

UNITED PARISHES OF TINGWALL, WHITENESS, & WEESDALE.

PRESBYTERY OF LERWICK, SYNOD OF SHETLAND.

THE REV. JOHN TURNBULL, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Boundaries.—THIS parish, consisting of the united parishes of Tingwall, Whiteness, and Weesdale, is bounded on the north, by the sea, and the parishes of Nesting and Delting; on the west, by the sea, and the parish of Sandsting; on the south, by the sea and Quarff; on the east, by Lerwick and Gulberwick. Lerwick was disjoined from Tingwall, and erected into a separate parish, in 1701. Sound and Gulberwick were disjoined from Tingwall in 1722, and annexed to the parish of Lerwick.

Extent.—Tingwall is in length, from north to south, from 12 to 14 miles. Whiteness lies to the west of Tingwall, and is in length from 5 to 6 miles. Weesdale is to the north-west of Whiteness, and from 6 to 7 miles in length.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Ancient Remains.—There are many tumuli, where the Scandinavians had buried their dead. In those which were lately opened, earthen urns of various sizes were discovered, containing calcined bones. Steinbartes or stone axes, called here thunder-bolts, are frequently found, also arrow-heads. There are also the remains of a very great many Roman Catholic chapels.

Tingwall was formerly an archdeaconry. Most of the church lands in it were made over by Sir Jerome Cheyne, the Popish Archdeacon of Tingwall, to his nephew, and remained in the family, without, I believe, ever being challenged.

In 1592, when Presbyterianism was established in Scotland, Tingwall was the seat of, and gave name to, the Shetland Presbytery; the meetings of which were afterwards removed to Scaloway.

While the Shetland Islands remained under the Danish crown, the Foud or chief magistrate resided here.

At a small holm in the Loch of Tingwall, the assize was held, and the judgments of the other courts (Gula Thing) were revised.* On a hill at a little distance, is the place where the last sentence of the law was inflicted on the condemned. After these islands came under the Scottish Crown, this court was removed to Scalloway. The last who suffered there, were Barbara Tulloch, and her daughter, Ellen King, who were condemned for the crime of witchcraft, and put to death in a cruel manner in the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Scalloway is the only village in the parish. It was anciently the capital of Shetland, and a burgh. The name is said to signify the harbour beside the mansion houses,—*Scallu* signifying house, and *way*, or more properly *vie*, a roadstead. Some suppose it to have been *Scallavick*, the little harbour. In this village most of the Shetland gentlemen had residences. And even in the recollection of some old people, the Sinclairs of House, (descendants of the St Clairs of Caithness,) Mitchells of Westshore, Scotts of Giblesta, Umphrays of Asta and Berry, Mitchells of Girlsta, Dicks of Fracafield, Dicks of Warmadale, Mowbrays, &c. had houses in Scalloway. The only gentleman in the village now is Mr Scott of Scalloway. The castle of Scalloway, a fine old ruin, stands to the east of the village. It was built in 1600, by Earl Patrick Stewart. Great oppressions and heavy burdens were imposed upon the people during the erection of this edifice. The village has increased much of late, and is chiefly supported by the fishing.

Ancient History.—St Ninian is said to have introduced Christianity into Shetland; but it did not generally prevail until 995. These islands were in a very unsettled state (being frequently taken by Scotch pirates, and retaken by the Danes,) until King Harold, in 776, took possession of Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles. Hacon Adlestain introduced the Gula Thing law into Shetland. After King Harold was slain at Stamford Bridge, in 1067, his son visited Shetland, &c. and, with the consent of Adlebert, Archbishop of Bremen; established bishops in all these islands. After his return to Norway, in 1672, he granted to the merchants of his new city of Bergen the sole right of trading with the islands, excepting that 360 cwts. of wool were annually exported for the use of the Archbishop of Bremen and his clergy.

* Island Law, as the highest courts were held in islands.

