

PARISH OF HALKIRK.

PRESBYTERY OF CAITHNESS, SYNOD OF SUTHERLAND AND
CAITHNESS.

THE REV. JOHN MUNRO, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—THE ancient name of this parish was St Fergus and St Thomas. It had this name because the parish of St Fergus was united to that of St Thomas's soon after or about the time of the Reformation. It is very probable that the tract of country now known by the name of the parish of Halkirk, or the united parishes of Halkirk and Skinnet, contained at some remote period more than the two parishes above alluded to: the number of burying grounds, and the ruins of several places of worship, afford a presumptive proof of this. Some of these, however, are said to have been chapelries in the times of Popery. The etymology of the modern name, Halkirk, is involved in the greatest obscurity, and, as there is no tradition regarding it, the conjectures of imagination are the only sources from which any thing probable can be drawn.

Extent, &c.—The very irregular figure of the parish makes it difficult to ascertain its real extent. The extreme length is 24 miles, the breadth varies from 12 to 3 miles. From these considerations, we may suppose that the parish contains about 90 or 92 square miles. The parish is bounded on the north by the parish of Thurso; on the north-east and east by the parishes of Bower and Watten; on the south and south-west by the parishes of Latheron, Kildonan, and Reay; on the west by Dorrory, a detached part of the parish of Thurso; and on the north-west by the parish of Reay.

Topographical Appearances.—There is neither hill nor mountain remarkable for height in the parish, except the Spittal hill, partly in this parish and partly in the parish of Watten, and about three miles south-east from the church of Halkirk. The elevation of this hill above the level of the sea is not known; its height, how-

ever, is such that the greater part of the county may be seen from its summit. From time immemorial till within the last seven or eight years, it was customary to have an annual market on the very top of this hill. From the name of the market, *the Jamesmas*, it is evident that it had its origin during the prevalence of Popery in Scotland. This market is now held in a place equally central and far easier of access, and will be afterwards mentioned under another head.

Hydrography.—There is a considerable number of lakes in the parish, from twenty-two to twenty-four, including small and great. The loch of Calder is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length, and from one mile to half a mile in breadth. The next in magnitude is Lochmore, which differs very little in size from the other. Both these lochs have a very pleasing effect on the scenery. In travelling towards either of them a person does not see them till they burst at once on his view, and they form a striking and a lively contrast to the moss and the heath with which they are surrounded. There are two rivers which pass through the parish. By the inhabitants of this parish, the principal of these rivers is called the river of Halkirk, but at Thurso, near which it enters the sea, it is called the river of Thurso. The source of this river is *Alltan na cat*, or Cat'sbrook, which is about eight miles south-west from Lochmore and in Sutherlandshire. Though this brook is considered the source of the river, there are several lakes, upwards of twenty, which pour their waters into the river. Some of these lakes are in this parish, and some in the mountains which divide this county from Sutherlandshire. As this river flows through a wide extent of country it receives into its channel and discharges into the sea a great quantity of water. After much rain or a rapid thaw it overflows its banks, and, during the harvest months, has at times done great damage to grass and other crops which lie within its range. Its course is nearly through the centre of the parish; and, taking into calculation its various windings, its length from the source to its junction with the sea is from 40 to 50 miles. The other river, that of Forssy, divides this parish from Reay on the north-west, and joins the sea at *Forss*, in the parish of Thurso. This river, after great falls of rain, comes down in torrents, and does much injury to corn and grass in low situations near its course. It is from 15 to 20 miles in length. Trout and salmon are taken in both the rivers, and trout of various kinds in the lakes.—There are two springs in the

