

## PARISH OF GLENSHEIL.

PRESBYTERY OF LOCHCARRON, SYNOD OF GLENELG.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

THE district of Kintail, which formerly constituted a parish of that name, was, about a century ago, divided into two parishes, to one of which the original name of the district has been appropriated,—while the other has received the name of Glensheil, from the valley which forms its central division.

*Name.*—The etymology of this word is so obscure as to give abundant scope to the fancy of the philologist, being equally capable of being interpreted *the glen of cattle* (Glenshelibh,) *of hunting* (Glensheilg,) *or of rain* (Glenshilidh,)—any of which is sufficiently descriptive of the locality, while there is none of them so exactly represented by the modern pronunciation of the name as to determine its meaning.

*Boundaries.*—The parish is bounded, on the north, by the arm of the sea called Lochduich,\* which divides it from the parishes of Lochalsh and Kintail, and the river of Croe; on the east, by the parishes of Kiltarlity, Urquhart, and Kilmanivaig; on the south, by the parish of Glenelg; and on the west, by the strait of Kyle-rea, which divides it from Skye. Its greatest length, which lies from east to west, is about 26 miles, with a breadth varying between 2 and 6 miles.

*Topographical Appearances.*—The parish consists of two divisions, distinguished by physical characteristics. The eastern and larger division is of a decidedly alpine character. It consists of three ranges of lofty mountains, separated by narrow vallies. These chains, originating near the head of Lochduich, after running parallel to each other in a southerly direction, for five miles, turn off to the south-east, and again trending to the east, join the ridges which separate the vallies of Strathglass, Glenmoristone, and Glengarry. At their western extremities, they rise from the level of the sea, with a rapid and almost precipitous ascent, to an average

\* Loch Duthich, St Duthce's Loch. Tain has its Gaelic name from the same saint, "Baile Dhuthich."

height little short of 4000 feet; and presenting many series of pyramidal summits, among which the peak of Scùr-ùran is eminently conspicuous, they form a piece of alpine scenery not often surpassed in grandeur. The middle chain is distinguished by the name of Benmore, *great mount*; that on the north is called Bein-fhadd, *long mount*; and the other Meal-cheann-dearg, *red-headed mass*.

Between these ridges, lie the vallies of Glensheil and Glenlichd, *i. e. the valley of the flat stone or flag*,—the former extending along the western,—the other, along the eastern base of Benmore.

The valley of Glensheil is about fifteen miles long, the lower portion of which space consists of a level plain about eight miles long and half a-mile wide, containing some good meadow and arable land, through which the river Sheil winds between low banks ornamented with alder bushes. The lower end of this portion is occupied by the lake of Lochsheil. About the middle, its breadth gradually diminishes, until the mountains approach so closely as to leave only room for the stream to pass between them. But after passing the level, at which the waters which run to the east divide from those flowing to the west,—the valley again expands, and forms a bed for the lake of Cluonie, which is about six miles long, and the middle of which marks the boundary of the parish in this direction.

The valley of Glenlichd is shorter and narrower than the other, opening at its lower end into the strath of Croe, *i. e. the Sheep Penn*, which is about five miles long and two broad, and is drained by the river Croe, which here divides the parish from Kintail.

The western division of the parish, called Letterfearn, *i. e. the alder side*,\* consists of the north side of a hill, of the average height of about 2000 feet, and is 12 miles long and 2 broad, forming the south bank of Lochduich, and extending from Kyle-rea to the pass of Ratagan, where it joins the most southerly of the mountain chains already described. The character of this division is far more attractive than that of the other. The rock is here well covered with soil, and clothed with pasture of remarkable verdure. The ground rises with a gentle slope from the water, the general uniformity of the landscape being agreeably diversified with bold headlands, precipitous ravines, and rocky eminences, interspersed with cultivated fields and clumps of natural wood.

*Meteorology*.—Although no meteorological tables have been kept in this parish, the climate may be stated generally as characterized

\* The opposite side of the luch, in the parish of Kintail, is called Letter-choil; *i. e. the wooded side*.

by mildness and humidity. The thermometer seldom indicates a higher temperature than  $77^{\circ}$ , and has not been observed lower than  $24^{\circ}$  of Fahrenheit. The average temperature, as ascertained by observations upon the heat of springs, may be about  $47^{\circ}$ . The changes in the pressure of the atmosphere are frequent and rapid, the mercury in the barometer, which usually stands at  $29\frac{1}{2}$  inches, often rising or falling half an inch, in the course of a few hours.

The heat of summer is tempered by the influence of a moist soil and cloudy sky,—while in the lower parts of the parish, in consequence of the vicinity of the ocean, frost is seldom felt, and is never intense, or of long continuance. The prevalent wind is the south-west, which blows more frequently than all other winds together. This wind, sweeping over the expanse of the Atlantic, and being consequently saturated with moisture, proceeding from a warmer to a colder latitude; and having its temperature further depressed in passing over the mountains by which the parish is surrounded, is necessarily a rainy wind, and by its prevalence communicates the same character to the climate. The chief falls of rain are experienced in the months of August, September, and November. October is often dry, although storms of westerly wind, accompanied with thunder and lightning, not unfrequently occur. The winters are usually open and mild, snow seldom falling on the low grounds, and never lying for more than a few days; but in the high mountains, it falls to a considerable depth, and does not entirely disappear before the middle of June. The spring months are always boisterous and inclement, and May is often cold and ungenial, but in June and July the weather is almost invariably delightful. As a proof of the mildness of the climate, it may be mentioned that tender greenhouse plants, as hydrangea, fuchsia, balm, geranium, and others, live out the winter, in gardens, with scarcely any protection from the weather. The climate is also extremely salubrious. No endemic disorder is known. Contagious diseases are rare, and since the disappearance of small-pox, have not been extensively mortal. The complaints most prevalent are pneumonia, rheumatism, and dyspepsia, with phlegmonous and erysipelatous affections; disorders which have their origin, probably, in the fatigue and cold to which the people are exposed in prosecuting the herring fishery, combined with the effects of a moist climate and insufficient nourishment. Upon the whole, the inhabitants of the parish enjoy a fair portion of health. The prejudice against the practice of vaccination, which at one time prevailed, has given way before the expe-

rience of its efficacy. There is no medical practitioner resident in the parish, the duties of that profession thus devolving on the minister.\*

The prognostications of the weather usually referred to by the Highlanders, are entitled to little regard, being certain days of the week or month,—which they consider, on the authority of tradition alone, as types of the subsequent season. They ascribe certain influences to the phases of the moon, equally unworthy of attention; supposing that an increasing moon communicates a growing quality to all substances, and a decreasing moon the contrary,—on which account they will not fell timber, cast peats, or cut hay, while the moon is on the increase, believing that they will not season properly,—nor kill meat during the decrease, from an idea that doing so would occasion its shrinking. It is also a prevalent opinion that every moon imparts a peculiar character to the weather during its continuance, so that should it be new moon about the end of April or of October, the month of May, in the former case, will possess the character of spring; and in the latter, that of November will resemble autumn.

