

PARISH OF LOHCARRON.

PRESBYTERY OF LOHCARRON, SYNOD OF GLENELG.

THE REV. JOHN MACKENZIE, MINISTER.*

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—LOHCARRON is so called from an arm of the sea of the same name by which it is intersected, and which derives its name from the river Carron (signifying in Gaelic a winding stream) which falls into it.

Extent, &c.—It is 25 miles long. To its breadth it is difficult to apply any scale of measurement. From its eastern extremity to the end of the loch (about 15 miles) it is upwards of 10 miles broad. It is then considerably narrowed. On the south side, the parish extends along the loch for about 4 miles. On the north, it consists of an elevated ridge, extending along the coast for nearly ten miles, and seldom exceeding 2 miles in breadth. Including Courthill, situated in Kishorn, within the parish of Applecross, Lochcarron may contain 250 square miles.

Topographical Appearances.—The entrance to the parish from the east is a glen, bounded by hills varying in height, and stretching out into heathy and uncultivated moors. As you pass along, the scene becomes more interesting. The bottom of the valley is watered by the Carron, which, by the accession of several tributary brooks, is increased to a considerable stream. The banks are diversified with portions of cultivated ground; and the hills on both sides present pasture of a superior description.

Not far distant, along the base of a hill facing the north, rising almost perpendicularly, covered with natural woods of birch, alder, and wild ash, you see Lochdowal in the Carron adorned with three islands, skirted with ash, oak, and underwood; and farther on, you have Lochcarron, which presents the appearance of a fresh water lake. The glen widens as you approach the loch, and opens into a valley equal in extent to any on the coast, and furnishes a fine subject for improvement. The most interesting view of the

* Drawn up by a Probationer of the Church of Scotland.

parish is from an eminence in Lochalsh above Strome Ferry. From this eminence, looking to the north-east, you behold the fine expanse of Lochcarron, presenting the appearance of a fresh water lake about 20 miles in circumference, embosomed in hills, which at the head of the loch rise to a considerable height. The hills surrounding the valley appear almost to meet in their bases, and to jut towards the loch like so many promontories.

The sloping ground of Strome, extending from the ferry, presents a series of gentle and irregular hillocks, diversified with natural birch, ash, and underwood,—while cultivated fields frequently relieve the eye; and behind this ridge, the mountains of Applecross tower aloft, in rugged and precipitous magnificence.

In a calm summer evening, when hundreds of boats are seen shooting their nets, and scores of vessels lying at anchor, Lochcarron exhibits a scene of rural felicity and of rural beauty that is seldom to be witnessed.

Soil, &c.—The parish presents every variety of soil. The prevailing winds are north-east and south-west. The climate, in the opinion of the older inhabitants, has undergone a considerable change. They allege that the winter has become less severe, the summer less mild. The climate is so variable as to render an accurate description of it impossible. The winter is generally mild, and during its continuance vegetation is seldom checked. The spring is usually wet, and such as greatly retards the operations of the farmer. Early in this season, we have occasionally storms of hail, brought by a north-west wind. In April and May, we have keen easterly winds, with frost at night, which proves very injurious to such fruit trees as are then in blossom. We have not the genial warmth of summer until the beginning of June. The crops then make rapid progress; nature is clothed in the beauty of summer; and when free from rain the weather is most delightful. The weather in harvest is very changeable, and renders the securing of the crop very troublesome and expensive. Speaking in general, this parish, like the rest of the west coast, is very subject to rain, from the height of the mountains and their proximity to the Atlantic. The prevalent distempers are such as arise from damp and sudden vicissitudes of weather; such as fevers, colds, and rheumatism. Cutaneous and scrofulous disorders are likewise common, occasioned, probably, by poor feeding and inattention to cleanliness.

Geology and Mineralogy.—Our mountains are principally composed of gneiss, with smaller displays of quartz rock and red sand-

stone. The same gneiss rocks and clay generally meet us on the plain. In the heights of the country, limestone is found in beds in the gneiss, and is wrought for agricultural purposes by the tenantry in the neighbourhood. In Kishorn, limestone is abundant.

Hydrography.—A few chalybeate springs are scattered over different parts of the country, but they are not of such a nature as to indicate the existence of extensive strata of iron.

Zoology.—The animals which inhabit the parish are, deer, roe, fox, polecat, and weasel. Game, moorfowl, partridge, plover, and ptarmigan. In our lakes, wild-duck abound, singing-birds, thrush, lark, linnet, blackbird, and redbreast; water-birds, gulls, (they have their nests in islands in our mountain lakes) duck, scart, curlew, sea-lark, and oyster-eater. The black eagle builds in some of the most inaccessible rocks; but as great pains have been taken to destroy the species, it is now rare. The kite has his eyrie. Of migratory birds, swans visit us occasionally in winter, wag-tail in February, swallow in April, and cuckoo about the same time.

