

PARISH OF ROGART.

PRESBYTERY OF DORNOCH, SYNOD OF SUTHERLAND AND
CAITHNESS.

THE REV. JOHN MACKENZIE, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—ROAIRD is the name of this parish in the Gaelic language. How it came to be written and pronounced *Rogart* can only be accounted for by the difficulty in pronouncing the name to those who did not speak that language. It is evident that Rogart is a modification of Roaird. Various etymologies have been assigned to this word. The most probable is, that it is an abbreviation of two Gaelic words, *rhidhe*, an inclined plain, and *ard*, high. In the district of the parish called Roaird, which gives the name to the whole parish, there is *Roaird-bheg* and *Roaird-mhor*; both inclined plains of no great extent, but one, *Roaird-bheg* of less extent than the other, as the name implies. *Rhidhe* and *Rhidheachan*, in the plural, are common in Sutherland, and all of them are used as names of inclined plains. To give an idea of the liberty used with Gaelic names, when attempted in another language, it may be mentioned, that *Rhidheachan* is found in this county, and in the neighbouring county, Ross-shire, to have passed into Rhives. In like manner, Roaird has been changed into Rogart.

Extent, Boundaries.—This parish is of nearly equal length and breadth, and forms a square of ten miles. It is bounded on the east by parts of the parishes of Dornoch and Golspie; on the south by parts of the parishes of Dornoch and Criech; on the west by the parish of Lairg; and on the north by parts of the parishes of Clyne and Farr. It comprehends, on the south side, the whole of Strathfleet; on the north side, the upper division of Strathbrora, and an interjacent space, consisting of low hills, flat moors, meadows, small lakes, and the courses of many burns issuing from them to form the river Fleet, and to swell the Brora, which has its source in a distant mountain.

Topographical Appearances.—Strathfleet, in the language of the

inhabitants, is called Strathfloid; and the small river passing through it is called in that language *Flodag* the diminutive of *Flod*, a word signifying inundation, to which this stream is subject. This strath is ten miles in length, and of irregular width. In some parts it is three-fourths of a mile wide; in other parts it is contracted to within a few yards of the stream passing through it. Both sides of it rise to an elevation of from 500 to 700 feet above the course of the Fleet,—in some parts abruptly, but generally in sloping banks, which are occasionally cultivated and produce crops.

The part of Strathbrora which is in this parish bears a resemblance to Strathfleet,—the difference being such as may be accounted for by the action of a larger body of water, which has in some places cut deeper into the rock, forming chasms. In other parts, the water meets with less resistance, the valley is widened, and lengthened haughs are formed. Being nearer the mountainous region, the aspect of this strath is of a more rugged character than that of Strathfleet.

The hills between these straths are nearly of equal height, and rise to an elevation of from 800 to 900 feet above the level of the sea. The meadows, which are found around some of the lakes and in those flat parts which are subject to irrigation from burns passing through, are not of great extent, and form but a small proportion to the extent of the moors.

Climate.—The climate of the county of Sutherland, from its latitude and exposure to the winds of the German and Northern Ocean, is sharp and cold. The greater part of Rogart, owing to its elevation, and to its having but little shelter from the east wind, and being swept by every blast coming from the high mountains of Assynt and Strathnaver, is much exposed to the severity of a cold atmosphere. Yet snow does not lie long here, and frost is not very intense. Winter, however, leaves us but reluctantly, continuing during the greater part of spring; and it often arrives in the last month of harvest. At the times alluded to, we have our most disagreeable weather,—cold easterly winds, bringing sleet or rain. The most frequent winds, however, are the north and east, but the south-west blows with greatest violence.

Summer here has a great proportion of dry weather; as the rains which fall among the high mountains in this season do not extend to this place. A dry scorching summer is more frequently a subject of complaint with us than one too rainy. Nor can it be

said that we have more rain in winter than there is in other parts of this island.

Notwithstanding the coldness of our climate, however, it is remarkably healthy. With the exception of catarrhs in the months of March and October, diseases but rarely visit the inhabitants.

Hydrography.—The lakes in this parish are very numerous, but not remarkable for extent. Of Loch Craggie, in its western extremity, anglers speak with rapture for the size and quality of its trout, and for the excellent sport it affords. In the north-eastern extremity of the parish, there are two lakes in which fine trout are found. Their name implies that they were once on this account held in estimation; both being called *Loch-beannached, Lake of Blessing*.

