

PARISH OF KIRKWALL AND ST OLA.

PRESBYTERY OF KIRKWALL, SYNOD OF ORKNEY.

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I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, Boundaries, &c.—THE royal burgh of Kirkwall is situated in latitude $58^{\circ} 59'$ N., and longitude $3^{\circ} 23'$ W., and is surrounded by a landward district called St Ola, which forms nearly a square, intersected by several bays, the side of the square measuring about 5 miles. Buchanan considers the name of the town as a corruption of Cracoviaca or Kirkvaa, the ancient Danish name; but it is more probably derived from the extensive walls of the principal and most ancient building, the kirk or cathedral of St Magnus, to be afterwards noticed. The name of the parish is borrowed from Olaus or Olave, the first Christian king of Norway, to which country the Orkney Islands anciently belonged. The town consists principally of one street, in many parts very narrow, running the whole length; parallel to which, however, a new street, called King Street, has been commenced within the last twenty years, and contains several neat and commodious houses.

The principal bays in the parish are those of Kirkwall, Inganess, and Scapa; the two former affording safe and capacious anchorage for ships of the largest size, and the latter being the common place of landing for boats and small craft, from Caithness and the islands south of Kirkwall.

The surface of the parish is, on the whole, not very elevated; the only considerable hill being that of Widesford, rising about 500 feet above the level of the sea, and covered with heath, the soil being chiefly mossy. Towards Gait-nip on the east side of Scapa bay, are the highest crags, and in them there are several excavations formed by the action of the sea, one running in the form of a narrow winding passage, upwards of 100 yards

* Drawn up by the Rev. William Logie.

from the sea edge, being in height apparently from 12 to 20 feet, and adorned with beautiful stalactites of lime.

Hydrography.—In the parish, are several ponds, rivulets, and springs of excellent water; and about two miles south of the town there is a pretty strong chalybeate spring, called Blakely's well, to which invalids formerly resorted.

Geology.—The prevailing rock is argillaceous schistus, frequently alternating with a coarse sandstone, in some instances of a white and in others of a red colour, sometimes containing veins of limestone with iron pyrites. The clay-slate is frequently traversed by small veins of lime, and occasionally by heavy spar, containing small crystals of galena. It is also often found highly impregnated with bituminous matter, which gives it a black colour, and when recently broken, a tarry smell. The subsoil is, for the most part, a very retentive clay, as might be inferred from the great prevalence of clayey strata. There are considerable extents of peat moss. The soil in the arable grounds is chiefly a good black loam, with either a clay or gravelly bottom.

Botany.—The botany of the parish presents nothing rare or peculiar. Gardening is, for the climate, practised pretty successfully. Besides currants, gooseberries, and strawberries, which attain a good size and ripen well, apples, pears, and cherries thrive well; and in one garden, grapes are produced by the aid of artificial heat. Forest trees, except under shelter, do not succeed, partly, no doubt, owing to the sea air, but probably more to the strength of the tree being spent in repeated germinations during the winter, arising from the prevalence of open weather alternating with slight frosts.

Zoology.—Of animals the parish contains no rare species. Rabbits are not numerous, and till about twelve years ago, there were no hares, but a few pairs having been then introduced, they have rapidly multiplied, to the no small annoyance and damage of the farmers. The commons abound with plovers, grouse, snipe, and other species of game. Sea birds in great variety frequent the rocks and bays of the parish. Of the domestic animals, the cows and horses are generally rather small in size, but considerably larger than those of the Shetland Isles. Sheep, pigs, geese, ducks, turkeys, and fowls, are reared in considerable numbers, and many are exported, as well as horses and black-cattle, especially since the commencement of steam navigation.

Fisheries.—On the coast, fish of all the kinds common in Scotland, and of excellent quality, abound. The cole-fish, in all its

gradations of size, here distinguished by the names of silloch, cuith, cuthine, and saithe, is by far the most useful, constituting a principal part of the food of the poorer classes.

Sea trout are taken in considerable numbers in the bays and small brooks or burns, which they ascend in October and November for the purpose of spawning, returning in the spring months. Salmon are very rarely met with, though now and then a stray fish is caught.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Kirkwall was erected into a royal burgh by a charter from James III. of Scotland, dated 31st March A. D. 1486, and is governed by a provost, four bailies, dean of guild, treasurer, and councillors. It is also the seat of the Sheriff-Court, Justice of Peace Court, presbytery, and synod.