*Hydrography.*—The arm of the sea which bounds the parish on the north, is closed in, on the west, by the eastern extremity of the Isle of Skye, with the exception of the straits of Kyle-rea and Kyle-akin, by which the loch communicates with the ocean, on either side of that island. This inlet consists of three distinct portions, the largest of which, called Lochalsh, divides the western end of Glensheil from the parish of that name. This piece of water, which runs east and west, is about 10 miles long, by 3 miles wide at its broadest part. It is divided into two parts by the low island of Glass Ellan, *i. e.* Green Island, which is about thirty acres in extent, with flat sandy shores extending so far on every side, as to leave only a narrow passage between it and either land. About four miles to the east of this island, the inlet divides into two unequal

\* Under the present head, may be mentioned an extraordinary instance of abstinence, which occurred about the close of the last century. A female of this parish, of the name of Isabella Macrae, of weak intellect, and a beggar, had left Glenmoristone, where she had been soliciting alms, at the beginning of a fall of snow, which lay upon the ground for the unusually long period of six weeks. During the greater part of this time, the poor woman was not missed, her friends in this parish believing that she was waiting in Glenmoristone for the disappearance of the snow. It was at last ascertained that she had left that country, on her way home; but it was only at the end of the period above-mentioned, that she was discovered, under a wreath of snow alive, after eating all the heather within her reach. She was known to have had a small quantity of oatmeal in her possession, which, with the heather, composed the whole of her sustenance, during the time that she remained under the snow. Though she lived some years afterwards, she never recovered an erect posture, and it is also recorded, that when found, her chest bore the impression of her knees, in consequence of her having been so long in a sitting and stooping posture.

branches, the largest of which runs in a south-east direction, and the other to the north-east. The former of these is properly called Lochduich, although it gives its name to the whole inlet. The length of this inner loch from the point where the other branch, which is called Lochlong, *the Ship loch*, joins it, is six miles,—its breadth at the entrance being half a mile; but towards its eastern extremity it widens to nearly two miles. Its course is nearly straight, with a slight curvature having its convexity to the south-west. At its eastern angle, it throws off a branch to the north-east, about a mile long and half a-mile wide, called the Little Loch. The depth of the water in this inlet, is various; in the western division, it runs from 15 to 30 fathoms; at the entrance of Lochduich (proper) it does not exceed 10 fathoms; but towards its head, it increases considerably, being in some parts from 80 to 100 fathoms. In the shallower parts, the bottom consists of rock, and sometimes sand and gravel; at the great depths, it is always mud.

The water of this inlet, in consequence of the narrowness of the passages by which it communicates with the ocean, neither of which exceeds a quarter of a mile in width, is much less salt than sea water usually is. Partly from this cause, it is sometimes observed, during severe frost, to become partially covered with a crust of ice about one-eighth of an inch thick. It has never been known, however, to be completely frozen over; nor does the partial congelation now mentioned take place unless the weather is calm, and the frost has been preceded by rain, which floats on the surface of the sea, when there is no wind to occasion the mixture of the different strata.

During the autumn, the water is strongly luminous, when disturbed, in consequence of the multitudes of medusæ, beryozes, and other phosphorescent animals, which then appear in it. In ordinary weather, there is nothing peculiar in the colour; but after heavy falls of rain, it is rendered so muddy that no object can be seen through it, at the depth of a few feet. The current runs with considerable rapidity, through the narrows at the entrance of the Loch, and both sides of Glass-Allen; and the rate at spring tides may here amount to four miles an hour. In the strait which divides the parish from Skye, the current is extremely rapid, running at times at the rate of seven miles per hour. It is high water in the inlet about six o'clock, on the day before new and full moon. The ordinary height to which the tide rises, with springs, is 16 feet. Both the height and time of high water, however, are much influ-

enced by the direction and force of the wind. A gale of south-west wind often raises the water 4 feet above the elevation which it would otherwise attain, and at the same time causes it to rise half an hour sooner than the proper time of high water,—while a north or east wind produces the opposite effect. The change of tide in Kyle-akin, in consequence of the water having to make the circuit of the island of Skye, before it comes to the entrance of this strait, is generally three hours later than in the other passage, although the distance between them does not exceed four miles.

The whole of the inlet affords safe anchorage for shipping of any size. At the junction of Lochduich with Lochalsh, occurs the harbour of Ob-Inag, a creek of a semicircular form, having a sufficient depth of water, a muddy bottom, and shelter from every wind. The bay of Ardintoul also, and that of Craigan-roy, at the south corner of Lochduich, are safe and commodious harbours.

Although the whole of this inlet, and particularly Lochduich proper, is sheltered by the barrier of mountains which inclose it from every wind, it is very subject to heavy squalls. This is the consequence of the height and steepness of the hills, which interrupt the fair passage of the wind. During a gale of south-west wind, which blows perpendicularly to the direction of the inner loch, the water is torn up in spindrift, and sometimes whirled about to a great height in the air. On such occasions, the loch presents the appearance of an immense boiling and smoking cauldron. In fine weather, Lochduich assumes a remarkably pleasing character. The view then presented from its entrance, when its verdant and finely variegated banks are seen, in contrast to the magnificent back ground formed by the mountains at its termination, and when the whole scene is reflected from the glassy surface of the water, is one which combines loveliness with grandeur, in a degree seldom equalled, and certainly not exceeded, on the west coast of Scotland.

In the eastern portion of the parish, two rivers of moderate size occur, each running from the eastward, with a course of about twelve miles, and falling into the loch at its south and east corners. The water of both is remarkably clear, in consequence of their flowing from high mountains nearly destitute of moss. Both are favourite resorts of salmon and trout. The parish is abundantly supplied with springs, which gush out at short intervals; distinguished from the superficial rivulets, by the channels in which they flow being no wider or deeper, than is necessary to contain the stream, and by

the profusion of saxifrage, water cresses, and other fontine plants, by which their course is accompanied; and their generally forming a plot of marshy land covered with alder and willow trees. There are no mineral springs except some that are tinged with iron ore, none of which are drunk medicinally.

The lakes connected with the parish, of such extent as to require notice, are three. Loch Cluonie, *i. e.* the lake of Meadows, the largest, has been already mentioned. In the next valley to the south of it, occurs Loch Luin, about a mile long by half a mile broad. The water of both these lochs flows eastward into the river Moriston, and they abound in trout of good quality. The other lake is Lochsheil, also already mentioned,—through which the river Sheil flows to the sea.

*Geology and Mineralogy.*—The mountains of this parish consist chiefly of gneiss, variously modified in respect of the size and proportions of its component minerals, and alternating occasionally with mica slate. On the banks of Loch Cluonie, a tract of granite occurs, coarse grained, and tinged with red. That part of Letterfearn, which lies to the south-east of the church, consists of gneiss, deeply tinged of a red colour with iron; beyond this, to the west, the rock resumes its ordinary grey colour. At this point, there occurs a bed of primitive limestone, grey, spotted with green and red, and very impure. A similar bed is found near the harbour of Ob-Inag, extending across the hill to Glenelg, and presenting veins of asbestos. In this last position, the rock has a manifest influence on the vegetation in its neighbourhood, which is unusually verdant. The dip of the rocks is generally between north-east and south-east; but both this and the angle of inclination, which is generally considerable, are extremely irregular. In the higher mountains, masses of quartz and plates of mica, of considerable size, are found; and along the shore, beds of soft talc slate are not unfrequent. In the hill above Ratagan, stones with drusy cavities containing crystals of quartz, lined with a yellow metallic ore, are found; and to the west of the manse, cubical masses of the same substance, being probably an ore of iron, have been discovered.

*Soil.*—The soil of the vallies of Glensheil and Croe consists of gravel and sand of various degrees of fineness, well covered with vegetable mould, and would, in a more favourable climate, be well adapted for cultivation. Along the sea shore, the soil is generally a coarse gravel, containing many stones, carried down by the streams from the ravines

which they have formed in the sides of the mountains. These pieces of land are capable of producing good crops of bear or bigg and potatoes, but require frequent supplies of manure. In the hollows which occur between rocks or the lower slopes of the hills, the soil is not unfrequently deep and fertile. In the higher mountains, peat does not exist in any considerable quantity, nor in the low grounds at all, with the exception of a small spot, near the outlet of Glen-sheil; but the summit of the hill above Letterfearn is covered with this substance. Clay occurs in a few places, near the sea, and is used as mortar. From the frequency of rain, the greater part of the soil, with the exception of the gravelly spots above-mentioned, is naturally wet, while the nature of the subsoil, which is either rock or compact and impervious till, renders the operation of draining laborious and expensive. The peculiar character of the rock also, which frequently protrudes from the soil, constitutes a serious obstacle to agriculture.

There are no mines of any description in the parish.