In 1269, King Henry of England entered into a commercial treaty with King Magnus Lagabetter of Norway. Englishmen were sent to inquire into the state of the islands, their extent, produce, &c. It is supposed they also divided the land into merks.

In 1271, Shetland was separated from Orkney, and united to Faroe. They had had the same Foud and Lagamand who resided at Scalloway. They had between them nine bishops. *

By a treaty of 1470, Shetland was pledged to the Crown of Scotland; and from that period, the original inhabitants were most grievously oppressed by tyrants, from time to time, sent over by the Scottish Crown. At the time of the transfer, all the property in Shetland was held by Udal tenure, (descending from father to son without any written documents,) paid no fees, and owned no superior. About 1664, Douglas of Spynie, factor for Lord Grandison, compelled many of the simple udallers to take out feu-characters for their lands. Very few of the descendants of the Norwegians now possess lands in Shetland. There are still a few in Dunrossness and Cunningsburgh. For a century before the islands were transferred to the Scottish Crown, the St Clairs of Caithness possessed a very large share of the Shetland property, which their descendants enjoyed until a late period.

In 1530, the islanders were so oppressed by James, Earl of Moray, that, simple and yielding as they were, they rose in arms against his factor, and the Crown was compelled to revoke the charter granted to him of the lands belonging to it in Shetland.

In 1561, Queen Mary, importuned by Lord Robert Stewart, her natural brother, made a grant to him of all the Crown lands in Orkney and Shetland. After her unfortunate connexion with Bothwell, she revoked the grant given to Lord Robert Stewart, and conferred it on her husband. On Bothwell's forfeiture, the lands again reverted to the Crown, and Lord Robert Stewart gained possession of them; but, owing to his cruelty to the inhabitants, he was deprived of them, and confined for six months in the palace of Linlithgow. But, in 1581, his interest at Court procured for him a new grant of the Earldom; he was also appointed Justiciar, with power to convoke and dissolve the Lawtings. He forfeited the grant in 1585.

In 1587, Sir John Maitland obtained a grant of the islands, revenues, &c.; but, having resigned, Lord Robert Stewart prevail-

* For much of the above information I am indebted to the Rev. Mr Schroter of Faroe.

ed on King James to confer them on him; and, in 1600, Earl Patrick obtained a new grant of them, lived at Scalloway, built the castle, and grievously oppressed the inhabitants, doing all in his power to prevent their complaints reaching the ears of Government. In 1608, however, they made known their grievances to Parliament, which, in 1612, revoked the charter, and annexed the Lordship to the Crown. Two years afterwards, Earl Patrick, who justly merited punishment for his cruelty to the Shetlanders, was put to death for high treason. He had the power of life and death over the inhabitants of these islands, fined them, and confiscated their property at his pleasure. He assessed the country in money, provisions, and personal labour. He also feued lands he had seized from the poor udallers; and these, with scatt and other burdens then imposed, together with the Crown lands, form the revenue of the Earldom in Shetland.

In 1614, Sir James Stewart of Ochiltree farmed the Crown property; but he being also guilty of the greatest oppression was deprived of it.

In 1624, Sir George Hay was appointed Farmer-General and Steward of the islands. He, too, oppressed the poor Shetlanders; and the lordship was again annexed to the Crown by act of Parliament.

In the reign of Charles I. the Earl of Morton obtained a wadset of the Lordship of Shetland and Earldom of Orkney for the sum of L.30,000, said to have been advanced his Majesty by him. This deed was ratified by act of Parliament. No attention was paid to it during the Commonwealth; but, at the Restoration, Viscount Grandison, as trustee for the Morton family, obtained a grant of the property and revenues belonging to the Crown in Shetland and Orkney.

In 1641, the alleged debt due the Earl of Morton was discharged, and the Lordship of Shetland and Earldom of Orkney were to remain inseparably annexed to the Crown. During the reign of Queen Anne, however, on account of the active part taken by James Earl of Morton in bringing about the Union between England and Scotland, he obtained a new grant in the form of a wadset, redeemable for the old sum of L.30,000.