The only rivers are those already mentioned, the Fleet and the Brora. Even the larger of these is insignificant in summer and harvest; but both when in flood, discharge a great body of water, and often cover almost the whole of the plains in their courses, so as to present the appearance of a succession of lakes. The Fleet has its origin in a rising ground, forming the boundary between the parishes of Rogart and Lairg. After traversing ten miles, from west to east, in many windings, fringed with birch and alder bushes, it enters an extensive plain, once covered by every tide from the Moray Frith, but now encroached upon only by this stream: the waters of the sea being completely shut out by the earthen mound, at the head of the *Little Ferry*. In this place, where it is not confined by the skill and enterprise of the agriculturist, it appears almost completely lost among rapidly growing alders, until it collects itself into a pool, or forms a considerable lake, before being discharged into the sea by the sluices of the mound. The Brora is about twice the size of the Fleet, has its origin in the high mountain Beinclibric, and passes from west to east, traversing ten miles of this parish in its course. It then enters the parish of Clyne, where it unites with another river called the Blackwater, and passing through that parish, it joins the Moray Frith at a village to which it has given its name, and affords a harbour for light shipping.

Geology and Mineralogy.—Rogart lies chiefly on gneiss rock, in which the only veins seen are of quartz. It is of a large-grained kind, with a great proportion of mica. It is used in building the houses and cottages of the inhabitants, and is found an excellent material for the purpose, being easily wrought.

Over the whole of the parish, rolled blocks of granite are seen in great numbers on the surface; in some parts, if viewed from a distance, the surface appears covered with them. They are found no less numerous under ground in hollows, where there has been an accumulation of soil to cover them.

Of the whole surface of Rogart, moss forms the largest proportion. In some parts it is very deep, found often to a depth of twelve feet. In those parts where its depth is less, its fresh appearance indicates rapid growth. The soil in the valleys, and covering the sides of the hills, is sandy and gravelly. The land abounds in springs; consequently, to be brought into a state of culture, it requires to be intersected with frequent drains.

Plants.—The moors produce heather, deers'-hair and cotton-grass, intermixed in proportions said to be highly favourable for the feeding of sheep. The hills are covered with heather on the tops, but on their sides a mixture of fine grasses is to be found; and, around their bases, red and white clover, and mountain daisy, are common. The meadows and straths are covered with the meadow grasses prevalent in similar situations, and, where irrigated, are very productive.

Zoology.—Roe-deer may always be seen here, but not in great numbers. The red mountain-deer is occasionally seen crossing the moors to or from the mountains north of this, which abound in that species of animal. The gray mountain-hare is here common on the higher grounds. The brown hare, and of late the rabbit, are found on the lower grounds,—the former exceedingly numerous. Moor-fowl are still abundant, though less so, it is said, than they have been. Black game, which are said to increase as moor-fowl decrease, are become very numerous.

Goats were once a part of the stock of the inhabitants, but they have now nearly disappeared, giving way to more profitable animals. There is a species of sheep, of small size, formerly the only kind known here, still reared by the occupants of small lots of land, and much commended for fineness of fleece and excellence of mutton; but they are likely soon to disappear also,—those who have them appreciating the better size of the Cheviot sheep.

A great variety of trout is found in the lakes. Salmon, grilse, and sea trout, are taken in the Brora and Fleet. The trout make for the burns falling into, or issuing from, the lakes, in the month of October, to deposit their spawn; and their spawning season lasts

generally till the beginning of November, and seldom or never extends beyond the middle of that month. Salmon begin to spawn fourteen days later, and before the middle of December; that process being finished, they return to the sea. Salmon enter the Fleet in the end of May. They are found, and were taken, till a recent act of Parliament prohibited, at the mouth of the Brora, as early as the end of January; but they are not seen in the upper part of that river,—the part belonging to this parish,—till the commencement of summer.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Land-owners.—The Duke and Duchess of Sutherland are proprietors of nearly the whole parish of Rogart. The other proprietors of land in it are, George Dempster, Esq. of Skibo, and Hugh Rose Ross, Esq. of Glastullich and Cromarty, who have each a small patch in it unconnected with their principal estates.

Antiquities.—At a place called Corrie, where there are indications of the existence in former times of oak trees, imperfect remains of a Druidical circle are to be seen. The inhabitants, quite unconscious of the sacrilege, finding the stones composing it suitable, carried them away for the purposes of building, so that but few of them are now to be seen.