*Zoology—Quadrupeds.*—Among wild animals, the first place must be assigned to the red-deer, which are still to be found in considerable numbers in the eastern parts of the parish. The roe is rarely to be met with. Hares are numerous, and the grey mountain species, which becomes white in winter, is found in the higher mountains, feeding upon the smooth green herbage which sometimes occurs near the highest summits. The badger excavates his burrow in the lower slopes of the hills; and from the cairns of broken rock which occupy the same situations, the fox has not yet been extirpated. The fissures of the rocks harbour numbers of wild cats and polecats. The marten is not unfrequent in the woods, and of the clefts of rocks that border the lakes or the sea, the otter is a constant tenant. Weasels are numerous, and the stoat is occasionally seen. Rats and mice abound, although the former have only appeared within the last few years. Moles are very numerous, but the squirrel, hedgehog, and rabbit are unknown.

*Birds.*—In the precipices among the higher mountains, the brown and black eagles build their nests, to the serious injury of the sheep-farmer, to whose young lambs they are scarcely less destructive than the fox. The osprey frequents similar situations near the sea. The white and brown owls, kite, and buzzard are numerous. Hawks of different species abound, as do also the rook, raven, and hooded-crow, but the magpie is rare, and the carrion-crow, the jack-daw, and the jay have not been seen. The cuckoo

regularly ushers in the summer, and its young, found in the nest of the titlark, has been frequently reared, but in no instance has it lived to utter its peculiar note. The wryneck and woodpecker are unknown, as are also the kingfisher, hoopoe, and creeper. The black-cock is rare; but the red grouse are rather numerous, and among the heaps of stones which occur on the higher slopes of the mountains, the ptarmigan is not unfrequently seen. Partridges are not numerous. The rock and wood pigeons occur, but rarely. The stare is also a rare bird. The missel, blackbird, redwing, field-fare, and throstle are common. The ring-ouzel is sometimes, and the water-ouzel frequently, met with. The chatterer and gross-beak are unknown, but finches and buntings abound,—especially of the former genus, the chaffinch, bullfinch, sparrow, and linnet,—and of the latter, the common, yellow, and snow-buntings; the last named species generally appearing in large flocks, before the first snow of the winter. The wood and field-larks are unknown, but the skylarks and titlarks are numerous; as are also the white and the yellow wagtails, the red-breast, stone-chat, and wren. The great and blue titmice are abundant. The window swallow is a regular visitor, and the goat-sucker is sometimes heard.

Of the class of waders, the heron, curlew, woodcock, snipe, sand-piper, oyster-catcher, and golden plover, are well known, the last occupying in great flocks the summits of the less elevated mountains. The rare long-legged species (*Himantopus melanopterus*) has been found. The corn-rail is familiar in the hay fields, and the water-hen occurs in the marshes. Among the fin-footed birds, the coot and grebe are seen; and of the numerous tribes of web-footed birds, the guillemot and imber, the gull and the tern may be mentioned. The stormy-petrel has been observed, skimming over the sea, or floating on its surface when calm. The red-breasted goosander, the smew, and the cormorant, are often seen diving along the shores; the wild swan, in severe winters, visits the lakes; the laggoose and the bernacle are not unknown; and the mallard, teal, widgeon, and tufted duck are common on the lakes and loch.

*Fishes.*—Among the inhabitants of the waters, of the cetaceous class, the herring-whale and the fin-fish, the dolphin, porpoise, and seal, are all occasional visitors. Of cartilaginous fishes, there occur the piked and the spotted dog-fish, the skate and the thornback, the angler and the pipe-fish. The sturgeon has been sometimes taken of a large size. Of the apodal bony fishes, may be mentioned the conger and common eel, and the lance or sand-eel. Among the jugular

fishes, the important genus of the cod deserves the first notice. Of this tribe, the common cod, the haddock, the bib, the cole-fish, the whiting, the hake, the ling, and the pollack or lythe are well known. The five-bearded cod and the tusk have been found. The smooth, the spotted, and the viviparous blenny are numerous on the rocky shores; as are two species of flounder, on the sandy shallows. The common wrasse and sea-perch are often taken; and the elegantly marked bimaculated wrasse is sometimes caught. The common mackerel is numerous, as is also the scad or horse mackerel; but neither is much esteemed. The grey gurnard visits the loch, in great numbers, in autumn; the red is also sometimes taken. Both on the sea shore and in the rivers, the salmon and the white trout are abundant. The lakes abound with the yellow spotted trout. The grey mullet is sometimes caught; but the herring is the staple fish of the parish. It usually enters the loch, early in August, at which time it is always full of roe and milt, or lean, and feeding on its own fry, which at this season it devours so greedily, as to be frequently caught upon the hooks baited with a white feather for catching the young cole-fish. The next shoal which enters the loch, about the end of August, is generally of fine quality, fat and large. From this period, the fish usually decrease in numbers, and fall off in quality till the beginning of December, when they gradually disappear. It is not a little remarkable, that, at the period of the season in which the herring is in the finest condition, there is nothing to be found in its stomach. This is probably the consequence of its feeding at this time upon animalcules, which are either invisible from their diminutive size or transparency, or are so quickly digested as to have escaped observation, probably upon the luminous kinds which always accompany it.

*Reptiles.*—The only reptiles are frogs, toads, and lizards. No serpents have occurred in the parish.

*Insects.*—The insects of this parish have not attracted much attention; consequently no rare or interesting kinds have been observed. Wild bees are numerous and of several species, forming their hives in the deep soil or in the mossy pastures. The scarlet and the white butterflies are very abundant. The gooseberry caterpillar is the only insect complained of as destructive to vegetation, and the midge as troublesome to man. The fly which deposits its eggs in the back of the sheep, has scarcely found its way this far north, and it is hoped that the wetness of the climate will prevent it from extending its ravages. The same cause probably preserves the

fruit trees from the depredations of insects. A beautiful caterpillar, resembling a green leaf bent into a tube, with its nerves and foot-stalk, was observed two years ago upon the Lombardy poplar.

The only kinds of shell-fish which abound on the shores of Lochduich are whelks, limpets, and mussels, all of which are used as bait for fish, and in times of scarcity are resorted to by the poor people as food. Clams and other bivalves are rare. The lobster is scarcely known, but the green crab is very common. An animal bearing a close resemblance to a leech was discovered by the writer, two years ago, under a stone at low water mark, of the extraordinary length of four yards.

*Botany.*—The Flora of this parish does not seem to contain any plants but such as are common in similar situations in the Highlands, unless the *Epilobium angustifolium*, a large plot of which occurs near the church, be considered worthy of notice. Of the native plants applied to economical purposes, may be mentioned the common heath, the green tops of which dye a good yellow, and with indigo a tolerable green; the bark of the alder, which, with the addition of copperas, forms a good black; the *Lecanora tartarea*, which dyes a purple, and the *Parmelia omphalodes*, a reddish-brown. The twigs of the willow are twisted into ropes, as a substitute for hemp, as are also the shavings of fir root, rushes and heath laid with the hand. In domestic practice, the leaves of the spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) are used as a blister; the red crane's-bill (*Geranium robertianum*), to abate the inflammation in erysipelas; a cataplasm of hemlock (*Cicuta virosa*) is a favourite application to indolent tumours; and a decoction of the sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia* and *longifolia*) is used to cure urinary disorders of cattle.

The native fruits found in the parish are brambles, (*Rubus fruticosus* and *corylifol.*;) roebuck berries (*R. saxatilis*;) raspberries, (*R. idæus*;) of which the white variety occurs; cloudberry (*R. chamæmorus*;) strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*;) whortleberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus* and *V. vitis idæa*;) bear-berries, (*Arbutus uva-ursi*;) crow-berries, (*Empetrum nigrum*;) roan-berries, (*Pyrus aucuparia*;) and hazel nuts.

