

PARISH OF KILMUIR EASTER.*

PRESBYTERY OF TAIN, SYNOD OF ROSS.

THE REV. CHARLES R. MATHISON, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name—Boundaries.—THE original name of this parish signifies the grave, or the chapel of Mary.

The parish lies partly in the county of Ross, and partly in the county of Cromarty, owing to the circumstance of George, the first Earl of Cromarty, having possessed considerable property in it, and his having obtained the privilege of erecting his whole landed property in Scotland into a separate county, called the county of Cromarty. This property forms a part of many parishes in the synod of Ross; and all these parishes are partly connected with the counties of Ross and Cromarty.

Extent, &c.—This parish is about 10 miles in its greatest length, and 4 miles broad. It is bounded on the west, by the parish of Rosskeen; on the east, by Loggie Easter; on the north, by Ederton and Kincardine; and on the south, by the sands of Nigg, and the Frith of Cromarty. The superficial contents of the parish may be estimated at 17,000 acres.

Topographical Appearances.—The soil of the parish is various; but of late years, it has been greatly improved, especially in the lower parts, which border on the shore of the Frith of Cromarty. The whole of this range, including the Mains of New Tarbat, is now in a fine state of cultivation, and adorned with plantations. The higher grounds contain a great quantity of barren muir, intermixed with natural wood, and fit only for the pasture of sheep. The soil is, in general, of a light gravelly nature in those parts which are cultivated; but there is also a considerable quantity of moss. The coast is flat, and composed of red sandstone. At the recess of the tide, the sea retires very far, and leaves an almost uninterrupted passage to the opposite parish of Nigg. The

* Drawn up by Mr Donald Munro, Parochial Schoolmaster of Kilmuir Easter, and Preacher of the Gospel.

sands of Nigg contain a great quantity of cockles, and other shellfish. The parish is in the lower parts very flat and level. The temperature of the atmosphere is in general mild and gentle, and extremely salubrious; and the climate is free in a great measure from those heavy and noxious vapours which occasion almost incessant rains in many parts of the Highlands. In summer, there is a transparent sky, and unclouded sunshine. This is greatly owing to the absence of any mountainous ridges. The hills which skirt the parish on the north are of no great elevation, and serve as a barrier of defence in that direction. There are no prevalent distempers peculiar to the district, though the parish is occasionally visited with fever. The inhabitants generally enjoy robust health, and often live to an extended old age.

In winter, the sea coast is frequented by barnacles, and different species of wild duck. Swans occasionally visit the sands. There is abundance of sea-ware at certain seasons of the year, thrown ashore, which the inhabitants collect as manure for their land. Westerly winds generally prevail, and blow very severely; but, for the last three years, east winds have been most prevalent. The whole of the lower district is well cultivated, and appears to reward the toil and expense employed in the production of the various agricultural crops; and in summer, the aspect which it assumes is most beautiful. Directly opposite to the parish lies the Bay of Cromarty, which, together with the fine prospect afforded of the Moray Frith by the opening betwixt the Sutons, forms one of the most delightful landscapes in Britain. Much of the higher district of the parish still remains uncultivated, and covered with heather, amidst which large blocks of granite are thickly scattered, and great quantities of moss, which afford peats for fuel to the inhabitants.

Hydrography.—There is no river or fresh water lake in the parish. The small river of Balnagown bounds the parish on the north-east, and runs north and south until it empties itself in the Frith of Cromarty. On the south, the parish is bounded by the Frith of Cromarty, which is from 6 to 7 miles in breadth. In the vicinity of Tarbat House, in a beautiful plantation, and very near the shore, there are two chalybeate springs which flow perennially, and are strongly impregnated.

Zoology.—The small river of Balnagown affords abundance of trout, and sometimes salmon of a certain growth. Cod, skate, flounders, and cuddies, and occasionally herrings, are fished in the

Frith of Cromarty. In the sands opposite the shore, there are considerable beds of cockles, and large mussel scalps, which are the source of some annual revenue to the principal proprietor in this parish, Mr Hay Mackenzie of Cromarty. There is also an oyster scalp, which thrives very well.