parish which may be noticed. Tobair Acraig, the well of Halkirk, about a mile south-east from the church, is believed to be medicinal, and partakes of the nature of chalybeate waters. The other is at the north-west end of the Loch of Calder, and is believed by the inhabitants in its vicinity to be useful for the cure of diseases. It is of the same nature with the one just mentioned. It may be observed that marl is found in the Loch of Calder, and that a year or two ago, exertions were made, which are still persevered in, to raise it by means of a boat having machinery attached for the purpose. Another loch, that of Leurary, the whole bottom of which is a bed of marl, was drained a number of years ago, and the loch being now dry, this substance is easily obtained, and is found very useful for agricultural purposes.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Land-owners.—The land-owners in this parish are, Sir George Sinclair of Ulbster, Bart. M. P. for the county; Lord Duffus; Sir Patrick M. B. Thrieland of Fingask and Toftingal, Bart.; James Sinclair, Esq. of Forss; Charles S. Guthrie, Esq. of Scots Calder; Donald Horne, Esq. of Langwell; David Henderson, Esq. of Westerdale; James Smith, Esq. of Olig; and Adam Duff, Esq. of Banniskirk. None of these except Mr Henderson of Westerdale reside in the parish.

Parochial Registers.—The old registers of this parish were destroyed many years ago by some ill disposed persons. The present ones commence with the year 1790.

Antiquities.—One of the relics of antiquity in this parish is the Castle of Brawl. It is situated on the north bank of the river Thurso, which flows through the middle of a valley, long and broad, commencing to form at the sea, and extending fully twelve miles into the interior. A place equidistant from both the extremities of this valley, and at which there is a peculiar winding in the course of the river, attractive and pleasing to the eye, is the spot chosen for this once strong and well fortified, but now ruined haunt of ancient heroes. Under the general designation, Castle of Brawl, are comprehended two distinct buildings, belonging to different eras of architecture. The most ancient of these is a tower 39 by 36 feet; and there still remain 35 feet of the height. The walls are 9 feet thick; and in the centre of the east wall is formed a stone stair leading to the very top of the building. In the walls there are several recesses 2 feet and 2 feet 8 inches in breadth, which may contain two or three persons in a standing po-

sition. These recesses diminish gradually both in height and breadth towards the outside of the wall, and each of them ends in a narrow opening, which appears to have admitted all the light which found an entrance to this gloomy abode of the heroes of battle and of rapine. These openings seem also to have been calculated as convenient positions from which those within the castle could shoot at such of their foes as dared attack them in this fastness, which, before the invention of gunpowder, must have been of considerable strength. There are other recesses in the walls, not unlike small rooms, 5, 6, 7, and 8 feet long, by 3, 4, and 5 broad, and $6\frac{1}{2}$, 7, and 8 feet high. On the ground floor in the north side there is a strongly built dismal hole, 10 or 12 feet by $4\frac{1}{2}$, and about the same height with those already mentioned. It is covered with massy stones, and must from its appearance have been a place either of concealment or of imprisonment. The whole superstructure is of a hard durable species of stone found in the vicinity. On the north-west side of the tower there is a fosse, 6 feet deep, and about 20 broad, which protected it on that side, and the river afforded it some defence on the other. The other building in ruins, or rather the commencement of a more spacious and commodious castle, projected on a more elegant plan, belongs to a more improved era of architecture, and is of a modern date compared to the tower. The front height of this ruin varies from 12 to 15 feet. The building is erected on a bank elevated 6 or 7 feet above the bed of the river, and looks towards the east, on which side, and within a very short distance thereof, the river flows with a murmuring hum over a rough stony channel. All that seems to have been built of this well projected and pleasantly situated castle is the ground floor, 100 feet in length by 50 in breadth, divided into six vaults, four of which have two port-holes in each; and there is one in each end of a passage which runs betwixt the end and the centre vaults. The diameter of these port-holes varies from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Each vault has a door communicating with the passage just mentioned, and to each end of which there is a stair descending from the back of the building. The dimensions of these vaults are 16 and 17 feet square, by 12 in height. Some of them have small windows $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 1 foot. All the light admitted into two of them enters through a very narrow opening above the port-holes. By whom and at what period the tower was built and inhabited, and by whom the more modern building was commenced and so far carried on, are questions not