Tradition accords with the rude but certain monuments of battles, in showing that Rogart was in past times the scene of violent contests, and of much bloodshed. A ridge of hills crossing the eastern extremity of the parish from north to south, and extending from Strathbrora to Strathfleet, is covered with tumuli, which appear to have been thrown over the slain where they fell. One of these was opened lately by dikers erecting a fence around the glebe, having no idea that they invaded the resting place of a warrior, probably of an ancestor. They found in the centre of it a stone coffin, containing mouldered bones, and the blade of a dirk, or short dagger, which seemed to have been wielded by the hand of some leader, being of a more costly description than the common dirk, coated with gold, and marked with lines, crossing one another at acute angles, and terminating in the point. It is likely that this bloody instrument was broken, and covered, in the wound it inflicted, and was thus retained in the body of its victim.

The Earl of Montrose on his return from Orkney passed unmolested through Strathfleet, where he and his followers halted for a night at a place called Rhin. The stillness and beauty of

that spot forms a striking contrast with the struggle and disaster to which the next day's march conducted him. From Rhin he marched to Strathocail, on the heights of which this bravest of unfortunate men fought his last battle.

III.—POPULATION.

A continued decrease is found in the population of the parish of Rogart since the year 1811,—as may be seen by comparing the census of that year with the census of 1831, and with these statistics. This decrease has been caused by emigration to the provinces subject to Britain in North America,—chiefly to Upper Canada.

Population in 1801,	-	2022
1811,	-	2148
1821,	-	1986
1831,	-	1805
For the last seven years the average number of births is	-	40
deaths,	-	29
marriages,	-	10
The number of persons under 15 years of age, is	-	695
betwixt 15 and 30,	-	413
30 and 50,	-	350
50 and 70,	-	236
upwards of 70,	-	64
The number of unmarried men, bachelors, and widowers, upwards of 50 years of age, is	-	25
The number of unmarried women upwards of 45 years of age, is	-	46
families is	-	386
The average number of children in each family is	-	3
The number of families in the parish,	-	386
chiefly employed in agriculture,	-	279
in trade, manufactures, or handicraft,	-	19
The number of inhabited houses,	-	386
houses now building,	-	4
insane persons,	-	3
fatuous,	-	3
dumb persons,	-	1

Language.—The Celtic, or Gaelic, language is spoken by almost all the inhabitants. There are a few shepherds who do not speak this language; but their families do. A considerable proportion of the inhabitants, however, can converse in the English language; and, in a few years it is likely that none may be found who cannot do so. Their English, being acquired from books, and occasional conversation with educated persons, is marked by no peculiarity, except a degree of mountain accent and Celtic idiom; so that it is more easily intelligible to an Englishman than the dialect spoken by the Lowland Scotch.

Character of the People.—A desire for information prevails among them, as, indeed, among all the inhabitants of the High



land districts; and the degree of information they possess is more than could be expected from the advantages enjoyed by them. The young, in general, read Gaelic and English; and some of them write and understand arithmetic. Such of those advanced in years as have been taught to read, delight much in the Holy Scriptures, and in some of the popular works of the early divines of the church of Scotland,—which, having been read and talked of for generations, have acquired a sacredness of character. They are all Presbyterians, and firmly attached to the religion and modes of worship of their forefathers. They have hitherto been respectful to persons in stations superior to their own, peaceable and orderly in their intercourse with one another, and have seldom or never been charged with the commission of crime. Smuggling, happily for their character and circumstances, has been checked. Poaching in game, or in the salmon fisheries, is not attempted by them.

There have been three illegitimate births in the parish during the last three years.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

A great part of the population of this parish is employed as day-labourers for more than half the year. The men find employment in the making or repairing of roads; or from the tacksmen in parishes along the coast as extra labourers in spring and harvest-time; or, during the season of the herring fishing, in curing fish at the fishing stations. The women find employment with the farmers in weeding, hoeing, and cutting down crops, and with the fish-curers at the proper season. A certain portion of time is, of course, occupied in the cultivation of their own lots, and in securing the crops which these produce. Some elderly persons of both sexes, helped by children not attending schools, are always occupied at home in herding cattle.

Agriculture and Sheep-Farming.—The proportion of land in culture and yielding crops is small, and must always be so, while naked rock forms a considerable part of the surface of the parish. It has, however, for several years back, been increasing; and it is likely, that, in the course of some years, what is now occupied by lotters, if left in their occupation, may become cultivated where practicable. The quantity of land cultivated, or occasionally in tillage, does not at present exceed 1200 acres.

