Cumming, younger of Craigmiln, his bailzie, upon the 16th day of September 1697 years. "John Macgillichallom, theiff and robber, haveing been indicted, as within written, and haveing acknowledged, as is within expresst, the persons of assyze finding him guiltie, the sds judges appoints and decerns the said pannell to be hanged upon Teusday next to the death, upon the gallowes erected upon the Gallow Hill of Altyre, and yt betwixt the hours of two and four

in the afternoon, be the hands of John Gowie, publick executioner, and this is given to him for doom. W. CUMING."

III.—POPULATION.

Amount of the population in 1755,	.	1313
1791,	.	1072
1821,	.	970
1831,	.	992
1841,	.	987

Of late years, the principal cause of its decrease has been the uniting of a number of small farms into one. It is hoped that the reduction, from this cause, has now reached its lowest degree, and that our proprietors are convinced that they need not, for any prudential reasons, enlarge their farms; but that their rents are as surely forthcoming from a L.40 farm as from one of L.400.

The yearly average of births for the last seven years may be stated at 16; that of marriages at 8; number of families, 200; average number of children in each family, 4. There are two fatuous persons in the parish, but none insane; one blind; none deaf and dumb. The people enjoy, in a reasonable degree, the comforts and advantages of society, and are, in general, moral, religious, contented, and industrious.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—

Number of acres, standard imperial measure, either cultivated or occasionally in tillage,	3550
Number of acres which have never been cultivated, and which remain constantly waste or in pasture,	2942
Number of acres that might, with a profitable application of capital, be added to the cultivated land of the parish, whether afterward to be kept in occasional tillage or permanent pasture,	280
Number of acres under wood, natural or planted,	3695

Rent of Land.—The average rent of arable land per acre is L.1, 5s. The average rent of grazing for an ox or cow, L.2.

Wages, &c.—Average rates of different kinds of farm-labourers; for a grieve or principal servant, L.14 per annum, with a house; and for ploughmen, from L.10 to L.12, with food; for women, L.4 to L.5, with do. Wages of a mason per day, 2s. 6d.; carpenter, 2s. Price of butter, 10d. to 1s. 3d. per lb.; cheese, 3d. per lb.; eggs, 3d. to 6d. per dozen; fowls, 1s. each.

Live-Stock.—The former common breed of sheep, small horn Scotch white-faced, is now very much superseded by the Cheviots or crosses, which, of course, repay better for winter feeding. Of cattle, we have Highland, polled Aberdeenshire, and short-horned. Much attention has, of late, been paid to the improvement of these several breeds, and has been evidently productive of the desired

effect, as many of the prizes from agricultural societies are awarded to this parish.

Husbandry.—The system of husbandry commonly pursued is the six-course shift, which is thus arranged: 1. year, grass; 2. grass; 3. wheat; 4. oats; 5. turnips or potatoes; 6. barley. There are instances, although not required by any conditions of lease, of the farmers preferring the fifth course, which does away with oats succeeding wheat, or two continuous white crops. Draining is carried on to a considerable extent, and a good deal of waste land has been reclaimed. Perhaps the principal improvement recently introduced is the draining of the moss of Tarras, by means of which, and of other operations of a like kind, from 200 to 300 acres have lately been added to the cultivated land of the parish. Farther improvements might be made in this respect. Indeed, all obstacles to improvement are in a fair way of being overcome by the increased activity of the tenantry. The only thing required is adequate remuneration on the part of the landlord for reclaiming lands. Were the proprietors to grant a fair allowance to the tenant at the end of the lease for every acre taken in, the benefit would be theirs as well as the tenants, in the improved state of their properties. The duration of leases is nineteen years, which is considered equally favourable to the tenant, and to the land. The farm-buildings are generally substantial and in good repair; but no enclosures are used except palings, and, in most instances, none at all. Thrashing-mills are now almost universal.

Produce.—The average gross amount of raw produce, as nearly as can be ascertained, is as follows:—

For grain of all kinds, at L.5, 10s. per Scotch acre,	-	L.7700	0	0
For hay and pasture, at L.2, 10s. per do.	-	2325	0	0
For turnips, at L.4, 10s. per do.	-	2097	0	0
For wood, from felling, &c.	-	550	0	0
Quarries,	-	13	0	0
		<hr/>		
Total,		L.12685	0	0

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town.—There is no market town in the parish. The nearest is Forres, distant from the church about two and a-half miles. The parish contains no village of any size. Forres is also the nearest post-town.