The native trees are the alder and the ash, the former occupying the swampy hollows, the latter the steep banks and rocky eminences. Both these kinds of timber cover a considerable extent of the lower slopes of the hill of Letterfearn, growing quite down to the high water mark. These woods are of some importance

In an economical point of view, the first mentioned being well adapted for herring barrel staves, and the other for the purposes of the boat-carpenter and agriculturist. Besides these, hazel, mountain-ash, and willow, are found in considerable abundance. The rarer kinds are birch, bird-cherry, poplar, holly, oak, and elm. The native fir, which at one time must have covered a great extent of the parish, its roots being found everywhere in the higher grounds, is now almost extirpated.

The planting of timber has hitherto been attempted on a scale so very limited as to be unworthy of notice, except so far as to observe that the result of such experiments as have been made is such as to hold out ample encouragement to this species of improvement. The trees to which the soil seems most congenial, next to the alder and ash, are the larch, the elm, and the plane tree. But there is no sort of timber cultivated in Scotland, that would not thrive, under careful management.

#### II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Of the history of this parish, little is known of an earlier date than the middle of the thirteenth century. About this period, Colin Fitzgerald, the founder of the family of Seaforth, received from Alexander III. the governorship of Castle Donan in Kintail, in reward, it is said, of his conduct at the battle of Largs. Letterfearn was then possessed by tribes of the names of Macbheolan, Macaulay, &c.; and if tradition can be relied upon, it was by a practice not uncommon in those times, of fomenting quarrels amongst these septs, and then obtaining "power of fire and sword" against them as unruly subjects, that the Mackenzies managed to possess themselves of the country. About the beginning of the following century, the Macraes, a clan of Irish origin, who appear to have come over to this country, before or along with Fitzgerald, as they are stated to have fought under him at Largs, and afterwards settled for some generations in the Aird of Lovat, emigrated into the parish, where they gradually increased in numbers and consequence, until they became almost exclusively the occupants of the lands.\*

\* Although a matter of little importance, it may be proper here to state, that the unworthy invention which an individual of a neighbouring district palmed upon the credulity of Dr Johnston, and to which the weight of that great name has given currency; viz. that the Macraes only attained to consequence by marrying the widows of the Macleannans slain at Auldearn,—is destitute of all foundation, and contradicted by ample evidence, written and traditional, from which it clearly appears, 1. That the Macraes were a tribe of considerable notice, before the Macleannans existed as a clan known by that name; 2. that the former had attained to a higher degree of import-

The most interesting historical event connected with the parish is the action which was fought in the cause of the Stewarts in the valley of Glensheil, in June 1719, between the Macraes, supported by some other adherents of the family of Seaforth, and 400 Spaniards, commanded by Earl William of that name; and a body of the Royal troops. The principal force of the Highlanders was posted on the north bank of the Sheil, on a steep eminence overlooking the narrow pass, into which the valley is here contracted; and round the base of which, on the brink of the torrent, which at this place forms a succession of falls and deep pools, wound the rugged path by which the Royal forces were advancing. The Spaniards occupied a similar eminence on the south bank; while a small party, at the head of which was the celebrated Rob Roy, was stationed about a quarter of a mile to the eastward, behind a hillock, with the view of surprising and surrounding the enemy. The advantages of this strong position were rendered unavailing by the superior discipline of the King's troops, and the treachery or cowardice of the foreign auxiliaries. The Highlanders fought with their accustomed bravery, repelling three several attempts to dislodge them from their position. A fourth attack proved more successful. Earl William being dangerously wounded, and the Royalists having, with hand grenades, set fire to the long heather among which the Highlanders were posted, the latter fell into confusion: and receiving no support from the Spaniards, who, on a party being detached to attack them, laid down their arms without firing a shot, they retired, carrying along with them their wounded leader. Of Rob Roy, it is recorded, that having, with more zeal than judgment, attacked the rear of the enemy's column before they had become engaged in front, his little party was routed, and the intention of placing the King's troops between two fires, was thus defeated. In constructing the Parliamentary road which runs through this pass, a few years since, several bullets and some pieces of musket barrels were found; and the green mounds which cover the graves of the slain, among which, that of the "Dutch Colonel," Wightman, is distinguished, and the ruins of a rude breastwork, which the Highlanders had constructed on the crest of the hill to cover their position,—still mark the scene of the conflict.

ance before the date in question, than at any subsequent period; 3. that more of their number fell at Auldearn, than of the MacLennans; and 4. that the latter have always been considered a subordinate sept.

ROSS AND CROMARTY.

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*Antiquities.*—On the estate of Letterfearn, near the harbour of Ob-Inag, are the remains of one of those singular structures, which, for want of a better name, have been denominated “Picts’ houses.” This building, like the rest of the same kind, is of a circular shape, having the faces of the wall separated by an interval, which, at the base, is 3 feet wide, but diminishes gradually upwards, until it entirely disappears. Across this space, rows of band-stones are laid in a spiral manner, connecting the two faces of the wall. The internal diameter is 25 feet, and the thickness of the wall, including the enclosed space, is 9 feet. An aperture of 4 by 5 feet occurs on the side that looks to the sea. The building is constructed of flat stones, the greater number of which are of large size (that covering the entrance, which is of a triangular form, cannot weigh less than a ton,) apparently carried from a heap of stones of the same kind that occurs in the immediate vicinity. These stones are laid with remarkable accuracy, especially on the external face, being so closely fitted as to leave no room for pinnings, but without mortar. The internal surface is less carefully built; and no attention has been bestowed on smoothing the sides of the intervening space, into which the pointed ends of the longer stones are suffered to protrude far beyond the general level. There is no tradition, except such as is manifestly fabulous, respecting the date or purpose of this building. The peculiarity of its construction, indeed, indicates an origin too remote to leave room to expect that the case should be otherwise. This is a subject, the investigation of which demands and merits more attention than it has hitherto received. These towers seem to point to an era and a state of society, concerning which history is altogether silent. Respecting the intention with which they were erected, no theory has yet been suggested that is not liable to objection. The opinion of their having been strongholds for securing the cattle, is contradicted by their limited dimensions, and by the care bestowed, and the labour expended in their construction. That they were intended as places of refuge from an invading enemy, is rendered equally improbable, by their being unprovided with loopholes for the discharge of weapons, and their being sometimes, as in the present instance, commanded and overlooked by a neighbouring eminence. For being permanent places of residence, they seem not at all adapted, having had neither windows nor roof; and did their construction, otherwise, admit of the supposition, that they were meant for watch-towers or beacons, the position of this one, which is situated in a

hollow, from which there is but a very limited view, would prove its fallacy. But in whatever obscurity the particular purpose of their erection may be involved, these buildings clearly indicate, by their great size and the mode of their construction, a measure of skill in the practice of masonry, and a state of society admitting the combination of the powers of many, to produce a common result, not easily reconcilable with the barbarism so unhesitatingly ascribed to our remote ancestors.

A barrow, constructed of small flat stones, laid with great neatness, and covered with flags overlapping one another in an imbricated manner, was discovered a few years since, in digging for gravel for the road upon the west side of the valley of Glensheil. Its height was 5 feet, its width 2 feet 3 inches. It ran in a sloping direction from the bottom to the top of a small hillock of gravel to the length of 26 feet. Nothing was found in it that could throw any light on its history.

*Land-owners.*—The whole lands of this parish, as well as of the neighbouring parishes of Kintail and Lochalsh, were possessed by the family of Seaforth, until within the present century, when the greater part of them was alienated. The property of Letterfearn, comprehending the portion of the division of that name, lying westward of the church, was purchased in 1834, by the late Lachlan Mackinnon of Corry, for about L. 15000; and that of Glensheil, consisting of the remaining portion of Letterfearn, and the south and west side of the valley of Glensheil, by Charles Lillingston, Esq. of Ipswich, for L. 28,000. The rest of the parish, included between the rivers Sheil and Croe, belongs still to the representative of the family of Seaforth, the Honourable Mrs Stewart Mackenzie.