Nearly the half of the parish in value, and more than the half in extent, is laid under sheep of the Cheviot breed. It is no less than

62,800 acres in extent. Probably 1000 acres might yet be added to the cultivated land.

Husbandry.—The pasture for sheep is good, and the sheep reared on it are said to be of the best quality of their kind. Surface draining, which has been carried on to a great extent, has added much to the quantity, and improved the quality, of feeding for sheep. In this species of improvement, little remains to be now done here by the sheep-farmer. Large farms are let on leases of nineteen, and small lots on leases of seven, years.

Live-Stock.—The number of sheep of all kinds is 6420; of black cattle, (heads of,) 1079; of horses, 276; of pigs, 210.

Rent.—

The rent of sheep-lands is	-	L. 648	0	0
of corn-farms,	-	281	0	0
of lands under letters,	-	569	0	0
Total rent,	-	L. 1498	0	0

Woods.—Timber as yet cannot be mentioned as one of the products of the parish of Rogart. A small space in Strathfleet, about twenty acres, having some native plants of oak, was enclosed, and planted with larch and common fir. The appearance of this small plantation, which has been lately thinned for the first time, affords sufficient encouragement for planting in situations equally favourable; of which situations the sides of that strath, and several other parts in the parish, present many. Small alders are to be seen along the streams; and patches of dwarf birch are common. Both of these, when in foliage, enliven the aspect, and relieve the ruder features of the scenery; but otherwise they are of no value.

Produce.—The average gross amount and value of raw produce yearly raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, is as follows:—

Grain of all kinds, whether cultivated for food of man or the domestic animals, 3000 bolls at 15s. per boll,	-	L. 2250	0	0
Potatoes, 1500 bolls at 8s. per boll,	-	600	0	0
Hay, 10,000 stones at 4d.	-	166	13	4
Land in pasture, rating it at 10s. per cow or full-grown ox, grazed, or that may be grazed for the season; at 2s. per ewe or full-grown sheep, pastured, or that may be pastured for the year,	-	1300	0	0
Miscellaneous produce, including turnips, cabbages, &c. not enumerated under any of the foregoing heads,	-	400	0	0
Total yearly value of raw produce raised,	-	L. 4716	13	4

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—A road extends through the whole length of the parish along Strathfleet; and another crosses its

breadth at the eastern end, from Strathfleet to Strathbrora. The road in Strathfleet is a continuation of a line of road from Golspie to Tongue; from which roads branch off in various directions. From the cross-road to Strathbrora there is a road branching off to Golspie, and forming a more direct and shorter way to that village for the inhabitants of the interior of the parish. Along these lines of road there are sufficient bridges.

There is no post-office in this parish. Letters to and from it, for which there is a receiving-office at Pitentrail, are carried twice a-week by a mail-gig running between Golspie and Tongue. It is probable, other improvements continuing to advance, that the communication may become more frequent.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church and manse are situated, not far from each other, in one of the most elevated parts of the parish, commanding an extensive and romantic view,—in which the peaks of almost all the high mountains in the county of Sutherland form a part. This is a source of enjoyment which is dearly purchased, by the exposure to the wind and storm. The manse was built in the year 1776, and the church in 1777. The church has undergone some repair, and the manse has frequently been repaired; but, owing to the very exposed situation of the latter, it cannot be said to be in a good condition. For the parish, the situation of the church is most inconvenient,—being in its extreme boundary on the east. Consequently, some of the parishioners travel ten miles in coming to hear sermon; which, being doubled before they return to their homes, is a severe exertion, though it be cheerfully made, even in the short days of winter. The distance of the parishioners from the manse is also productive of much trouble and inconvenience to them. Having few besides their minister whom they consult, various and often recurring are the occasions which oblige them to travel from their place of residence to his.

The minister's stipend is L. 138, 14s. 2½d. Sterling, and 15 bolls, 1 firloot, 1 peck, 3 lippies, half-meal and half-barley, including the allowance for communion elements; so that he draws L. 8, 1s. 5d. from Exchequer, to make his income equal to the minimum stipend in the Church of Scotland. The glebe consists of arable and pasture land. The arable part has lately been considerably increased, by trenching small spots capable of improvement: so that it may be about eighteen acres in extent A

patch of green pasture, rocks, and spots covered with stunted heather, extend its surface to about twenty-five acres. Occupied alone, its value is not much,—servants, horses, and farming implements sufficient for the culture of a small farm being required for it. But if held along with an extent of land which would enable him to cultivate it conveniently, the occupant might find the arable part of it worth 15s. per acre, and the pasture of corresponding value.