easily solved. Some say that the former was inhabited by a succession of the Bishops of Caithness and Sutherland, and that the latter, so far as it was finished, was the work of one of these bishops. The only foundation for this lame tradition is a story, quite a true one, that one of the bishops who occupied the see was burnt by some lawless miscreants in his castle of Halkirk. There is no reason for confounding Halkirk with Brawl, as they are on opposite sides of the river. The place where the horrid deed was perpetrated was a residence which the bishops had on the Halkirk bank of the river, opposite the Castle of Brawl. There is no vestige of a ruin to point out where the bishop's residence stood. It is probable, however, it was in a field to the north-east of the present manse, where the parochial ministers had their residence till the present house was built. The total removal of every stone of this building has obliterated the memory of its existence. This has been the means of ascribing to the bishops the ruins which remain; it has been the means of placing them in a tower over which they never had any control; and of fathering on their invention and power a project which never owed its form or its existence either to their wealth or to their contrivance. The more probable opinion is, that the Castle of Brawl was a residence of the Harolds and Sinclairs, who were Earls of Caithness, the former at a very early period, and the latter ever since the Harolds lost the title. At Brawl there is an extensive garden, by far the most ancient in the county, belonging to the family of Ulbster, which, notwithstanding its northern latitude, and its being rather neglected, produces considerable quantities of fruit, and in and around it stand chestnut, ash, and elm trees, of good size both in height and circumference.

There was also a castle on the rugged crag of Dirlot, said to have been inhabited by a bold and daring freebooter of the name of Sutherland, a near relation of the Dunrobin Sutherlands, whose lands of Dylrid and Cattak were forfeited for treason, and given to M'Kay of Strathnaver by charter, dated at Inverness, 4th November 1489. The rock of Dirlot is said to have been surrounded at one time by the river, and accessible only by a draw-bridge. The nature of the ground gives some countenance to this tradition; but now the river flows entirely on one side of the crag, on whose summit the gray remains of the castle are to be seen. There was also a place of defence, and of no small importance, at the north corner of Lochmore, where the river issues

from that lake. There was another at the east end of the Loch of Calder. These relics of towers, castles, and forts, are the only monuments remaining of the wealth and the power of the chieftains of days that are gone; these are the only remnants of their possessions; the only indications of their greatness. The fame of their possessors is not recorded in story: if the bard ever sung of their valour; if tradition for a while spoke of their achievements in war, or commended their heroism in the day of battle, the song of the one is no longer sung in the hall, and the tongue of the other is for ever silent. If a little green hill, or three gray stones did for years point out the tomb of their rest, they are now thoughtlessly trodden upon by a race to whom their names and their deeds are alike unknown. If a rude unsculptured pillar marked out the spot or the field where they fell, it stands on a lonely moor, or the side of a barren hill, without a name engraved either by tool or tradition.

There are also some remains of ecclesiastical antiquity. Of these are the relics of St Thomas's Chapel at Skinet. Here was left to stand the sacred chair of St Thomas, of exquisite workmanship in stone, an object of some curiosity; it may be of superstitious veneration, till broken down and used in building a fence. Within the walls of the chapel which still remain, as well as in the ground around, a few continue to bury their dead. There was another of these chapels at Banniskirk, of which there are no remains; its stones have been removed, and the silent mansions of the dead, by which it was surrounded, have been ploughed up, and added to an adjoining field!

A third of these ruined chapels, St Magnus, said to have been founded by the same individual who was the originator and the benefactor of the Kirkwall Cathedral, is at a place called Spittal. It appears to have been 60 feet by 20, and the walls, though in a dilapidated condition, have been left to decay under the slow but sure process of the blasting elements, and the demolishing progress of time; and no views of expediency have induced the proprietor of the lands on which it is built to increase his revenues by demolition and sacrilege; nor has the occupant of the farm, in the centre of which it stands, so far forgotten the reverence due to the mighty dead, as to enlarge his fields by disturbing their repose, scattering their ashes, and exposing their bones to the bleaching influence of sun and of rait. Here was the cemetery of the clan Gunn, at one time a powerful and a warlike