*Modern Buildings.*—There is no building of a class superior to that of farm-houses in the parish. These, including two recently built on Mrs S. Mackenzie's property, are substantial and comfortable, though small. There is no mill, those of the neighbouring parishes of Kintail and Lochalsh being sufficiently accessible to the inhabitants.

The gneiss of the mountains to the eastward, though difficult to dress, is sufficiently compact to form excellent building stone. That of Letterfearn is too much intersected with fissures, to be fit for the purpose. An attempt made, a few years ago, to burn the limestone of Letterfearn into lime, was unsuccessful, the lime produced proving too impure to be fit for mortar. But good lime is to be had at Broadford in Skye, at the distance of twenty-four miles, from

which it is carried, in boats, to this country. The price there is 6d. per boll.

Strathspey timber of natural growth is generally used in the farmers' houses; but in those lately erected on Mrs S. Mackenzie's property, planted fir from Brahan has been employed.

The houses occupied by the cottagers are of a very inferior description. They are invariably built of dry stone, *i. e.* without any kind of mortar, roofed with couples of unsquared alder, the lower ends of which are built into the wall, joined together by a few horizontal spars fastened with trenails, on which are laid the small sticks called "kebbers," which support the thatch. The latter consists of a layer of thin parings of turf, neatly laid on in the manner of slates, and afterwards covered with heather, ferns, or rushes. The interior of the building is divided into three compartments, in one of which the family sit, eat, and sleep; another contains the potatoes; and the third, through which the entrance leads, is converted, in winter, to the purposes of a byre, containing the cows and stirks.

The only apertures, besides the door, are a window, on the principal apartment, the upper part of which is sometimes, though rarely, glazed, and the lower fitted with wooden shutters; and a hole, on the roof, for the emission of the smoke. The fire is lighted on the earthen floor, and supported by a large stone set on end: over it, depends, from the sooty rafters, the wooden crook, by which the pot is suspended.

There is a "genealogical account of the Macraes," written by a Mr John Macrae, minister in Dingwall, who died in 1704, a copy of which, in manuscript, is in the possession of Lieut. Col. Sir John Macrae of Ardintoul, containing some curious information respecting the early history of the country and its inhabitants.

### III.—POPULATION.

During the disorderly period of feudal independence that succeeded the downfall of the Norwegian authority, the inhabitants of this parish, in common with those of the Highlands in general, took an active part in the commotions of the times; and in every contest, in which the Mackenzies of Seaforth were engaged with the neighbouring clans, the Macraes proved themselves faithful and efficient adherents of that family. They were also, under the chief of that name, concerned in the wars of the Stuarts, and fought at Auldearn and Sheriffmuir, as well as at Glensheil, but took no part in the struggle of 1745.

The period that preceded and succeeded this last era, so im-

portant in the history of the Highlands, seems to have been one, during which the inhabitants of this parish enjoyed a large measure of prosperity. It is still referred to as a species of golden age; and, after making every necessary allowance for the fondness with which it is natural that the memory of better times should be cherished under the pressure of present misery, it is likely that the people, during the period in question, possessed, in a high degree, the substantial comforts of life. Secluded by their inaccessible position from the turmoil of general society, enjoying, to a considerable extent, in virtue of their high character for prowess, security of life and property; and holding their lands on such terms as admitted of their consuming among themselves a large proportion of the produce; they passed their days in peace and comfort, alike free from the drudgery of labour and the privations of indigence. The country was, at this period, exclusively stocked with black-cattle. The flesh of these, with the produce of the dairy, in the management of which they were noted for their skill, oat-cake and salmon, constituted their food. They were clothed with kelt or tartan manufactured from the fleeces of a few sheep kept for the purpose, and if their luxuries were not numerous, their wants were few in proportion. About the beginning of the present century, the change of stock from black-cattle to sheep, which has tended so materially to alter the whole social system of the Highlands, began to be introduced. It could not have long escaped observation, that the mountainous pastures of this parish could be employed to greater profit in feeding the sheep, to which the most lofty and rugged eminences are accessible, and which can exist during the severity of winter, independently of artificial provision and shelter, than in rearing the less hardy and active cow. Yet the change was not introduced but with great caution and much reluctance on the part of tenantry. It was apprehended, that though the breeding of sheep was carried on with great advantage in the finer pastures and milder climates of other parts of the country, they could not live among the sterile and stormy mountains of this quarter. A series of unusually severe seasons, which occurred about this period, seemed to justify these fears. It was also, and with more reason dreaded, that a system of husbandry, which could only be carried on to profit on large farms, and which required a mode of management so different from that to which they had been accustomed, as to render their skill in that branch of agriculture of no avail, might lead to the removal of the ancient occupants of the soil, and the introduction of strangers, possessed of the

necessary capital and experience. These apprehensions, which retarded for some time the change of stock, have proved in part to have been unfounded. The success of the first experiments shewed at once, that the climate and pasture were perfectly congenial to the sheep. The rearing of black cattle was by degrees abandoned, and there is at present no farm in the parish except two small lotted farms in Letterfearn, of which the staple commodities do not consist of wool and mutton. But though the change now described produced an amazing increase of rent, the advance, in some instances, of mountain pasture amounting to from 1000 to 6000 per cent. in the course of a single generation, the effect upon the population was not so favourable. The valuable and respectable class of "substantial tenants" has been entirely swept away; such of their number as did not emigrate to America, having sunk to the rank of lotters or cottars upon the large farms, are crowded along the shores of the loch, dependent for subsistence upon the laborious and uncertain pursuit of the herring fishing, or the still more fatiguing, precarious, and pernicious practice of smuggling. Nor has the ruin thus brought upon the tenantry been unattended with a corresponding reaction upon the landlords. Notwithstanding the incredibly rapid increase of the value of the lands, the expectations of this class, and the additional expenditure to which these led, rose in a progression still more rapid, and the result is apparent in the fact, that the whole lands of the parish were lately under trust or assignation, in consequence of pecuniary incumbrances. Such of the descendants of the original occupants as were possessed of sufficient means have become store-farmers on a large scale, and, with the experience of a few years, have profited so much by the example of such strangers from the south as have settled among them, that they now manage their farms with a skill not inferior to that of their instructors.

There is no village in the parish, unless the assemblages of houses occupied by the class of lotters already mentioned, be considered as such.

During the last seven years the average number of births has been	-	104
	of marriages,	4½
The number of unmarried men above 50 years of age is	-	2
of unmarried females above 45 is	-	8
The average number of children, of all ages, in each family, is	-	3
of persons under 15 years is	-	278
between 15 and 30,	-	174
30 and 50,	-	162
50 and 70,	-	78
above 70,	-	30
	Total population,	722

Amount of population in 1801,	710
1821,	768
1831,	715
Number of families in the parish,	144
chiefly employed in agriculture,	115
trade, manufactures, and handicraft,	15

There are no insane, fatuous, blind, deaf, or dumb persons in the parish; and only 2 individuals of infirm mind.

There is no register kept of deaths. There is no landed proprietor, or other person of independent fortune, resident in the parish.

*Character of the People, &c.*—The male inhabitants have long been remarkable for the personal qualities of great size, strength, activity, and courage; the females, for beauty and gracefulness; and both sexes, for an extraordinary taste for the cultivation of poetry and music.\*

The personal qualities of the people are, however, undergoing a change, corresponding to that which has taken place in their circumstances and habits. They are still indeed a taller race than the inhabitants of the neighbouring parishes; but even this only remaining distinction is rapidly disappearing under the combined influences of hard labour and scanty aliment.

The language generally spoken is Gaelic. Forty years ago, there was little English known; but that language is now, from the joint effect of schools and increased intercourse with strangers, rapidly gaining ground; and there is scarcely an individual of the rising generation that does not understand and speak a little of it, the advantage of which is daily experienced.