Eminent Men.—Of eminent characters connected with the parish, those most worthy of notice are, Sir Robert Strange, the eminent engraver; Malcolm Laing, Esq. the well-known historian of Scotland, over whose remains, in the cathedral, is erected a handsome marble tablet, bearing a very elegant inscription in Latin; and Dr Traill, the present accomplished Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Edinburgh; all of whom were born in Kirkwall.

Land-owners.—The principal land-owners are the Earl of Zetland; Mr Baikie of Tankerness; Mr Balfour of Trenaby; Mr Pollexfen of Cairston; Mr Laing of Papdale; and Mr Græme of Græme's Hall.

Public Buildings.—The chief public buildings are, the Cathedral of St Magnus, the Earl's and Bishop's palaces, and King's castle, the town house, and grammar school.

Of these edifices, the most deserving of notice is the Cathedral, founded A. D. 1138, by Rognvald or Ronald, Count of Orkney, and dedicated to the memory of his uncle, Magnus, also Earl of Orkney, and canonized for his piety, real or reputed. This stately building still remains in a condition of wonderful entireness and preservation, considering its great antiquity. Its choir having been immemorially used in lieu of a parish church, the cathedral was, for a long period, upheld and repaired, solely by a small fund arising from seat-rents, which, however, being very inadequate for the purpose, the building would speedily have fallen into decay, had not a wealthy native of the county, Mr Meason of Moreduin, about thirty years ago, mortified a sum, amounting, after deduction

of legacy duty, to L. 900, for the purpose of repairing and beautifying it, by the annual application of the interest; and this liberal gift has since contributed very much to its preservation. The cathedral is the property of "the provost, bailies, council, and inhabitants of the burgh," to whom it was gifted by the above cited charter of James III., confirmed by a new charter from James V., dated 1536; and a third, by Charles II. in 1661, ratifying the former two. Upon this charter infestment followed in 1669, and all these titles were confirmed by Act of Parliament, 1670, cap. 42. These charters also conveyed to the magistrates and corporation, the patronage of the two benefices in Kirkwall, which, however, the crown-officers, about twelve years ago, claimed for the crown; but the question being carried to the Court of Session, and by appeal to the House of Lords, the right of the corporation to the patronages, and, consequently, to the property of the cathedral, conveyed by the same titles, was found to be valid and impregnable.

The cathedral is built in that style of mixed Gothic and Saxon architecture common in the age of its erection. Its length outside is 226 feet; breadth, 56; height of the main roof, 71; and from the floor to the top of the steeple, 133. The main roof of the choir and part of the nave is elegantly arched, and is supported by 32 pillars, faced with freestone. The side aisles, behind the pillars, are finished above by a series of groined arches, and the whole is lighted by 103 windows, including those in the steeple, some of them in the Gothic style, and of great size. The steeple contains an excellent chime of three large bells, rung by ropes attached to the clappers, so as to produce a kind of melody, in the ancient cathedral fashion.

The Earl's Palace, the ruins of which, still pretty entire, stand near the cathedral to the south-east, was erected, A. D. 1660, by Patrick Stewart, Earl of Orkney, whose father, Robert, was a natural son of James V. The bishop's palace, whose ruins are also situated very near the cathedral, is of much greater antiquity and in a much more dilapidated state. It was honoured by the residence in it at different periods of two royal guests, Haco, King of Norway, who died in this building, and James V. of Scotland, who, in the course of a progress through his dominions, lodged there for a short time and partook of the bishop's hospitality. Of the King's Castle, erected in the 14th century by Earl Henry

St Clair, a very inconsiderable and ruined portion now remains to mark the spot on which it once stood.

Parochial Registers.—The parochial registers, in the custody of the kirk-session, consist of five volumes of register of baptisms, extending from 1657 to the present time, without interruption; three volumes of register of marriages, from 1657 to the current year; and five volumes of the minutes of session, containing the *res gestæ*, from 1626 to 1840, with the exception of ten years, from 1659 to 1669, the records of which appear to have been lost. No regular or continuous register of deaths or burials was kept till within the last fifty years.

III.—POPULATION.

Amount of population in 1801,	.	2621
1811,	.	2283
1821,	.	3246
1831,	.	3721

It appears from a comparison of successive censuses taken since the commencement of the present century, that the population of Kirkwall was, for many years, progressively on the increase. It is, however, the general belief that, since 1831, the population, if not decreasing, has been at least stationary.* This, indeed, is evident from the fact, that house building, which in former years went on very briskly, has of late been almost at a stand, and many habitations in the town are at present untenanted. This arrest on the increase of population is mainly to be ascribed to the failure of the kelp trade, formerly the staple of these islands, the large profits of which gave a stimulus to industry and trade; and though the fisheries have been greatly extended since that manufacture was given up, or nearly so, yet the emolument arising from the former source has passed into other hands. Those who profit by the fishing are chiefly boatmen and labourers, who lay out their little capital, not in trade in the towns, but in farming or an extension of their fishing speculations.