race, who inhabited the mountainous parts of this county, as well as the Kildonan district of the Sutherland county, and who, notwithstanding the high mountains, the many mosses and morasses which intervene to render the journey tedious and laborious, are said to have carried their dead, especially the remains of their chiefs and principal men, from the glens of the Crask and Knockfinn, in order to be interred in the Chapel of Spittal. There was, besides, the Chapel of St Peter at Olgimore, that of St Columba at Dirlot, and that of St Ciran in Strathmore. These last bear the names of the early propagators of Christianity in Scotland; but whether built in their time, or by others in honour of them after their day, is a subject that must for ever remain in doubt. If the pure doctrines of Christianity were for a time declared in these ancient places of worship, it is certain, that during the dark ages they were the temples of idols and their superstitious worshippers. In proof of this, it is traditionally reported, that a band of marauders made the image of St Ciran the butt of their arrows, and thus for their own amusement destroyed the last of the dumb idols worshipped in this part of the country. Of the Clachans of Gerston and Achardale, little remains except the name, and the certainty that each of them contains the ashes of the dead. It is evident from this enumeration of ruined chapels, whatever was the quality of the instruction given, that the people had more easy access to the public worship than at present. Whatever superior advantages the present generation enjoy compared to those that are gone, it appears that the latter were more zealous in supporting a false religion than the former are in supporting and attending the pure doctrines of the Gospel.

III.—POPULATION.

Were we to be guided by the former Statistical Account, we would be led to think that the population was greater at the time it was written than at present. There cannot, however, be the least ground for such an opinion, as the Government census shows an increase at each of the periods it was taken. No part of the parish has been depopulated, and, in moors where ten years ago there was no house, a considerable number of dwellings is now built. The occupiers improve as much of the waste ground as their circumstances enable them. The gradual increase of the population is to be attributed to the cultivation of waste ground,—the improvement of which is carried on by those poor and industrious individuals who build houses in moors, and by farmers who

employ labourers to cultivate wastes adjacent to the arable land they occupy. Thus there is a demand for labour, and the soil yields a produce sufficient to remunerate the farmer for the capital he may have laid out.

In 1831 the population was	2847, viz. 1322 males ; 1525 females.
In 1836,	3085
of whom about	1180 were under 15 years of age,
	875 were between 15 and 30 years,
	645 - 30 and 50
	294 - 50 and 70
	91 were upwards of 70 years.

There is a population of 170 in the village of Halkirk, and the rest spread over the extent of the parish. The average number of marriages is 18 in the year, and of baptisms, 74. There is no register of deaths kept.

Language.—The Gaelic language and the Scots dialect of English are spoken in the parish. A considerable majority of the old people speak the Gaelic ; but there are not many of the young who cannot speak the Scotch, which, it is acknowledged, prevails now more than it did thirty or forty years ago.

According to the usages of this parish, and, indeed, of the county, the terms for hiring farm as well as domestic servants, commence for the summer half year on the 20th of June, and for the winter half year on the 26th of November, or the 9th of June, and 15th of November old style. This is a very unequal division of the year, inasmuch as it makes a difference of very nearly seven weeks betwixt the summer and the winter half year. But this is not all ; for servants who complete their service on the 20th of June are not considered entitled to their wages till towards the end of August,—the time of a great annual market at Thurso, and as a great number of servants attend this market it gives them an opportunity of mis-spending their wages. A servant, whose term of service ends on the 26th of November, is not paid his wages till the 12th of January thereafter, which is the day observed by the country people as New-Year's Day,—a time when servants are too apt to spend their hard-earned penny in drink and other equally useless purposes. The dwelling-houses of the peasantry, constructed without much regard to the rules of architecture, have a forbidding appearance. This description is applicable to the greater number of houses. In most cases, all the houses necessary for the generality of tenants are built in a continued line. The barn and the kiln are in one end of this line, after these follows the dwelling-house, generally divided into three apartments.