Dancing may be stated as the favourite amusement of the people, within doors. Weddings are still celebrated in a style more expensive than the circumstances of the parties can well afford; and during the winter holidays, subscription balls are occasionally held. The abominable practice of drinking to excess at funerals is now nearly abolished. The *club* or *shinty* used formerly to be much played on

\* One Duncan Macrae, an inhabitant of the valley of Glensheil, in the early part of the last century, possessed these qualities in such a degree, as to entitle him to be regarded as a type of the distinguishing characteristics, physical and intellectual, of his countrymen. A stone of immense size, which he carried to some distance in his arms, remains upon the farm of Achnungart, as a monument of his extraordinary strength. The thieves of Lochaber often experienced his sagacity, activity, and courage, in recovering his own and his neighbour's cattle; and several poetical compositions, distinguished for pathos and pious sentiment, prove that this Highland "Cathernach," in common with heroes of greater celebrity, amidst the din of arms, did not neglect the gentler arts of peace. He was killed, with many of the best men of his surname, at Sheriffmuir in 1715, but not, it is said, before he had, with his broad sword, done terrible execution among the ranks of the enemy; and his formidable weapon was long, and perhaps still is, preserved in the tower of London, and shewn as the "Great Highlander's sword."

Christmas and New Year's Day, O. S. ; but this pastime is now almost abandoned to the boys.

In their personal habits, the people manifest as great a love for cleanliness as their circumstances admit ; the smallness and smokiness of their houses, and their general poverty, being strongly opposed to the practice of this virtue. The Highland dress is still a good deal worn, on occasions of public meetings, especially by the young men in the higher district of the parish. The ordinary clothing of the males consists of a short coat or jacket and trowsers of kelt, blue, or chequered of different colours, manufactured at home, and dyed with the native substances before enumerated ; a cotton waistcoat, shirt, and neckcloth ; the blue felt bonnet, flat or *cocked*, and shoes and stockings ; the former generally made by each individual for himself, of home-tanned leather, the latter spun and wrought by the females of the family. The females, until about forty years ago, were universally clothed in worsted stuffs, generally dyed blue, with narrow stripes of red, of domestic manufacture, and woven by country weavers, and are still generally clad in the same material when engaged in field or other labour, but always appear at social meetings and at church dressed in cotton garments, of which last substance the shift is always composed. Caps are seldom worn, except by such women as have had children, or are married, and the straw bonnet is not yet assumed by the native females of the lower class. The ordinary food of this class consists of potatoes ; along with which, they generally have herrings, but sometimes nothing but salt. Oat-cake and flesh meat are luxuries which they can but seldom afford ; and butter and cheese, though favourite articles, they can but rarely indulge in. Oatmeal, when it can be procured, is used in the form of cake or gruel, being seldom made into porridge. The universal beverage is cold water. In their eating and drinking, the people are scrupulously cleanly ; and they will walk a considerable distance to a fountain, rather than quench their thirst at a common brook. Beer is unknown.

It cannot be said with truth, that the class of people of which the great majority of the population consists, enjoy the comforts of life in even a moderate degree. Poorly fed, scantily clothed, and miserably lodged, theirs is a life of penury and toil. Exposed to the temptations of idleness without its ease, and to the slavery of labour without its rewards, they drag out a wretched existence, suffering under the continual fear of impending want, and uncheered by

any prospect of amendment in their condition. It cannot be expected, that a people thus situated should feel satisfied with their condition; but they have learned to submit to their hard fate, and bear their numerous privations with a degree of patience extremely commendable.

In place of any general statement respecting the character of the people, the following incident may be taken as highly characteristic of the peculiar features by which it is distinguished. When the estates of William Earl of Seaforth were forfeited, on account of the share his family took in the rebellion of 1715 and 1719, and the noble proprietor was under the necessity of quitting the kingdom, the Commissioners on the forfeited estates appointed a Mr Ross of Fearn, as factor under them, to collect the rents. This gentleman, regardless of intimations which he received of the determination of the people of the country to resist any attempt to collect their rents, except for the behoof of the person whom they still considered their lawful proprietor, proceeded to the west, accompanied by his son and some other attendants. On the day that these unwelcome visitants were expected, six men, armed with muskets, stationed themselves near the pass by which they were advancing on the road leading from Strathglass. Aware that his life was in danger, Ross had, before his party came to the pass, exchanged horses with his son, directing the latter to ride some distance in advance. This arrangement proved fatal to the young man, for no sooner had he come within range of the Highlanders' guns, than, mistaking him for his father, three of them fired, and he fell dead; upon witnessing which, the factor and his attendants turned their horses and fled. Many subsequent attempts were made to levy the rents; but, though supported by the presence of a military force, they proved equally unsuccessful. While the people were thus resisting the royal authority, they acted a part which showed that their violent conduct was dictated, not by selfish motives, but by fidelity to their absent chief. They voluntarily paid their rents to his factor, Mr Murchison of Auchtertyre, ancestor of the present distinguished Secretary of the Geological Society, and that gentleman regularly carried or sent them to France, where the expatriated Earl then resided, for many years, until the forfeited estates were restored.

The qualities of stern determination and disinterested attachment exemplified in this transaction, may be said to be still characteristic of the people of this parish. Recent occurrences, which

it would be tedious to detail, have shewn, that, with all their patient endurance of hardship, there is a point beyond which oppression becomes dangerous, especially when exercised in a shape calculated to irritate the suppressed but not yet extinct feelings of the Highlander. In illustration of the moral character of the people, it may be mentioned, that a slight wooden latch, to exclude the cattle, is all the fastening that is deemed necessary for the door of a house in the absence of the family; that instances of theft are very rare; that no illegitimate child has been born in the parish for the last three years; that no murder or robbery has been committed in the parish within the memory of man; and that, for the last eighty years, no native of the parish, or individual of the name of Macrae, has been convicted of a felony. This freedom from crime may be ascribed in part to the influence of a species of local patriotism, through which each individual member of the community is deterred from the commission of any improper act, by the consideration of the disgrace which might accrue from his misconduct, to his *country*; but chiefly to the constraining force of a deep though unostentatious feeling of piety and religious principle, with which the minds of the people are imbued. Of the first of these salutary influences, the power is gradually giving way before the increasing intercourse with strangers, and the other, it is to be feared, will prove no more than sufficient to counteract the force of the various demoralizing agencies which are now at work among them.

Among these, the practice of smuggling holds the first place. Illicit distillation, which was introduced about twenty years since, prevails, especially upon the estate of Letterfearn, to an extent that threatens to prove destructive to all habits of regular industry, injurious to the health, and ruinous to the morals of its victims; and is likely to continue to produce these distressing results, until the owners of the land choose to discountenance it. The consequences of the praiseworthy conduct of some of the neighbouring proprietors prove, that, while the severe, but desultory, and therefore ineffectual exertions of the revenue officers have failed of putting down this baneful mischief, a simple prohibition on the part of the landowners, under the sanction of a threat of removal, will at once effect an object so desirable.

Poaching in game and salmon is practised to some extent by young men in the higher parts of the parish, but does not prevail to such a degree as to influence the general habits of the people.

## IV.—INDUSTRY.

The number of acres of land which is either constantly or occasionally in tillage may be about 280. The number which remains constantly in pasture 71,600. The number that might be cultivated with advantage does not probably exceed 50. There is no land in a state of undivided common. The number of acres under wood cannot be less than 70. The natural woods are not judiciously managed. No attention is bestowed on thinning them. The trees are cut, before they attain to a proper size, and they are much injured by breaking off the branches for fuel, a practice which the scarcity of that article renders common, and which occasions the early decay of the trees from the effects of the wet they receive by the wounds thus made.

*Rent of Land.*—The average rent of arable land, taking that of the large farms at L. 1, and of the lots at L. 2 per acre, may be stated at L. 1, 10s. The average rent of pasture is reckoned at L. 2, 10s. for each cow, including provender for winter, and the rearing of a calf till he is a year old, or L. 1, 10s. for summer grass, 15s. for wintering, and 5s. for the calf; 10s. is the usual charge for summer pasturing young cattle. The average rent paid for a ewe of the cross or Cheviot breeds is 2s. 6d., of the black-faced breed 2s., both being reckoned from the age of seven months.