Botany.—There are several superb and very ancient trees in the vicinity of Balnagown Castle, consisting of oak, and elm, and beech, and chestnut interspersed, and forming a splendid avenue. There is likewise, in the vicinity of Tarbat House a fine old grove, which contains trees of very ancient growth and large size. Larch is now frequently planted in the parish, but the Scotch fir is still the tree most commonly grown.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Eminent Characters.—Long ere the controversies which have lately agitated our church and land were known, and while the people, especially in our rural districts, were distinguished by their devoted attachment to the clergy of the Establishment, flourished the excellent and amiable Mr Porteous. The Rev. John Porteous—a name which was never pronounced in Ross-shire without the deepest veneration—was minister of the parish of Kilmuir Easter for the long period extending between 1732 and 1775. His grandfather is said to have come to Inverness in Cromwell's army, and after the Restoration he settled in that ancient burgh, of which Mr Porteous, the minister of Kilmuir, was a native. During the period of his incumbency in this parish, extending to forty-three years, he officiated with the highest reputation, adorning his profession with all those gifts and graces which serve to remind us of the primitive purity and integrity of apostolic times. Nor did his Divine master fail to acknowledge him in his work of faith and labour of love, for he was favoured with many proofs of an accepted ministry while living; and there is abundant reason to believe that he will have many as his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

The distinguishing characteristics of this venerable man, as a preacher of the Gospel and a teacher of righteousness, appear to have been, sublimity and spirituality of doctrine; patriarchal simplicity of diction, and of manner; a deep insight into the arcana of the human constitution, and the power of embodying his conceptions in striking and forcible language, and of carrying irresistible demonstration to the conscience. He possessed a brilliant imagination, which, though subject to occasional eccentricities, was still so

thoroughly imbued with the solemnities of Christian truth, that it always ministered instruction, and enabled him to enlighten and to edify his hearers. He was "a man on earth devoted to the skies," and, from the fulness of a heart overflowing with love to God and to his fellow-creatures, he spoke with an unction and a pathos which carried captive the understanding and the affections to the obedience of the truth. Though now dead upwards of sixty-three years, his memory is cherished with the highest veneration, and the respect and reverence with which his primitive pastoral admonitions, and profound doctrinal and experimental observations, have been handed down, resemble more the regard with which we may conceive the Jewish people to have listened to the predictions of their prophets, than the attention ordinarily paid to the instructions of uninspired men. Whilst minister of this parish, he was pre-eminently popular; and the church of Kilmuir constituted a centre of attraction to a large surrounding neighbourhood, who hurried eagerly from different and widely distant parishes to hear this man of God, and to hang upon his lips. He did the work of an evangelist, and made full proof of his ministry. "He watched and prayed—he wept and felt for all." His mortal remains are deposited in the church-yard of Kilmuir, and in the close vicinity of that spot in which he so long held forth the word of life, and cheered so often the Christian pilgrim in his journey toward Zion.

How sleep the good who sink to rest?
 By all their country's wishes blest.
 When spring with dewy fingers cold,
 Returns to deck their hallow'd mould,
 She there shall dress a sweeter sod
 Than fancy's feet have ever trod.
 By angels' hands their knell is rung,
 By forms unseen their dirge is sung,
 There virtue comes, a pilgrim gray
 To bless the turf that wraps their clay,
 And piety shall still repair,
 To dwell a weeping hermit there.

In the autumn of 1833, this parish was deprived of one of its most valuable members in the person of Donald Mitchell, who died at an advanced age, after having been for upwards of thirty years employed in the office of catechist. Though an illiterate man, and not able to read even the Gaelic language until after his marriage, his views of divine truth were comprehensive, accurate, and profound, and for many years he was an able instructor to the young and rising generation. Diligent in duty, and clothed with the dignity and the moral force of Christian character, he had acquired the esteem and veneration of an extensive district of coun-

try, in which he was familiarly known, as a solid, judicious, and deeply experienced disciple of the Lord Jesus. Never was there a more striking exemplification of the efficacy of Divine teaching, in enlightening the mind with that wisdom which cometh from above, and which often reveals to babes what is hid from the wise and the prudent. The inhabitants of this parish will long remember the solemn warnings, the affectionate addresses, and the pathetic appeals of this man of God—and though dead, he yet speaketh.

Heritors.—There are six land-owners. Mr Hay Mackenzie of Cromarty possesses the highest valuation, and is patron of the parish.

Parochial Registers.—The register of births commences in 1738, and there are no sessional records of an older date than 1771.

Antiquities.—In addition to the antiquities so well described in the former Statistical Account of this parish, may be mentioned a round tower connected with the present church, and used as a belfry, which bears date in large figures, 1616, and which, after having braved the storms of two centuries, is still in a high state of preservation.