Means of Communication.—The length of turnpike roads is three and a-half miles. On the road between Elgin and Forres, which intersects the parish for about three miles, there run daily a mail-coach and two stages; these, however, pass only through

the northern extremity of the parish, and there is no coach or carrier on the other road. There is a road in continuation of the road to Craigmill in Dollas, now carrying on beyond the bounds of the parish, through Dollas and Knockando—a part of the contemplated direct line from Perth—which promises to be of great advantage, as opening an intercourse with the lower districts of the Spey, even if not prosecuted farther than to its banks; whilst in the accomplishment of the greater object, viz. its being carried on to Perth, it would shorten the distance to that central point fully forty miles, and make this the direct line of communication between Morayshire and the capital.

The bridges on the Rafford burn were all swept away by the flood formerly referred to, and have not been rebuilt; those on the Altyre burn are in a state of good repair, and highly ornamental to the scenery, especially the one at Craigroy, than which, a more picturesque object is scarcely to be met with.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church is nearly central, and is distant not more than four miles from any part of the parish. It was built in 1826, is a handsome and commodious structure, in the Gothic style, from a plan furnished by Gillespie Graham, Esq., and affords accommodation for 600 sitters. The sittings are all free. The manse, built in 1817, is a good substantial house, and every necessary repair has been given to it by the heritors, from time to time; but, having been found to be inadequate for the accommodation of a very large family, it was, about two years ago, very considerably enlarged by the present incumbent, at his own expense. The extent of the glebe, exclusive of the ground occupied by the manse, garden, and offices, is about four acres, and its yearly value L. 8. The stipend awarded by decret of the Court of Teinds in 1822, is 14 chalders, with L. 10 for a grass glebe, and L. 8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements, unexhausted teinds, L. 111, 17s. 6d. The patron of the parish is James Campbell Brodie, Esq. of Lethen. There are no chapels of Ease, Government churches, Missionaries, Catechists, Seceding or Dissenting chapels of any denomination within the parish. Eight families, or their heads, attend Dissenting chapels in the neighbouring parish of Forres; one family alone attends the Episcopal chapel there. The number of families, therefore, attending the Established Church may be about 190; the number of persons of all ages, 500 to 600; the average number of communicants is 140.

There are no Societies for religious purposes established in the parish, but collections are annually made for the various schemes of the General Assembly. The average annual amount of church collections for all purposes, religious and charitable, is L.50. Besides these, cases frequently occur of a public and private nature, for which subscriptions are raised, and to which the people contribute liberally.

Education, &c.—There are four schools in the parish, one parochial and endowed, and three unendowed, and supported entirely by the fees of the pupils. The salary of the parochial schoolmaster is the maximum, with an allowance for a garden. He likewise enjoys the benefit of the bequest under the management of the Dick Trustees. Fees about L.16 per annum. He is also session-clerk. The parochial school-house affords the legal accommodation; but is in such a state as to demand inquiry whether it be adequate to sustain the growing reputation of the school, or in good keeping with the increased comforts of every dwelling around. No additional schools are consequently required.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of persons receiving parochial aid is 36, and the average sum allotted to each, 15s. There is a capital stock of L.100; and the annual amount of contributions strictly for their relief, including other sessional disbursements, is about L.40. No recourse has been had as yet to assessments, nor do we desire to see that day. The poor people still retain a good deal of that, perhaps, peculiarly Scottish feeling, which inclines them to make parochial relief their very last resource. In truth, the destitution is in many cases great, before that is resorted to.

Fairs.—Two fairs annually are held within the parish, one in the beginning of April, the other in the beginning of November. Both are cattle markets.

Inns.—There is but one public-house, a convenience which could not well be dispensed with, and which is under such control as to prevent its being productive of any evil effects. In this respect, never was a parish more indebted to the care of heritors. In several instances in which attempts were made to open additional public-houses, they were resisted by the heritors, who deferred to the opinion of the minister whether they were required or not.

Fuel.—Three descriptions of fuel are used,—peat, wood, and coal. Of the first, there is now a scarcity, owing to the improve-

ment of the mosses. Coal is procured from the port of Findhorn, distant about eight miles, at an expense, including carriage, of 2s. 4d. per barrel. Wood is had at a reasonable rate from the thinnings of plantations.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The greater extent of ground now cultivated, and the immensely improved state of husbandry, constitute, perhaps, the most striking difference between the present state of the parish, and its state at the time of the last Statistical Account. Connected with this, and, in a great measure the cause of this improvement, is the putting down of the former practice of illegal distillation of spirits—than which, surely, never did any thing tend more to degrade and demoralize a people. So prevalent was this twenty years ago, that no disgrace was attached to the practice; and families, in other respects of good repute, carried it on without any compunctions, save those arising from a fear of detection, and consequent punishment. Instead of the midnight watchings, during which excitements cannot be supposed to have been wanting, and habitual deceit resorted to, in order to conceal their practices, we have now the satisfaction of seeing the same people steadily pursuing the improvement of their lands, elevated in their moral tone and bearing, their outward appearance giving evidence of a healthy temperament and ameliorated condition.

March 1842.