In the river Carron, salmon are found early in the season; but they are most numerous in June, July, and August; during which months, sea trout also come up in considerable numbers. Forty years ago, a common fisher could easily take with the rod twenty salmon in a day; at present, the most experienced angler will be contented with one good fish. Several species of fishes are taken in the Frith, but herring may be said to be the only species of importance in an economical point of view. The herring fishing has been unsuccessful for the last ten years: and may now be considered rather a losing concern, inasmuch as the profits of the few favourable seasons can hardly counterbalance the outlays of these and other seasons, during which a supply for home consumption is the utmost that can be secured.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Impenetrable darkness rests on the history of this district till within a late period. It was for many ages the scene of the barbarous depredations of contending clans, who, as the use of letters was little known among them, left no other memorial of their transactions than the dubious records of traditional poetry. At an early period, the parish was in the possession of several chiefs,—the principal of whom was Macdonald of Glengarry, who had the western part at Strome. All these were gradually dispos-

sessed by Seaforth Lord Kintail, who took the Castle of Strome in 1609, as recorded in the last Statistical Account.

Not farther back than the middle of last century, the inhabitants of this district were involved in the most dissolute barbarity. The records of presbytery, which commence in 1724, are stained with an account of black and bloody crimes, exhibiting a picture of wildness, ferocity, and gross indulgence, consistent only with a state of savagism. The people, under the influence of no religion, but, from political considerations, attached to Episcopacy, conceived a rooted dislike to the Presbyterian system, which all the prudence of the clergy was for some time unable to eradicate. In March 1725, we find the presbytery of Gairloch (now presbytery of Lochcarron) obliged to hold a meeting at Kilmorack; as the presbytery, to use the language of the record, had no access to meet in their own bounds, since they had been rabbled at Lochalsh on 16th September 1724, that being the day appointed for a parochial visitation there. From a petition which Mr Sage (the first Presbyterian minister of Lochcarron, settled in 1726,) presents to the presbytery in 1731, praying for an act of transportability,—we see that he considered his life often in danger; that only one family attended regularly on his ministry; and that he despaired of being of any service in the place. Mr Sage laboured in the place for forty-seven years. By his prudent conduct, he gradually conciliated the affections of the people, and mitigated the rancour of their prejudices, and was instrumental in bringing them to a state of comparative civilization.

Eminent Men.—About the time that Mr Sage was settled in the parish, flourished William and Alexander Mackenzie, brothers, the authors of some popular Gaelic poems. Such of the effusions of William as have escaped the ravages of time exhibit the *dijecta membra poetæ*, and serve to excite our regret that so much has been lost. His elegy on his brother's death, in tenderness of sentiment and felicity of expression, will not shrink from a comparison with some of the most successful efforts of the cultivated muse.

Antiquities.—We have no monuments of antiquity to interest the antiquarian. The ruins of Strome Castle still remain; and on the rising ground behind Janetown, and at Langanduin in Kishorn, we have one of those circular buildings or *duin* so frequent on the west coast.

III.—POPULATION.

The increase of population may be principally attributed to the division of land into lots. The village of Janetown, which at no

distant period consisted of only three families, contains now a population of nearly 500.

Baptisms and marriages have been regularly registered since 1819. The register kept before that time was accidentally burnt. No register of deaths.

Number of persons under 15 years of age is	774
from 15 to 30,	629
30 to 50,	474
50 to 70,	209
upwards of 70,	48
Unmarried men above 50,	18
women above 45,	70

Number of children in each family, 5 or perhaps 6 on an average. Insane, 3; fatuous, 4; blind, 4; deaf and dumb, 4.

Land-owners.—Landed proprietors two.

Language of the People.—The language generally spoken is Gaelic; but English is spoken by a great proportion of the younger people. Gaelic cannot be said to have lost ground for the last forty years; but it has been much corrupted by our frequent intercourse with the south, and the silly vanity of persons, who wish it to be understood, that they know something of another language.

Habits, &c. of the People.—The ordinary food of the peasantry is potatoes and herring twice a-day, and oatmeal gruel for supper. Those in better circumstances have, besides, oat cake, butter and cheese, and in winter and spring use for dinner, broth and mutton as a substitute for herring. Of the houses, some are of turf, but the greater part of stone frequently built with lime. The roof is covered over with turf,—above which, there is a coat of heather or ferns. There is seldom a chimney to the houses. The fire is kindled alongside of the wall, or a stone in the centre of the room, and the smoke reeks its way out at the roof, or door, or windows. The windows generally consist of wooden shutters, made to open at pleasure and admit the fresh air. The floors are of clay and mud. In many houses, the cattle are under the same roof, and even enter at the same door with the family, and are only separated from them by a partition of boards, wattles, or stone, having a door in the middle. As will be readily imagined, the space between this partition and the outer door is sometimes so dirty, that it is difficult for him who enters to pick out a clean footing. The greater part of the people do certainly not enjoy the comforts of society, and they are far from being satisfied with their situation and circumstances. Those living on the coast, particu-