*Wages.*—Farm-servants are usually hired for the year; males at a wage of from L. 7 to L. 8; females L. 2, 10s., and fed in the house. Shepherds receive pasturage for 2 cows, and from 40 to 60 sheep, 6 bolls of oatmeal, and a piece of land for potatoes. Day-labourers, 1s. 6d. per day without victuals; dry-stone masons, 2s.; carpenters, 2s. 6d. per day.

*Prices.*—The average price of Cheviot wool for the last seven years has been 9d. per pound smeared, or unsmeared, 11d.; cross breed wool, 6½d., or unsmeared 8½d.; black-faced, 5d., or unsmeared, 6d. per lb.; of cheese, 7s. 6d. per stone of 24 lb.; salt-butter, 16s. per do.; oatmeal, 18s. per boll of 140 lbs.; potatoes, 2s. 6d. per barrel of 32 gallons; oats, 10s. per do.; barley, 14s. per do. Milk cows sell for about L. 7; horses for L. 12: Cheviot sheep with lambs, or wedders, average L. 1; cross breed, 15s. black-faced, 12s.; lambs of these several kinds, 7s. 6d., 6s., and 4s. 6d. Of imported commodities, English coals are purchased at 18s., Scotch at 14s. Foreign timber, 2s. 6d. per foot; Strathspey do. 2s. 3d.; planted fir, 1s. 6d.; oak 2s. 6d. alder 8d.; ash 1s. 10d. Lime from Broadford, 9d. per boll.

The rates of mechanical work may be stated as follows: Mason-work, 9d. per yard; plaster-work, 2d. per do.; weaving from 4d. to 7d. per do.; netting, 6d. per pound; spinning, 2½d. per do.; smith-work from 6d. to 9d. per lb., or 2d. per do., not including the iron; sawing 3d. per 100 feet, or ½d. per stave. A wooden plough, mounted, can be purchased for L. 2, 15. An iron one for L. 3, 10s.; a cart for L. 5, a boat for L. 6. A barrel of nets for L. 4; ropes for do. 18s.; a pair of oars, 7s., making do. 2s.

*Live Stock.*—Of the several breeds of sheep above-mentioned, the four farms into which Mrs Stewart Mackenzie's property is divided, are stocked with the black-faced, as is also the farm of Ardintoul, in Letterfearn, the Cheviot breed having been tried on the latter, and found not to thrive. A good deal of care has been bestowed on the improvement of this kind of stock; but there is room for further exertions. The property of Mr Lillingston is partly stocked with Cheviot, but chiefly with the produce of the black-faced ewe and the Cheviot ram. Much attention is bestowed upon the improvement of this stock. There does not seem to be any speciality in the mode of management pursued, but such as results from the peculiarity of the climate and pasture. The loftiness of the mountains and the humidity of the climate render it indispensable to smear the whole flocks at the beginning of each winter. Tar and butter, or oil, are the materials used for this purpose. Any experiments that have hitherto been tried with other substances, have entirely failed. The casualties among the flocks are, on account of the ruggedness of the surface, the liability of the upland pastures to snow-storms, the difficulty of tending the sheep, and the quantity of vermin which the *cairns* and precipices harbour, necessarily very numerous. Much loss arising from the cause last mentioned would be prevented, if the fox-hunters possessed the art of snaring and poisoning the destructive animals; and also if the people were prevented from indulging their excessive fondness for keeping multitudes of useless dogs, which, being half-starved at home, prey to a mischievous extent upon the sheep and lambs. The disease called *braxy* is the source of serious losses, in the early part of the winter, and great numbers of lambs are often destroyed by stormy weather occurring at the time of their birth, especially among those of the Cheviot and cross breeds. During the last two springs the loss of sheep and lambs had been very great, in consequence of the unusual severity of these seasons.

The breeds of black-cattle are the Ayrshire and the Highland.

A few of the former are kept by the farmers for their milk; but being less saleable, and requiring more pasture and provender than the native kind, they are not in general favour. The indigenous breed have long been celebrated for their symmetry and hardiness. A good many are still kept by the farmers on their low-lying lands; they are a source of considerable profit; but there is not much attention bestowed on the preservation or improvement of the breed.

*Husbandry.*—The tillage of the land is chiefly in the hands of the lotters and cottars. Each *lot* consists of from one to two acres of hanging ground, a great proportion of which is generally rock or bogs. A part of this patch is always planted with potatoes, and the rest sown with barley or oats. The manure used for potatoes is always sea-ware, the dung being reserved for the barley. The tillage is chiefly accomplished with the “crooked spade,” an implement well adapted for the cultivation of steep and stoney land. The manure is generally carried out, in creels on the back of a horse. On the large farms, implements of improved construction are used, viz. ploughs, carts, and harrows. The great obstacles to improvement in this branch of husbandry, are the wetness of the climate, the want of leases, and of encouragement on the part of the proprietors. The lotters holding their lands only from year to year, having no meliorations allowed them, and having learnt by experience that to improve their houses or lots, instead of producing any permanent advantage to themselves, is only holding out an inducement to others to offer a few shillings of additional rent, and to deprive them of the fruit of their labour, are discouraged from attempting improvements which would add materially to their comforts. On the large farms, the leases are also shorter than they ought to be, to encourage the improvement of stock. This is in part occasioned by the late violent fluctuations in the value of farm produce, by which tenants are deterred from coming under permanent engagements, which a fall of prices might disable them from fulfilling, and in part also, by the present unsettled state of the ownership of the lands.

*Herring Fishery.*—The principal fishery is that of the herring. About twenty years since, the quantities of this fish caught in the loch were very considerable. Six and eight barrels in a night were then no uncommon capture for a boat equipped with four barrels of nets (of 36 fathoms length by 5 deep); but, of late years, the fishery has fallen off very much,—a single barrel of fish being now considered an excellent night’s fishing. During the present sea-

son the fishing has been good. The boats, which are manned with from two to four men each, are generally about 16 feet keel, and rigged with a single lug-sail. The nets are restricted by law to the width of a square inch in the mesh,—an absurd regulation, not warranted by any experience of its utility, and most glaringly partial in its operation; for while it prevents the capture of fish of a serviceable size, the catching of foul fish, *i. e.* of herrings full of milt and roe, is permitted without restriction; and as the great quantities of fish taken on the east coast of Scotland are almost all in this condition, it is no extravagant assertion to say, that more injury is done to the breed of herring by one night's fishing there, than by the capture of all small herrings that have been killed on the west coast for a hundred years. The fish is either cured by the people themselves, or sold fresh to purchasers from the Clyde. The price of the cured fish per barrel is generally about L. 1, 4s.; of the *cran* of the fresh fish, (a measure which it is computed will fill a packed barrel,) 16s. The chief obstacles to a more successful prosecution of this branch of industry are the smallness of the boats, occasioned by the want of capital, which prevents the fishermen from following the fish from loch to loch, and the want of timber of good quality at a moderate price.

*Salmon Fishery.*—There is a salmon fishery carried on at each of the rivers flowing into the loch, which together pay a rent of L. 60. That of the Sheil belongs exclusively to the estate of Glen-sheil; the fishing of the Croe is divided between Mrs S. Mackenzie, and Thomas Mackenzie, Esq. of Applecross, the proprietor of the opposite lands. These fishings, in favourable seasons, are extremely productive for the size of the rivers; but these are of very uncertain occurrence, and the fishings lie under the permanent disadvantages of distance from market, lateness of productiveness, and expensiveness of management. The fish are chiefly caught with the *stell*-net. Stake-nets have been tried, but nearly abandoned on account of their expensiveness.

*Produce.*—The average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, may be stated as under :

Produce of all kinds of grain,	-	L. 240
4990 bar. potatoes, &c. at 2s. 6d.	-	575
180 cows at L. 4,	-	720
21380 sheep at 4s.	-	4276
woods,	-	25
salmon fishery,	-	100
140 bar. herring, at 18s.	-	126
Value of total yearly produce,	-	L. 6062

The gross rental of the parish is L. 2600.