The church is the only place of worship in the parish. There is a catechist supported by an allowance from the inhabitants, to which the minister contributes : he labours constantly among them. The average number of communicants is 90.

Education.—There are three schools at present in operation in the parish,—the parochial school, a school supported by the General Assembly, and a Gaelic school, supported by the Gaelic School Society. In the parochial school, English reading, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping, mensuration, and land-surveying, are taught. In the General Assembly's school, English reading, Gaelic reading, writing, arithmetic, and sometimes the rudiments of Latin, are taught. In the Gaelic school, the reading of the Gaelic only is taught.

The salary of the parochial schoolmaster is L. 34, 4s. 4½d. The average amount of school fees received by him is L. 16. The salary of the General Assembly schoolmaster is L. 20. The average amount of school fees received by him is L. 2, 10s.

The teacher of the Gaelic school is not allowed to take fees, by the regulations of the society. He is not stationary in any place. His salary is L. 25. To these teachers the requisite accommodations are given. Fees are exigible from those who can pay them in the General Assembly's school, at the same rate as in the parochial ; but the greater part of the scholars are not in circumstances to afford them. In the parochial school, the fees per quarter are, for English reading, 2s. ; English reading and writing, 2s. ; English reading, writing, and arithmetic, 3s. ; book-keeping, 10s. ; mensuration and land-surveying, 10s. Many of the inhabitants cannot read or write : Of these, the number of all ages above six years, given in the Report to the General Assembly's Committee in 1832, was 842 ; and the number betwixt six and twenty years, 290.

There is a district of the parish, *Barrschol* and *Craiggies*, containing a population of about 200, which is four miles distant from

the parochial school, and has no other school within reach. There is another district of the parish, in which some families reside, *Braes of Langwel and Achintuachrach*, at a still greater distance from any permanent school, in which the Gaelic Society's teacher at present officiates.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—On an average of years, the number of paupers regularly receiving parochial aid may be stated at 84; but, in addition to these, there are several who receive occasional aid. Persons admitted on the poors' roll are generally advanced in age; and charges for the interment of paupers form a considerable expense on the fund. This fund consists of a yearly donation from the Duchess of Sutherland, regularly made, but depending on her Grace's good will, interest of L. 200 bequeathed by a benevolent individual, a native of the parish, and the church collections, the yearly average amount of which is L. 16. The average annual allowance to each pauper for some years back has been 4s. 9d. It has been felt degrading to receive parochial relief; but there are many applicants for it who are rejected.

Inns.—There are three houses in the parish, and one on the confines of it, licensed to retail spirits. They are found injurious to the morals and circumstances of the working classes.

Fuel.—Moss, cut as peats in the months of May and June, and abounding of the best quality at no great distance from the inhabitants, is the fuel used by all. It is procured at considerable expense of time and labour; but the very poorest never fail to supply themselves with a stock sufficient for the year's consumption.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

In the parochial school, writing and accounts have been so well taught for several years back, that many young men have set out from the parish, and found employment, some as clerks in mercantile towns, and some on plantation estates in the West Indies. In general, these are reported to be persevering and industrious; and small remittances frequently made to poor relatives, afford a pleasing proof that they are prosperous. Were the means of acquiring education given more fully, there is reason to conclude that, in every respect, an improvement in the condition of the inhabitants must follow.

Roads and bridges justly claim particular mention in the improvements which have taken place here, since the time of the last

Statistical Account. They have changed the mode, as well as improved the facility, of every species of carriage. Sledges, which may soon become one of the objects interesting to the antiquary, were formerly the best means of carriage which those in better circumstances could use in farming, and for other purposes. Now, almost every poor man who cultivates a croft of land, has his wheeled cart.

The greatest change has taken place in the habits of the people since the last Account. They are now very industrious in general, and surpassed by none around them as willing, skilful, and active labourers in all those kinds of work which the extensive and varied improvements carried on in the county have supplied to its population.

The traveller interested in the comfort of the working-classes must regard the cottages in this parish as pleasing objects; and their number, seen, as they often are, in picturesque situations, must strike every observer, as giving life and interest to the scene presented to his view. In no part of the North Highlands, are there so many well built neat-looking cottages as in the county of Sutherland. Whoever sees them, must form a favourable idea of the industry of the inhabitants, and of the encouragement afforded them by the proprietor of the soil.

September 1834.