The average number of marriages, births, and deaths for the five years ending with 1839, appears from the parish registers to be,—marriages, 26; births, 41; deaths, 59.

The inhabitants of the town consist chiefly of shopkeepers, tradesmen of the different crafts, sailors, boatmen, and labourers. Besides these, there are a few resident proprietors, officers of customs and excise, three medical practitioners, two bankers, six gentlemen

* The new census, taken while this Account was in the press, exhibits accordingly a decrease of 147 in the ten years,—the population being now only 3574.

of the law, and ministers of four communions, five in number; together with several teachers of youth, male and female.

The shopkeepers are very numerous, almost every alternate house, in most parts of the town, containing a shop. The principal shops are well stocked with goods of every description, imported from Edinburgh, London, and other markets; and which are sold on very moderate profits, considering the distance of the markets and the great expense of carriage.

Many of the mechanics execute their work well, but they are generally complained of as dilatory, seldom executing their orders within the stipulated time; though the undoubted fact was probably an extreme case, of a gentleman sending a nursery-fender to be painted, which was not returned till after the boys, for whose safety it was intended, returned, grown men, from college!

The sailors and boatmen, for skill, hardihood, and dexterity in their profession, are not surpassed by their brethren in any part of the world.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—As few of the estates in St Ola have been surveyed or measured, the extent in acres of the cultivated ground cannot be accurately given; but by good judges, it is thought, that the arable ground does not exceed 1200 or 1500 acres, which, on an average, is rented at about 16s. per acre. Considerable improvement in the modes of farming has taken place, of late years; several proprietors, and tenants, having introduced the improved modes of agriculture practised in the south, by rotation of crops, draining, and enclosing. Oats, barley, and bear, potatoes, turnips and artificial grasses, are cultivated with success. Mr Pollexfen of Cairston, besides setting an example of general good farming, on a part of his property in his own occupation, has made such improvements in the production of grass and turnip seeds, as to have attracted the approving notice of the Agricultural Associations; and the seeds raised by him are in considerable request, even in the south of Scotland.

There is a considerable extent of pasture lands in the parish. The common charge for pasturage of an ox or cow is L. 1, 10s. The wages of ploughmen are L. 7, 7s. per annum in money, with allowances of meal, milk, and potatoes; making the whole fee, L. 14 or L. 15. Female domestic servants receive, at an average, L. 8 per annum, with their maintenance. Price of labour, 1s. to 1s. 3d. per day.

The sheep pastured on the commons, which are undivided, are less numerous than formerly, but in their breed, as well as that of cattle and horses, a gradual improvement is taking place.

Prices of Produce, &c.—A horse, L. 12 to L. 16; a milch cow, L. 5 to L. 6; a good sheep, L. 1; a goose, 2s. to 2s. 6d.; poultry, 8d. each; beef, 5d. to 6d. per lb.; oatmeal, 2s. to 2s. 6d. per stone; potatoes, 2s. per barrel.

Manufactures.—Since the demand for kelp has so greatly diminished, the only kind of industry in the parish, properly falling under this denomination, is the plaiting of straw for hats and bonnets, which, more or less, occupies three-fourths of the female population. This manufacture has been carried on for forty years, and has proved a very seasonable source of emolument to the poorer classes. The raw material is either Tuscan straw imported from Leghorn, or rye-straw raised in Orkney, which is more durable, and very little inferior in appearance. This kind of labour, as at present conducted by the agents giving out the straw to the women to be manufactured in their own dwellings, is not liable to the objection of injuring the morals, as in the case of manufactures which assemble multitudes of the young in one place. In this manufacture, a woman earns from 3d. to 9d. per day, according to her skill and diligence or the time which she devotes to the employment. There are two licensed distilleries in the parish, which export a considerable quantity of whisky, besides what is sold in the place.

Navigation.—The town is provided with a safe and commodious harbour, constructed thirty years ago, and well frequented both by coasting and other vessels, including some from Norway and the Baltic.

There are, at present, sixty-eight vessels which sail from this port, as registered in the custom-house books; but as forty-seven of these belong to Stromness, and other harbours through the islands, the number strictly belonging to the town of Kirkwall and trading from it, is twenty-one, the tonnage of which is 1593, and the number of men and boys employed in them, 106.