There are still some remains of the ruins of the Castle of New Tarbat, once the seat of the Earls of Cromarty, which is said to have been the most elegant and highly finished house in the three counties. It stood near the site of the present mansion, and was allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation during the period of forfeiture. It is said to have been a most superb and spacious building, and beautifully adorned with turrets.

On the estate of Kindace, there is a small wooded hillock, on the summit of which there was a Druidical circle until within the last few years, when the farmer of the place removed the stones to *build a dike*. There is a fine spring of clear water at the foot of the hillock; and on the same property, there is a large cairn of stones, the tradition in regard to which is, that in a great battle fought there, a king was killed, and his head struck off, and buried under this cairn. The hill is now called *Kenrive*, a corruption from the Gaelic of *Ceann Righ*, or King's-head; and the foundation of a large castle or building can yet be traced close to the cairn.

Modern Buildings.—Balnagown Castle is a beautiful building, and splendidly situated. It is partly ancient, and partly modern. It boasts a very high antiquity, and was one of the seats of the

an opportunity of acquiring it to the poorest of the people. Along with the improved education of the lower classes, arising from their general acquaintance with the English language, there is a growing improvement likewise in their customs and habits. Those popular amusements which formerly engrossed much of their time, and dissipated their means and attention, and were the inlets to much low debauchery, are almost entirely given up, and when resorted to, occasionally, are not at all so keenly prosecuted as they used to be, in former generations. The habits of the people are cleanly and respectable. The ordinary food of the peasantry consists of potatoes and meal, with fish and milk occasionally; and in general, they are sober, steady, moral, and disposed to pay a decorous attention and respect to the observances and ordinances of religion. Poaching in game is a crime almost unknown, and smuggling seems to have been entirely given up for several years.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—

Arable land, about	2,500 acres.
Natural wood and plantations,	4,500
Moor, meadow, and pasture,	10,000
	<hr/>
	17,000

Agriculture is well understood, and practised upon the most approved and scientific principles. Many of the farmers in the parish are connected with the Ross-shire Farming Society for the Improvement of Corn, and of the different Breeds of Cattle. The usual five-shift course is adopted: green crop, barley or wheat, two years grass, and oats, or beans, or pease. Proprietors appear anxious to improve their land, and lime and bone manure are generally employed.

Rent.—Arable land averages from L. 1 to L. 1, 10s. per acre. The rent of grazing per ox or cow varies from L. 2 to L. 2, 10s. per annum.

Wages.—The rate of wages for farm-labourers is generally 1s. per day without victuals; women 6d. per day. Masons and carpenters get from 1s. 6d. to 2s. per day. Farm-servants who reside with farmers have an income, including all they receive, of from L. 18 to L. 20 per annum, besides a house.

The Cheviot and black-faced and Leicester sheep are common in the parish, and the polled Aberdeen black-cattle are in the course of being introduced on several farms. It is thought by competent judges, that, by a proper application of capital, a consi-

derable quantity of waste land might be advantageously reclaimed. Rents are considered as generally high, and the usual duration of leases is for nineteen years. Farm-buildings and enclosures are, upon the whole, in a good state of repair.

Produce.—The following is an account of the amount and value of the raw produce of the parish, so far as they have been ascertained.

Oats, 2000 qrs. at L. 1, 5s. per quarter,	-	-	L. 2500	0	0
Wheat, 700 qrs. at L. 3 per quarter,	-	-	2100	0	0
Barley, 800 qrs. at L. 1, 13s. per quarter,	-	-	1320	0	0
Potatoes, 1400 bolls at 10s. per boll,	-	-	700	0	0
Turnips, 150 acres at L. 5 per acre,	-	-	750	0	0
Hay, 40,000 stones at 9d. per stone,	-	-	1500	0	0
Rye, 80 qrs. at L. 1, 14s. per quarter,	-	-	51	0	0
Pease and beans, 150 qrs. at L. 2 per quarter,	-	-	300	0	0
Total amount,			L. 9221	0	0

Live-Stock.—Horses of all sizes, 360; black-cattle, of all ages, and different kinds, 1000, more or less; sheep of all kinds, 2000; swine, 300; goats, 30.