larly depending for their subsistence upon the herring fishing, a fluctuating and precarious employment, are frequently in a very poor condition. But they have their lands cheaper, and are on the whole in better circumstances than the peasantry of the neighbouring parishes. The people are industrious and obliging. They are naturally acute, and such as have had the advantages of education are intelligent. With respect to religion, there is a considerable excitement, and a considerable profession. From the practice introduced by the late minister, of causing the people to deliver their sentiments on religion publicly at fellowship meetings, many show a wonderful facility in talking upon such subjects; but close observation enables us to perceive that their knowledge is merely superficial. To the peculiar phrases used by them, they are found to attach no definite ideas; and if the ideas which the phrases convey are expressed in another language, the words of which they understand, they do not recognize them. What is most to be blamed, is a general addiction to flattery and infidelity to engagements.

The number of illegitimate children in the parish during the last three years was 4.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—

Number of acres, standard imperial measure, in the parish, which are either cultivated or occasionally in tillage,	1238
Number of acres that might, with a profitable application of capital, be added to the cultivated land of the parish,	200
Number of acres under wood,	1500

Produce.—Average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish, as nearly as that can be ascertained, is as follows :

Grain of all kinds, whether cultivated for food of man or the domestic animals,	L. 1620
Potatoes and turnips,	2035
Hay,	585
Land in pasture for cows,	1250
For sheep,	1500
Annual thinning and periodical felling of woods,	100
Fisheries,	3000

Total yearly value of raw produce raised, L. 10,090

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town—Means of Communication.—The nearest market-town is Dingwall, fifty miles distant; but family supplies are generally got from Inverness, to which there is a regular communication by carriers. Our roads are excellent. Carriages of all descriptions visit us. We have a post-office in Janetown, where the mails arrive three times a-week.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church was built in 1751. It is situated in the centre of the parish, and as the roads are good, it is pretty convenient for the greater part of the population. It affords accommodation for upwards of 300, but is a miserable edifice, almost unfit for the exercise of public worship.

The glebe contains 10 arable acres, and pasture for 6 cows and 150 sheep. The stipend is the minimum. There is no Episcopalian in the parish, and only one Roman Catholic, a woman. The inhabitants are partial to the Establishment; but are far from being punctual in their attendance on public worship. A catechist labours among them, paid by the session. There are no Dissenting or Seceding families in the parish.

Education.—In the parochial school, are taught, Greek, Latin, and all the ordinary branches of education. The salary is the maximum, and the amount of school fees may be about L. 15. The expense of education is from 8s. to 18s. per annum, according to the branches studied. At present, there is no Society school in the parish; children come therefore to the parish school, from a distance of six miles. Three additional schools are required, and they would secure an attendance of from 30 to 70 scholars. There are at present from six to fifteen years of age, 291, and upwards of fifteen, 693 persons who cannot read. The people are in general alive to the benefits of education. They are particularly anxious that a knowledge of English should be imparted to their children, from an impression that their temporal interests will be more certainly promoted by a familiarity with that language.

Poor.—The number of poor receiving aid from the parochial funds is from 25 to 30. The sum allotted to each is small. Our church collections do not amount to L. 8 per annum, and there is no other mode of procuring funds besides the fines imposed on delinquents.

Fairs.—The only fair held in the parish is the new Kelso market, on the first Monday of June. At one time, it was a considerable fair for cattle, but now it has dwindled into an annual term for settling accounts and drinking whisky.

Inns.—There are 2 inns in the parish, and 2 dram-houses. The resort of the younger part of the people to these places tends much to corrupt their morals.

Fuel.—The fuel used is dried moss, procured at no other expense than the labour of lifting it.

ROSS AND CROMARTY.

H

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

Since the last Account was drawn up, considerable improvements have taken place in agriculture, persons of skill and capital have introduced an approved system of husbandry, and their example has been speedily followed by the tenantry. To promote the comfort of the people, it would be necessary to give longer leases, so as to encourage a spirit of improvement, and to let the lands at a cheaper rate, that the produce might pay the rents without any other resource, (which is now far from being the case,) and to afford employment to the labouring classes, by introducing judicious improvements at the expense of the proprietors. In diffusing among them the blessings of knowledge, much might be done by the introduction of a more efficient system of education, by the establishment of parochial libraries, and the circulation of cheap periodicals.

P. S. Since the above Account was written, the church has been condemned by the presbytery; and it is confidently expected, that the heritors of Lochcarron will erect the house of worship, to be built in its stead, in a style worthy of the object and the situation.

The rental may be stated at not less than L. 2500.

At the death of the late incumbent (the author of the last Statistical Account,) the glebe of Lochcarron scarcely contained 5 acres of arable land, properly so called; 5 acres more are now in good heart; and 10 acres are in progress of cultivation. The whole extent of the glebe, from the loch to the top of the hill, may, at a rough guess, be said to be two miles in length, by half a mile in breadth; a goodly pasturage, without doubt, were its nature equal to its extent.

September 1836.