Considerable quantities of grain, fish cured in the islands, cattle, and other produce, are annually exported, both coastwise and to foreign ports.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—Kirkwall was formerly entitled to only three mails per week; but about a year ago (1839), through

the exertions of the county and burgh Members, a daily post was established; in other words, the mail-boat is bound, on every lawful day, when weather permits, to cross the Pentland Frith.

A good sailing vessel, for conveyance of goods and passengers, plies all the year between this town and Leith; and within the last few years, the place has obtained the great advantage of a weekly visit from an excellent and powerful steamer, which accomplishes the voyage to Leith, including several long stoppages, in from 34 to 40 hours.

The roads through the parish have of late years been greatly improved, which has led to the introduction of gigs and phaetons for hire.

Ecclesiastical State.—The parish is a collegiate charge, the two ministers officiating in the cathedral alternately. Their stipends were modified, each to L. 150; but, being partly paid in kind, have for many years fallen short of that sum. The first minister has a glebe consisting of about 50 acres arable, with pasturage; and its annual value has, for some years, been somewhat upwards of L. 40. He has also a manse, erected 140 years ago, but which at present is let by the heritors, who pay the present incumbent an annuity in lieu of it. The second minister has neither manse nor glebe; but, under a late act of Parliament, draws from the Exchequer L. 50 in lieu of both.

The only place of worship in connection with the Establishment, which the inhabitants have ever enjoyed, is the choir or chancel of the cathedral, which is seated to accommodate from 830 to 870 sitters; but so awkwardly, that it has been ascertained by measurement, that a better arrangement of the seats and position of the pulpit would give at least an addition of 150 available seats. The cathedral is placed in the centre of the parish, and there is no dwelling, more than two and a-half or three miles from the place of worship, while five-sixths of the population are within half a mile of it. The accommodation in the cathedral was probably sufficient for all the church-going population at a former period; but as the number of inhabitants increased, the want of more church room was severely felt, and a portion of the inhabitants, who could not procure seats, or such as they wished, accepted the offer of the Antiburgher Seceders to establish a congregation there. A chapel in that connection was accordingly erected forty-four years ago, and afterwards rebuilt on a larger scale. Shortly after, an Independent meeting-house was erected,

and more recently, one in connection with the Original or Associate Secession Synod. Thus a majority of the inhabitants are Dissenters, and from the great length of time that they have been so, and their strong attachment to their respective persuasions, there is no probability that, in any circumstances, many of them will return to the Established Church. While the churchman must regret this state of matters, yet, if a Christian, he will rejoice that not one individual in this parish, except through his own fault, is deprived of an opportunity of attending divine ordinances in a Protestant, or even a Presbyterian place of worship, and under pastors of good character, and preaching the Gospel in its purity. Of how many cities or burghs in Scotland can the same be said?

The cathedral, which is used as the parish church, though never designated or legally divided as such, nor upheld by the heritors of town or country, is well attended, notwithstanding that it is damp, and, like all such ancient buildings, inconvenient as a place of worship. While the population was rapidly increasing, all its seats were let, and for the most part occupied. At present, however, and for a few years past, from 60 to 100 seats are unoccupied in the ordinary diets of worship, and 320 are unlet, besides a few free seats held as heritable, and a considerable number assigned gratuitously to the poor. The rents, rendered necessary for paying beadles, repairing seats, firing, and lighting, are extremely moderate, varying from 6d. to 3s. per sitter, which is the highest charge excepting one seat, containing eleven sitters, which rents at 4s.

About four years ago, a few individuals in the parish proposed erecting a new church by subscription, as they thought that, from the circumstance of a great number of the burgh heritors being Dissenters, there was no hope of obtaining a parish church without a law-suit. Many of the congregation, understanding that it was to be used instead of the cathedral, contributed small sums to the undertaking; but by far the greater part of the subscriptions were obtained throughout Scotland and England. The chapel, situated close to the cathedral, and large enough to contain all the church population, man, woman, and child, is now nearly finished, and if it were to be occupied as a substitute for the old and inconvenient cathedral, would prove a great benefit to the place. Such, however, does not seem to be the intention of its proprietors. They applied for a grant from the General Assembly's Extension Committee, to aid in its erection, as an additional and separate place

of worship, to be served by one of the colleague ministers. The Extension Committee granted L.200 towards its erection. Four managers of the chapel have since presented a petition, which lies on the table of the Presbytery, praying them to divide the parish, uncollegiate the ministers, placing one of them in the chapel as minister of one-half the parish, but reserving to him his civil rights and emoluments as a minister of the whole or *quoad civilia* parish. This, in the circumstances of the parish, would be just to convert one of the charges into a sinecure, so far as preaching is concerned; as it is certain, and the petitioners calculate upon it, that when the comparison comes to be between the old and incommodious cathedral, and a comfortable chapel just next door, the whole audience will evacuate the cathedral, while, by the proposal, one of the ministers must still continue to officiate there. As the principal heritors are perfectly willing that the worship should be wholly transferred to the chapel, the proper course appears to be, to obtain the Presbytery's sanction to its occupation as a preaching station, in lieu of the cathedral; and this is the consummation which has all along been desired by the whole community, excepting a few individuals.