There is no land in the parish in a state of undivided common. A considerable quantity of butter and cheese is annually made and sold, of which it would be difficult to estimate the exact amount and value. There are, in all, fourteen farms in the parish, besides a number of small holdings, averaging each from 2 to 10 or 12 acres. These small holdings are in detached spots, and in general on the outskirts of the larger farms.

Quarries.—There is a quarry of fine white freestone at Kinrive, on the property of Kindace, resembling the Craigleith stone, capable of a high polish, and very durable. There are likewise several quarries of red stone, but much inferior in value to that of Kinrive. The quarry of Kinrive extends in a continued ridge to Camscurrie, to the north of Tain, a distance of ten or twelve miles.

Fisheries.—There is no regular fishery of any kind in the parish, though there is a village (Portlich), the inhabitants of which were once almost all fishers. The descendants of these people have, in general, betaken themselves to trades, and probably finding a more certain livelihood by these means, have almost entirely abandoned fishing, though there are occasionally some boats which go from this village to the herring fishing.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Villages.—There is a village in the parish, Milntown, in which there are four markets held annually. The population of this vil-

lage amounts to 200. There are other two villages, Bartaraville and Portlich.

Means of Communication.—There is a post-office at Milntown, and the great county road runs through this village; by which the royal mail-coach travels daily north and south, and another coach for the accommodation of passengers, during the summer and harvest months, from Inverness to Tain. The roads are excellent. A new road has been lately constructed through the most high land part of the parish, which will prove a great convenience to the people. There are several other new roads in progress, so that the whole parish will soon be intersected with excellent means of conveyance. There are two bridges, one over the river of Balnagown, and the other at Pollo. They are both in good condition. There is a harbour at Balintraid, which affords accommodation for vessels from Leith and Aberdeen and other ports; and which is very convenient for the people of this, and of neighbouring parishes, by the facility with which it enables them to procure coal, and various articles of merchandise. A considerable quantity of grain from the district of Easter Ross, and large quantities of fir wood for the coal-pits and railroads in the south, are likewise annually exported from Balintraid pier.

Ecclesiastical State.—The present church was built in 1798, and contains 900 sittings. It is situated in the south-east end of the parish, and is distant about five miles from some of the inhabitants. There are from twenty to thirty free-sittings in it. It is at present in a good state of repair. The manse was built about 100 years ago, since which time additions have been made to it, and it has been frequently repaired. There are 6 acres of glebe, valued at L. 12 per annum. The stipend is 87 bolls, 1 firloft, 1 peck, 3½ lippies oatmeal, 9 stones, Ross-shire boll, and 68 bolls, 1 firloft, 1 peck, 1½ lippy-barley, 9 stones, Ross-shire boll, and L. 62, 0s. 4½d. Sterling. The stipend awarded by the Court of Teinds was 15 chalders; but the teinds do not pay the stipend, nor the sum for communion elements.

There is no chapel of ease or Dissenting chapel in the parish, the people being, with the exception of one or two individuals, all members of the Established Church, which, in this parish is well attended, and in general crowded. There is a catechist appointed by the minister, with the consent of the congregation, and paid by the people and minister. There are individuals from 350 families, amounting to 800, who regularly attend the parish church. The

average number of communicants may be stated at 60. The probable average amount of church collections yearly for religious objects may be estimated at L. 20. There is a Bible Society, which meets regularly once a quarter for prayer, and for the purpose of making contributions, and once in the year for the purpose of distributing its funds to the various objects of Christian benevolence.

Education.—There are two schools, the parochial, and one supported by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. The parish schoolmaster has the legal accommodation, and a salary of L. 32, 2s. 9½d. Sterling. The school fees may amount to L. 12 yearly. The salary of the Society teacher is L. 18, with a house built by the parishioners. His school fees may amount to L. 6 annually. The numbers who attend both schools during the year may amount to 160 children. The expense of education, and the branches of instruction taught at the parochial school, are as follows: reading per quarter, 2s.; reading, writing, and arithmetic, 2s. 6d.; Latin and Greek, 5s.; book-keeping, 7s. 6d.; and English grammar, 3s. In the Society school, English reading, writing, and arithmetic are regularly taught. The people generally are able to read, and appear to appreciate the benefits of education. There is no additional school necessary in this parish.

