

PARISH OF URRAY.

PRESBYTERY OF DINGWALL, SYNOD OF ROSS.

THE REV. JAMES MACDONALD, MINISTER.*

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, Situation, and Extent.—URRAY is composed of the united parishes of Urray and Kilchrist. The former seems to derive its name from its local situation. The church and burying-ground lie on a large plain, on the banks of the rapid river Orrin, near its conflux with the Connon. The Orrin has, in the course of ages, evidently shifted its bed, and its passable fords, through every part of that plain, and would repeat its ravages almost every season, were it not restrained by the annual exertions of the surrounding proprietors. Hence it is probable the name is derived from *Ur-a*, the *new ford*. *Kilchrist* is evidently *Cella Christi*, a burying-ground consecrated to Christ.—It is situated chiefly in the county of Ross: A small part of it lies in Inverness-shire. It extends from the Frith of Beauly on the south, to the north side of the river Connon, about 7 English miles in a straight line, nearly from south to north. Its breadth on the banks of the Connon, from east to west, is about 6 English miles, but does not exceed 3 towards the southern boundary, along the Frith of Beauly. The intermediate space lines the foot of the great chain of mountains which extends from thence to the west coast of Scotland. There is a *davoch* of land belonging to this parish in the valley of Strathconnon, in the bosom of the western mountains, at the distance of 10 computed, or 18 English miles. It is surrounded by the parish of Contin, and forms a part of the mission in that parish.

Surface, Soil, and Climate.—The general face of the parish presents a picturesque view of corn-fields, intermixed with barren moor, clumps of natural wood, rapid streams, large plantations around gentlemen's seats, with different views of the two beautiful Friths of Dingwall and Beauly, which, as canals formed by the

* Drawn up from notes, furnished by Mr Charles Mackenzie, Parochial Schoolmaster of Urray.

hand of nature, and penetrating for upwards of twenty miles into a populous country, invite the merchant and manufacturer to settle on their banks. The soil is as various as the general face of the ground; but on the whole, is warm, dry, and productive. The fields on the slopes of the rising-grounds are comparatively of a richer soil than the low-ground, except a part of the estate of Lovat, which once belonged to the priory of Beaully, and is a deep, rich, carse ground. The plains abound with pebbles, from four to six or eight pound weight, evidently rounded by friction, and intermixed with beds of dry sand and gravel. Hence a considerable part of the low-ground is barren dry moor, producing only a short heath; and the arable land, with a few exceptions, of inferior quality to that on the high lands. On one estate there are several small hollows surrounded by this dry barren soil, which seem to have been once small lakes, but are now filled with peat moss. On the bottom of several of them some strata of shell marl have been found.*

Rivers.—The Beaully empties itself into the Frith of that name at the south-west point of the parish, and cannot be said to belong to it. The Connon intersects the parish near the north end, and is composed of four great branches.† The Orrin, running from S. W., falls into the Connon below Brahan Castle; a very irregular stream, fordable in many places during summer, but sometimes rising very suddenly to an alarming height, and proving a very unwelcome and destructive visitant to all within its reach. Mr Mackenzie of Seaforth generously defrayed the expense of a wooden bridge thrown across it some years ago behind the manse of Urray; but this was carried away by the flood of September 1839. It has been lately repaired at the expense of the county, and promises defiance to the violence of the stream.

About two miles west from Urray, the Garve falls in on the north side, which running from W. N. W. rises on the confines of Lochbroom. Thence, five miles farther west, is the junction of the other two branches, the Meig and the Lichart. The former rises on the borders of Lochcarron to the W.-S. W.; and the source of the latter is on the confines of Gairloch to the west.—The Connon

* Old Statistical Account.

† There is a spring on the bank of the Connon, near the west end of the parish, strongly impregnated with sulphur. The water is as clear as any other spring, but smells like the scourings of a foul gun. It is said to partake of the nature of Harrogate water, and to be useful in scorbutic complaints and rheumatism. It is of the same kind with the much frequented spring of Strathpeffer, in the neighbourhood.

abounds in salmon and pike. It has few trouts, except sea-trout in the months of July and August.*

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Parochial Registers.—There is a register of births and marriages,—the former commencing with the year 1756, and the latter with the year 1815. The register of births previous to the year 1820 was very irregularly kept, a great many names having been left out, and those in many cases entered improperly. The record was not even signed by the session-clerk.

Land-owners.—In whole, there are eleven land-holders in the parish, the principal of whom are the following:—

A. Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth, his valuation L. 711, 6s. 1d.; George Gillanders, Esq. of Highfield, L. 402, 7s. 1d.; Thomas Mackenzie of Ord, L. 342, 2s. 1d.; Fowler of Fairburn, L. 247, 19s. 3d.; Balfour of Strathconnon, L. 243, 18s.; Colonel Baillie of Tarradale, L. 223, 18s.

Mansion Houses.—These are, Brahan Castle, Highfield House, Ord House, Fairburn Tower, now in ruins.

III.—POPULATION.

There are no towns or villages in the parish.

The Population in 1801 was	2069	
1811,	2534	
1821,	2781	
1831,	2768	
Number of families in the parish in 1831,		634
chiefly employed in agriculture,		418
in trade, manufactures, or handicraft,		70

Illegitimate births in the parish in the course of the last three years, about 8.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Rental.—The real rental of the parish is L. 2573, 18s.

The principal agriculturist within the parish is Mr Mackenzie of Ord, who has improved his lands very much of late.

A distillery was set agoing about a year and a-half ago, distant about a mile from the parish church. It is conducted by Messrs D. Maclellan, and Robert Johnstone, and is called the Ord Distillery.

Fisheries.—Salmon-fishing is carried on in the river Connon at the proper season to a small extent.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Ecclesiastical State.—All the families in the parish belong to the Established Church, with the exception of 25 families, who

* Old Statistical Account.

are attached to the Episcopal Church; and excepting also one Roman Catholic family. The stipend is fixed at 16 chalders.

The glebe is about 8 acres in extent. The manse was built in 1814, and is at present in excellent condition, having been repaired in 1837.

Education.—There are 4 schools in the parish, two parochial schools, one Society school, and one Episcopal school, under the patronage of Mr Gillanders, Highfield. There is only one Sabbath school at present, but other two are in contemplation. All these schools are within the compass of four miles: and no more schools are required. The salary of each of the parochial schoolmasters amounts to L. 25 yearly. The probable yearly amount of fees actually paid to one of them is not more than L. 6. The other school having newly begun, the amount of fees actually received by the teacher cannot be stated. The probable yearly amount of the other emoluments belonging to the first parochial teacher is L. 7. A Female School of Industry is about to be opened under the immediate patronage of Mrs Mackenzie of Ord, —a lady of exemplary piety, and full of zeal for supplying the destitute with useful and scriptural education.

Poor.—The number of persons receiving parochial aid, averages from 50 to 70. The average sum allowed to each yearly is about 6s. The average annual amount of contributions for relief of the poor is about L. 20, all arising from church collections.

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