In 1742, the Earl of Morton obtained an irredeemable right to the lands, on condition of improving the islands. He was to drain marshes, build harbours, promote the fisheries, and improve the

agriculture. These conditions, however, have never been fulfilled.

In 1776, Lord Mortop sold his lands and casualties in Shetland to Sir Laurence Dundas, the ancestor of the present Earl of Zetland, for the sum of L.66,000.

Burdens.—There were many burdens imposed on Shetland; such as scatt, wattle, sheep, and oxpenny. Although it is maintained that scatt was the Danish land-tax, yet, until lately, it was never levied, when the lands were not under cultivation; but, in a process before the Court of Session in 1829, this casual payment was made a feu. Scatt varies on the merk from 4d. to 1s. 6d.; those farms or rooms having a right to a large common paying more than those not having such a privilege. The scatt was formerly paid in butter and oil. The Shetland proprietors have also to pay the British land tax. The wattle was a tax imposed on every family, paid in barley to the foud or bailie. It is said to have had its origin from presents made to a pious lady, sent over by the Bishop of Orkney to bless the pastures, in order to the increase of the flocks. It is now included in the scatt. Sheep and oxpenny had their origin from a certain number of sheep and oxen furnished for the governor's table from every parish.* It was also paid in butter and oil. It, too, is now included in the scatt. The feus were also paid in butter. All these butter payments were made in merks and lispunds. The lispund was formerly 15 lbs.; but, in a process lately before the Court of Session, it was made 30 lbs. Tron, or 32 lbs. Avoirdupois.†

By a late act of Parliament, the Earl of Zetland (then Lord Dundas) obtained leave to dispose of his feus, scatt, &c., which have almost all been bought up by the Shetland heritors.

Land Rent.—The land mails or rents were anciently paid in woodmail,‡ afterwards converted into money and butter. The merks land were rated at 6 penny, 12 penny, &c. The 12 penny paid 16s. and 16 lbs. butter. The tenant also paid the teinds in kind, now converted into money.§ They also paid one fowl for every house or reek "to feed his Majesty's hawks." This claim

* First granted as a compliment to Bothwell, when he took refuge in Shetland after his marriage with Queen Mary.

† See Pundler process.

‡ Woodmail, or mill, (cloth payment) was a strong woollen cloth made in Shetland, valued at 2s. per guilding. There are six cutties or Scotch ells in one guilding.

§ The Bishop of Orkney formerly drew one-half of all the corn teind in Shetland, except in the parish of Tingwall, the Archdeacon having the whole of the teinds parsonage and vicarage.

has again been set up by her Majesty's Falconer for Scotland, but resisted by the Shetland gentlemen, and a process in regard to it is now depending before the Court of Session. Formerly, when leases were granted, a sum was advanced by the lessee, termed a *grassum*, or entry money, in order that the lands might be kept at their old rent. In addition to the land rent, every tenant was obliged to pay one fowl per merk to his landlord, to deliver his fish to him at a certain price; and whatever produce of his farm he had to dispose of, had first to be offered to him. The landlord in return always supported his tenant in years of scarcity. Rents are now paid in money.

Until lately, great attention was paid to the division of scathold. The bailie, or chief magistrate, went along the marches, accompanied by some of the most respectable people of each parish, who were well acquainted with the division, and with them some young boys, on whom they bestowed a good flogging at particular places, in order that they might remember the marches; after which, they received some little reward. I have heard some old people who were present, describe what took place at these ridings of the marches, called "riding the Hagra."

They also paid great attention to the sheep-flocks, which constituted their chief wealth. They had large stone inclosures in all their pastures. They made a coarse warm cloth of the wool, which is still done by those who have any sheep. In 1797, the sheep-flock in this parish was computed at 10,000. It does not now amount to 1000. The want of them is very much felt.