Education.—The antiquity of the principal educational establishment in the parish, called the grammar school, cannot be accurately ascertained; but it cannot be much, if at all, short of 500 years old: for in the fifteenth century, it is referred to in the town's charter, as an existing establishment. At that time, and long after, it was taught by an ecclesiastic, the prebend of St Peter, connected with the cathedral; and even after the teachers were laymen, we find by the records, that they drew and enjoyed the emoluments of that prebendary, (November 1652). This goodly endowment, however, was, amidst the troubles of these times, alienated from the schoolmaster, and became merged either in the funds for payment of the clergymen of the different parishes connected with the prebendary, or in the revenues of the bishopric, which passed into the possession of the Crown. He, however, retained, and his successors still retain, a payment of thirty meills or bolls of malt,—the fruit of a voluntary contribution made by the clergy and other gentlemen of Orkney A. D. 1649, amounting to 2000 merks, which were mortgaged in the hands of Lord Morton, on condition of said annual payment of malt, out of the feuduties of the earldom, then held by the Earl of Morton, and now by the Earl of Zetland. To this there was, twenty years ago,

added a new endowment by John Balfour, Esq. of Trenaby, formerly Member of Parliament for the county, of the interest of L.500, very liberally mortified by him in the hands of trustees, for which the schoolmaster is taken bound to educate eight poor children, recommended by the donor or his representatives. These constitute the sole endowments now possessed by the grammar schoolmaster, which, together with the fees paid by the scholars, make up but a very moderate living. The school at present, and for sixteen years past, taught by a very able and talented teacher; Mr James Craig, is attended by from 80 to 100 scholars, male and female, who are instructed in the Greek, Latin, French, and English languages, mathematics, navigation, arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian religion. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it appears from the records, that the school-house was upheld, and the schoolmaster appointed, by the kirk-session; but since that period, the patronage has been exercised by the town-council, who also, upwards of twenty years ago, erected a new and elegant school-house, in lieu of the old one, which had become ruinous;—and while they continue to uphold the school-house, as at present, and to present, as they have done for some time past, able and respectable masters to the school, it is not likely that their right of patronage will be called in question.

Besides the grammar school, there is one endowed by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, and attended by from 50 to 60 scholars, children of the poor; and there are several other schools taught on private adventure. There is a private school for young ladies taught by an accomplished teacher, and a female charity school, supported by benevolent ladies in the town. There are likewise three Sabbath schools, numerous attended, and an infant school.

The benefits of education are generally appreciated by parents; and there are scarcely any betwixt the ages of six and sixty who cannot read.

Libraries.—There are two subscription libraries in the town, the oldest of which, called “The Orkney Library,” is on a pretty extensive scale.

Charitable Institutions.—There are three Relief or Friendly Societies in the town, affording aid to widows, orphans, and, in the case of one at least, to sick or reduced members. There are also

two subscription Societies for the relief of the indigent or destitute sick.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—This parish, like all the rest in the county, has been hitherto exempt from the evils of legal assessment. The poor receive relief from the parochial funds at the disposal of the kirk-session, from the revenue of an estate in the parish, which the Crown, as *ultimus hæres*, vested in trustees for charitable purposes, and from another fund in the management of the town-council. The United Secession Congregation also afford relief to their own poor.

The average number of poor on the kirk-session's permanent roll is $81\frac{1}{2}$, and the average rate of relief to each per annum is from 2s. to L.1, 10s. Besides these, an average number of $32\frac{1}{2}$ receive occasional relief, amounting to L.7, 0s. 3d. per annum, and from L.5 to L.7s, 10s. have been expended annually on the education of poor children. The funds under the administration of the kirk-session arise from church-door collections, averaging L.39, 3s. 8d. per annum; donations, and dues arising from marriages and burials.

Prisons.—There is one prison connected with the town-house, not of the best description; but a new one is in contemplation under the late Prison Act.

Inns.—Of these there are several, but one only adapted for the accommodation of respectable travellers.

Fairs.—There is one fair, commencing on the first Tuesday after the 11th August, and continuing a fortnight.

Fuel.—The principal fuel is English coal; but peats procured in this and the adjacent parishes are much used by the poor.

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