Literature.—There is no parochial library, but many of the more respectable inhabitants are connected with a district library, which affords many valuable works. And it would be difficult to find a rural parish in the north of Scotland, of the same dimensions, which contains a greater number of intelligent and well informed individuals, in the various classes of society.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—There are from 80 to 100 who regularly receive parochial aid. Their funds are derived from the following sources: mortcloth per annum, L. 2; rent of house in Tain belonging to the poor, which averages L. 15 annually; collections in church, which amount to L. 22 yearly, making in all L. 39. There is likewise a mortification of barley by George, Earl of Cromarty, which produces 5 bolls annually, for distribution among the poor; and there are other mortifications, amounting to L. 1, 3s. 10½d. yearly. There is no other mode adopted for procuring funds for the poor. An assessment has never been resorted to. The annual sums distributed to each pauper may average 5s. or 6s. in the year. None but the extremely necessitous receive parochial aid, and others are dissuaded from seeking it,

and taught to consider it as degrading. Some who receive occasional assistance are not enrolled in the list of paupers.

Inns.—There are 2 inns, and 4 public-houses. Intemperance is not, however, a prevalent vice in the parish, and it is very rarely that the people are known to quarrel or fight.

Fuel.—Coals are generally used in the lower, and peats in the higher, district of the parish. Coals generally sell for 1s. 1d. imperial barrel, and peats for 1s. the cart. The coals come from Newcastle, and there is abundance of moss in the parish.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

1st, When the last Statistical Account of this parish was written, the real rent did not much exceed L.1400 Sterling; now it is L. 3800 Sterling. The manufacture of kelp and shell-lime have been altogether discontinued, and lime and bone manure are generally in use. Within the last eighteen months, a toll-bar has been erected at the bridge of Pollo. Instead of there being upwards of 30 tippling-houses in the parish, there are now only 2 inns, and four public-houses. All the agricultural implements now used are of the most approved kind, and oxen are never employed in ploughing. Wheat is generally grown on all the farms in the parish, and is found to afford a good remunerating price. The roads which intersect the parish, are kept in good condition. In the upper district, and especially in the environs of Kindace, great improvements have been effected of late years. There are now four public roads in the parish, running parallel to each other, including the new road lately constructed along the upper district, and reaching from Tain to the policy of Novar, in the parish of Aness. The harbour of Balintraid, in the south-west end of the parish, has likewise been erected since the last Statistical Account was published.

2d, With respect to the improvements of which the parish is susceptible. It has been already observed, that the system of husbandry pursued is of the most approved kind, and that the means of internal conveyance are excellent. Much, however, remains to be done, in this, as in most other parishes, to advance the inhabitants to the *maximum* state of comfort and happiness. We have no desire to advocate any Utopian theory on this most important subject, but merely to suggest some hints for those substantial and sober improvements which might meliorate the condition of the people. If any thing could be done to give employment to the numerous and increasing set-

tlers in villages—whether by establishing some branch of manufacture, or by urging and encouraging able-bodied men to fish regularly in the Frith of Cromarty, or by allocating certain small portions of ground to stances for houses, as an inducement to build, and to *permanent residence* in the parish; these expedients, or any one of them, if vigorously prosecuted, might increase indefinitely the comfort and happiness of the lower classes. The great evil which requires to be remedied in some way or other, is the fluctuating state of the population, in consequence of the arable land being in the possession of a few,—which, however much it may tend to the agricultural improvement of the parish, certainly is not calculated to improve the state of the population. In consequence of this, many of the people are always on the wing, and shifting from one parish to another, in quest of a better place or of more congenial employment; thus rendering in a great measure nugatory the instruction which they receive, whether in the way of catechizing, or of private pastoral admonition and reproof.

It is expected that a saving's bank will be soon established in this district with a government security, and the sooner this is set agoing the better.

We may observe, as an instructive fact in the philosophy of education, that the greatly more intelligent character of the people of this parish now, than it was forty years ago, is owing in no small degree to their having been taught to read Gaelic as well as English, in the school established by the Society. It was this which first excited a desire for more information, and roused within them the latent principal of curiosity, proving that the only effectual way to instruct the ignorant is to address them first in the language which is most familiar to them, whether our object be to win their attention, or to engage their affections.

If a village or parochial library were established by voluntary contributions, consisting of interesting and instructive books in Gaelic and English, to which the poor might have free access, it might prove an incalculable benefit to many. It would be the means of creating a relish for reading, and for intellectual enjoyment among those who are still destitute of it, and of filling up the void of idle hours with profitable and amusing pastime.

December 1838.