III.—POPULATION.

Population in 1755,	. 1412
1806,	. 1997
1821,	. 2309
1831,	. 2797
1836,	. 3188

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Soil and Produce.—This parish lies in parallel straths, from north-east to south-west. The soil is generally a light-brown, black loam, or moorish. Each strath has a bed of primitive blue limestone, interspersed with quartz. The subsoil of most of the peaty ground, has a crust of iron ore impervious to water, and which at first resists the plough. After some years' cultivation, however, this ferruginous substance yields to the plough. The subsoil can then be turned up and mixed with the moss, greatly improving the soil. I have not found the iron ore so hurtful to vegetation as might have been supposed. But wherever there is a chalybeate

spring, it requires to be drained; for when it runs over the soil, it renders it unproductive. The subsoil of most of the meadows is blue till, mixed with small stones. This is even found under the beds of marl. The hills on the east side of Tingwall parish are composed of clay slate, and micaceous schistus, and appear capable of cultivation; those on the west side do not appear so capable. Whenever the moss on them is cut, the whole surface is covered with large stones of coarse granite and gneiss.

Near Rova Head, on the north-east part of Tingwall parish, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Bart. has discovered a field of fine blue slate, which promises to be of great benefit to the country; the gray slate, in use at present, soon splitting when exposed to sun and air.

In some of the meadows, there are quantities of fine shell marl, which answers well as a manure, especially for green crops.

The want of inclosures is much felt: cattle injuring the crops, and poaching the land in the winter time. In some places, however, there are good stone inclosures.

An improved system of agriculture has been introduced, and in many places a regular rotation of crops followed. The common rotation is, 1st year, turnips and potatoes; 2d, big barley, with grass seeds; 3d, hay; 4th, pasture; 5th, oats. The potato is cultivated to a large extent, and in ordinary seasons, Lerwick and Scalloway are supplied from Tingwall parish. The potatoes are planted in drills, horse-hoed, and when taken up, put into pits during winter. Turnips grow well. The red and green tops and Swedish are tried; but the yellow are preferred. The barley in use is the four and six-sided big. The two-sided has been tried, but does not answer. It is some weeks later in ripening, not so productive, and more easily injured by the wind. Wheat and rye have been attempted, but do not answer, owing to the want of sun. Pease do well, unless when we are visited by early frosts, but are little cultivated. Flax and hemp have also been reared, and grow luxuriantly, but the people do not know how to manage them when pulled.

The old one-sided plough is still in use. In some parts, the Rotheram, or Small's plough is in more general use, drawn by two horses; if they are small, assisted by two oxen. Close-carts are also much used. The land is in many places cultivated by the spade.

The method of making hay is much improved. It is in general

spread out as soon as mown, and before night put up in cocks. This method is continued for a few days, when it is led home, by which means the natural juices and nutritious properties are preserved, as well as the fine smell. A little salt is often mixed with it, when building.

Meadows.—The meadows and boggy land arise from springs of water issuing from higher land and running through crevices in the limestone. These meadows produce a quantity of coarse grass, which is made into hay for fodder for the cattle in winter. From these wet grounds, as well as from stagnant waters, there arises a mildew, whenever a slight frost takes place, especially on the fall of a north wind during the summer or autumn seasons. This exhalation or ground-fog is frequently seen to arise from these bogs like the smoke of so many fires, until, uniting, it forms one dense cloud over all the damp ground. It instantly destroys vegetation. The potato crop, in particular, is ruined whenever it reaches it. Not only do the stems soon wither, but the poisonous matter seems to descend into the bulbs, which renders them so unpalatable, that some seasons even the swine will not eat them. For the last four years, the crops in all our valleys, at a little distance from the sea, have been ruined by early frosts, accompanied by mildews. The crops within the vortex of the cloud on the lower ground, are often completely destroyed, while the upper part of the same field remains unharmed. The oats and barley, under the influence of the mildew, assume a dirty white appearance.