There are no manufactures of any kind, except those domestic ones above-mentioned. There are no vessels of any burden belonging to the parish, but there is a frequent resort of vessels from the south, by which wool and herrings are exported, and smearing materials, meal, salt, coals, iron, groceries, and cloths are imported. The freight of wool to Liverpool is from 4d. to 6d. per 24 lbs.; of goods from thence 3s. the barrel bulk.

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Means of Communication.*—The nearest market-town is Inverness, which is distant from the inhabited portion of the parish about 60 miles. With this town, there is a communication by means of a parliamentary road constructed in 1815, through the valley of Glensheil to Glenmoristone. It runs for 18 miles through the parish, sending off a branch at Sheilhouse, where the river Sheil enters the sea, westward to Glenelg and Skye, and another northward to Kintail and Lochalsh.\* At Sheilhouse, there is a sub-post-office connected with the post-office at Lochalsh, between which a foot post passes three times in the week. No public carriage runs on this road, but there is a constant resort of carriers to Inverness. There are two inns, one at Sheilhouse, and the other at Cluonie, twelve miles distant to the south-east. This road, for some years after its construction, formed the principal communication between Inverness and Skye; but its utility in this respect has been in a great measure superseded by the steam-vessels which now ply weekly between that island and the Clyde. There is no road in Letterfearn, where one is much required.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The parish church is situated near the eastern part of Letterfearn, and is distant about eight miles from the western extremity of the parish. Its situation, though equally contiguous to both the densely inhabited parts of the parish, viz. the middle of Letterfearn and the shores at the head of the loch, is not convenient for either, being about two miles and a-half distant from the centre of each. It was built in 1758, being the first church that was erected in this parish, and is much decayed in the

\* Both the roads here mentioned as leading from Sheilhouse to Skye are too steep for wheel-carriages, each of them being carried over a hill about 1000 feet high. A road perfectly level might be constructed along the shore of Letterfearn, to join the Kyle Akin road to Broadford, near the former village. The distance and expense of construction would, it is believed, be less than either of the present roads. Or a road from Sheilhouse to Ob-Inag might communicate with the Lochalsh road at Totag ferry, which would be quite level, easy of construction, and save four miles of distance; at the same time that it would greatly accommodate the inhabitants of the parish.

roof. It affords accommodation for about 300 sitters. The seats were originally put up by the parishioners, but have been kept in repair by the heritors. No seat rents are exacted.

The manse, which was built in 1834, is a commodious and substantial building.

The glebe is an arable one of 4 acres, with pasture for two cows and a horse, of about 20 acres in extent. Its yearly value is about L. 15. The stipend paid by the heritors is L. 132, 17s.,—the deficiency required to raise it to L. 150 being paid by Government. There is no other church or chapel, nor any missionary or catechist in the parish. The whole inhabitants belong to the Established Church, with the exception of a few shepherds from the south of Scotland, who are seceders, and about 30 Roman Catholics. The latter attend chapel at Dornie, in the parish of Kintail, where there is a priest stationed. Divine worship is generally well attended. The average number of communicants is 72.

*Education.*—There is a parochial school, situated at Letterfearn, in which Gaelic and English reading, writing, arithmetic and Latin, are taught. The salary of the schoolmaster is L. 28 per annum; the school fees may amount to L. 2 more. The expense of education would not exceed 7s. per annum even if the fees were rigorously exacted, which is by no means the case. The number of young persons, between six and fifteen years, who cannot read or write, is 46.

The people are generally much alive to the benefits of education. The whole children of the parish are not near enough to attend the school now mentioned. The parochial teacher is wretchedly accommodated.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—The average number of persons receiving aid from the poor funds is 17, to each of whom the average sum allotted is 6s. per annum. There is no mode practised for raising the money thus expended, except the collections at the church door, which amount to about L. 3 annually, the interest of a fund of L. 70, and the fines imposed by the kirk-session on delinquents. The precentor's, session-clerk's, and beadle's salaries, amount to L. 2, 10s.

The poor do not often apply for parochial relief, except in cases of great necessity; but in such cases they do not consider it as degrading to apply for aid.

*Fairs.*—The only fairs held in the parish are for the sale of black cattle, and occur at Whitsunday, July, and September. These

always take place on a Monday. The cattle are purchased by drovers from the south of Scotland, or from the neighbouring parishes. The markets are held at Sheilhouse. Although a good deal of whisky is drunk on these occasions, there is not much drunkenness, and a fight rarely occurs. The practice of exposing pedlar's wares at these meetings, which has been lately introduced, threatens, by attracting young females to them, to do injury to their morals.

*Inns.*—Besides the inns above-mentioned, some of the poorer inhabitants are in the practice of retailing spirits clandestinely, and, notwithstanding every endeavour to discourage it, this nuisance prevails to a pernicious extent.

*Fuel.*—The fuel chiefly used is peat. This is manufactured in the elevated situations, where alone moss occurs, and the carriage of it is a very laborious service, as it can only be transported in creels, sometimes on the backs of horses, but more frequently on those of men and even women. In the houses of the farmers, besides peats for the kitchen, some tons of coals are always procured for the other apartments. The firing required for a family of this class cannot be estimated at less than from L. 15 to L. 20 per annum.

#### MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The most striking variations betwixt the present state of the parish and that which existed at the time of the last Statistical Account, consist in the introduction of the sheep husbandry, and of the lotting system. The moral and physical effects of these changes have been already noticed. A less equivocal benefit has been derived from the opening of the communication to the eastward, and the more extensive diffusion of education.

In all these respects, however, there is room for much improvement. The district of Letterfearn suffers much from the want of a road, the inhabitants being thereby in great measure deprived of the advantage which those of the eastern portion of the parish derive from the communication with Inverness, and subjected to much inconvenience otherwise. They complain, and not without reason, that though they have been taxed with road-money like the people of other parts of the country, their district has not shared in the benefit of its outlay. Both in attending the church and the school, the want of a road is much felt. Another evil demanding attention is the great and increasing poverty of the

lower class of the people, and its accompaniments,—the insufficient food, bad houses, and the baneful practice of illicit distillation. The most obvious cure for this unhappy state of things would be to increase the size of the lots; to proportion the rents to the produce of the land; to grant leases to the more deserving of the people, and to assist the others to leave the country. The present wretched poverty-stricken population would thus be encouraged to build better houses, and cultivate their lands to better purpose, and enabled to provide themselves with such boats and tackle as should put it in their power to prosecute the herring fishery with a better prospect of success than at present. To these must be added, as a matter involving the moral as well as the physical welfare of the people, the providing greater facilities and more efficient means of education than at present exist. Two schools are indispensable, one of them situated at Letterfearn, and the other at the head of the loch, for the latter of which a permanent endowment for a teacher capable of teaching the ordinary branches of education, would be required. There is also need of some species of local police, to settle the disputes, and suppress the minor offences, which the presence of a resident magistracy would tend much to prevent.

November 1836.

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## PARISH OF DINGWALL.\*

PRESBYTERY OF DINGWALL, SYNOD OF ROSS.

THE REV. HECTOR BETHUNE, MINISTER.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

THE parish of Dingwall, consisting of the royal burgh of that name, with an inconsiderable tract of the surrounding country, is situated at the western extremity of the Frith of Cromarty.

*Name.*—A diversity of opinion exists as to the origin of the name “Dingwall.” The accomplished author of the former Statistical Account derives it from “*Digma Vallis*,” words indicative of the richness and fertility of the low grounds, which constitute a great part of the parish. Others, with perhaps greater probability, consider it, like that of several of the towns on this coast, of Scandinavian origin, and refer it to a word expressive of its being the seat of justice. It is certainly not Celtic, as the Highlanders have not yet become

\* Drawn up by Angus Bethune, Esq.