The advantages of draining are fully experienced. It is carried on in a very sufficient manner by Mr Hay, on his property at Laxfirth and other places. But it is not to be expected that tenants, without either capital or leases, are to follow his example. And until bogs are drained, and the stagnant water carried off, the saving of the crops must always remain precarious.

Considerable quantities of waste land have lately been brought into cultivation; some by the tenants themselves. It was formerly the practice for the landlord to mark out a piece on the common, and assign it to a tenant, who, on condition of bringing it under crop, had it for seven years rent free. But it was seldom the tenant could drain, trench, and inclose it properly.

It has been the practice here, as in all other parishes of Shetland, to cut up the best soil in the common, carrying it home either for manure, or to spread under the cattle in the byre. By

this destructive practice, the best pasture in the country is not only injured, but in many places completely destroyed. This system has been put a stop to by some of the heritors; but unless they will all unite, the evil will not cease. It is distressing thus to see the best pasture completely destroyed; and no sooner does the grass begin to spring than the ground is immediately robbed of its new surface; and this continues until the whole soil is either carried away by the tenants, or washed away by the winter rains.

Roads.—Roads are now so good in some places, that carts can drive on them. But they are yet in their infancy; and the want of them is a great bar to all improvements. There are excellent roads about Laxfirth and to the northward, but the middle of the parish has been sadly neglected. The soil being open, and carts and horses constantly traversing them, the roads that are, are so broken up during winter, that people cannot go to church with any comfort. These observations refer to Tingwall only; for in Whiteness and Weesdale, there can scarcely be said to be any made roads.

Fisheries.—The Shetlanders subsist chiefly by fishing, without which few could pay their rents. The inhabitants in the southern parts of this parish begin their spring fishing in February, venturing out to sea whenever the weather permits, often risking their lives. A few salt their own fish, and dispose of them, when ready for the market, on their own account. The price of cod in general is 4s. per cwt. for wet fish; price of ling, 6s.: two cwt. and rather less than a-half of wet make one of dry fish. The summer fishing begins about the end of April, and ends about the 12th of August. It is carried on in sloops of from twenty to forty tons. More than one-half of the fish caught goes to the men; most of whom about Scalloway have shares in the vessels. Some of them are sole owners.

The people in these parishes are under no obligation to fish to their landlords, or to dispose of any of their product to them. They are at liberty to employ themselves in any way they please.

There was formerly a bounty on Shetland fish, and also on the vessels engaged in the fishing, of L. 1 per registered ton.

For some years past, the herring-fishing has been extensively carried on. The people deliver their herrings at about 7s. per cran. I have known one of our boats take 297 crans in a season. In 1835, above 15,000 barrels were shipped from Scalloway alone. For the three last years, this fishing has not been successful; and

the crops having also failed, the people are in a very reduced state. In such circumstances, rents can hardly be paid either for lands or houses. Yet, with a very few exceptions, no tenant has been turned out of his possession by his landlord. The rents are at present all paid in money. There are 1637 merks land in this ministry. The rental is about L. 2000. The arable ground will measure rather more than 2500 acres.

Exports and Imports.—It is impossible to separate the exports and imports of this parish from the rest of Shetland. Some of the exports of these islands, as extracted from the Custom-House books, are as follows:—

Year 1823.	Year 1824.	Year 1825.
Fish, tons, 1866	1284	1575
Oil, barrels, 740	950	1243
Beef, barrels, 140		433
Oxen,	367	1250
Sheep,	63	76
Kelp, tons, 260		442
Ponies,	92	140
Butter, barrels,	106	119
Chromate of iron, tons		180

The following are some of the imports; oatmeal, 2152½ bolls; tobacco, 4788 lbs.; spirits, 14,330 gallons; coffee, 1419 lbs.; snuff, 1073 lbs.; tea, 17,983.

The late Mr Mouat of Garth states, that, in 1831, there were in Shetland 25,000 acres cultivated land,—400,000, uncultivated,—the rental being from L. 26,000 to L. 28,000. He reckons the gross proceeds of lands, fishery, trade, &c. to be L. 300,000 per annum.*

Lakes.—There are many lakes in this parish, abounding with fish. The principal ones are the lakes of Tingwall, Asta, and Girlsta in Tingwall; and the lake of Strom in Whiteness. In a small holm in Tingwall lake, the Grand Foud held his Court. Girlsta lake is celebrated by Torfæus. He says, it was called Geirhildar-vatn, from the daughter of Floke, a northern pirate, having been lost in it. † In the lake of Strom, there are the remains of a small castle, said to have been inhabited by a son of the Earl of Orkney, who was afterwards slain, by order of his father, at the standing-stone of Tingwall. ‡

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Harbours.—This parish is better provided with harbours than any in Shetland. To the north, are Deal's Voe, Laxfirth Voe,

* See Peterkin's Letter to George Traill, Esq. M. P.

† See Hibbert, p. 460.

‡ See Hibbert, pp. 268 and 641.

Wadbrister Voe, and Catfrith Voe. To the west, Weesdale Voe, Binnaness Voe, and Whiteness Voe. To the south, Scalloway Voe, and Cliffsound. And to the west of Scalloway, there is a cluster of islands belonging to this parish, within all of which there is fine anchorage.

Ecclesiastical State.—There are at present two churches,—one at Tingwall, built in 1788, after a long litigation before the Court of Session,—and one at Whiteness for the united parishes of Whiteness and Weesdale, at which there is a missionary on the Royal Bounty. It stands by the loch of Strom, near to the ancient fortification already noticed, part of which was taken down to help to build the former church. The present church is a new one. The old church was dedicated to St Ola. Near to this, lived Sinclair of Strom, famous for his bravery in defending the rights of the udallers against the Government in 1530. In this contest, the Earl of Caithness was slain. There was formerly a church at Weesdale dedicated to “Our Lady.” It was much (sometimes still is) frequented by people from every corner of Shetland, who, by casting in an offering of money at the shrine of “Our Lady,” believed they would be delivered from any trouble they laboured under. There is a tradition regarding the building of it, still firmly believed by the superstitious of the islanders. Two wealthy ladies, sisters, having encountered a storm off the coast of Shetland, vowed to “Our Lady,” that, if she would bring them safe to land, they would erect a church to her on the first spot they reached. They landed at Weesdale, and immediately commenced building the church. And each morning, when the masons came to work, they found as many stones ready quarried as they required during the day. One of the elders of the church, who lately lived in that neighbourhood, used regularly to gather up the offerings, which he put into the poor’s box. A church is building at Scalloway, for the village and its neighbourhood, the walls of which will be finished in a few months.

Stipend.—Tingwall is celebrated for its process of augmentation. The Court of Session declaring that they had no power to augment the stipends of the clergy, the incumbent, the Rev. William Mitchell, appealed to the House of Lords, who gave a decision favourable to the clergy. The Court of Session then augmented it to L.578, 13s. Scots, and 108 lispunds of butter, with L.40 for communion elements. It at present amounts to L.254,

14s. 3d., with 20 lispunds butter, and L.8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements.

Education.—The parochial school is placed about the middle of Tingwall. There are three schools supported by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, one in Weesdale, one in Whiteness, and one at Scalloway. In the island of Trondra, there is one of the General Assembly's schools: and there is another at Laxfirth, where Mr Hay has built a commodious school and dwelling-house. Owing to the parish being so intersected by voes, there are many children who can attend none of these schools.

Poor.—There is a great proportion of poor, especially in Tingwall parish, and there are no funds for their support but the Sabbath-day collection, to which the absentee heritors have contributed nothing, at least for the last thirty-three years.

June 1841.