After this come the byre, stable, and other necessary houses, arranged in an order by no means the most convenient or pleasing. Some have of late built houses of better construction, which have a more pleasing aspect, and must at the same time afford their occupiers more comfort than houses built after the structure followed till very lately in this county. It may be mentioned that attention is paid to cleanliness, both in the domestic economy and dress of the peasantry, and the sober and the industrious enjoy that share of the comforts of life with which people in the lower ranks are generally found to be content; and that they are so in this parish, the writer knows from the experience of several years spent among them. In a population so great, there must of necessity be individuals of very different dispositions, and of various degrees of intelligence; but, keeping out of view occasional brawls and a few squabbles which very seldom occur, the great mass of the population is to be considered as composed of good moral characters, who, in outward behaviour, conduct themselves in a manner becoming the Christian name; and there is a reason to hope, that not a few have felt the vital influences of the gospel of peace. The whole of the inhabitants, with the exception of thirty-three* individuals, are attached to the Established Church of Scotland. Making allowances for the distances which they have to travel, and the very bad roads by which they must come, the people on the whole are regular in attending public worship on the Sabbath, as well as catechetical exercises on week-days. That they are exempted from the failings and short-comings of our nature, is what can be neither expected nor affirmed. That a few young men, prompted by folly and the mere love of sport, should occasionally trespass against the game laws, can surprise no one who considers the temptations to which individuals are exposed in a place where wide extended moors, with abundance of game, are inducements to the sportsman too powerful to be resisted. This is not an apology for breaches of law; it is a mere statement of facts, which, when considered, must make the rarity of such breaches highly creditable to the inhabitants of remote districts, who can often commit a trespass of this nature without the least fear of detection.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—The parish, as already observed, may be consi-

* Of these, six, an exciseman and his family, who were Episcopalians, have lately left the parish.

dered in extent as about 90 or 92 square miles,—73,600 imperial acres: about 6000 of these are cultivated, as many under natural or meadow grass, and the rest is moor, moss, lakes, rivers, &c. The rate of annual rent is as high as L. 1, 10s. and as low as 2s. 6d. per acre. From what has already been done, it is quite evident that a great proportion of what is now waste ground might be improved to advantage, and, were the people encouraged to labour in this work, many would undertake the cultivation of such ground in preference to going to America at the imminent risk of their lives, and in violation of those feelings which make man cleave to the rugged rocks of his native mountain, the remembrance of which is associated in foreign climes with his recollection of the home and the country of his fathers. It is much to be regretted that those who do their utmost to subdue the stubborn soil of the moor and the mountain meet with so little encouragement. Instead of being made to pay a rent of 5s. or 2s. 6d. for every acre brought into cultivation, it would be better policy to give four times the sum for every acre so cultivated, for at least five or six years after a poor person commences such laborious and expensive work, and then a moderate rent might be charged for an equal number of years. A plan of this nature would encourage individuals to improve waste grounds, which, as they are, yield no food for man, no revenue for the proprietors,—whereas, by following a different system from that adopted, they might be made to support the labourer, and to pay the landlord a certain per centage for moneys expended in inducing people to embark in the work. A good deal is certainly done, but infinitely more would be cheerfully performed under a system which would hold out inducements for adding to what one may already possess, instead of deterring him from doing anything that way, by the certainty of 5s. being added to his rent for every acre brought into cultivation.

Quarries.—There are quarries of limestone in different parts of the parish. The lime made from these is used in masonry; but it answers better in agricultural processes than for any other use it can be applied to. There are also quarries of flags. These are much used in flooring in country houses; they are also used in paving; for which they are remarkably well adapted. Great numbers of them are annually exported to Leith, Aberdeen, &c.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town.—The nearest market-town is Thurso, which is about seven miles from the parish church.

Means of Communication.—There are three roads through the parish by which people can travel to Thurso ; these are not finished to the different extremities of the parish. They have been made within the last three years on Macadam's principles, and are in very good repair. An annual market is held in the village of Halkirk on the Tuesday before the 26th December. Its name is St Magnus ; it is not much attended. Another annual market is held within two miles of the church. The site of this market is the hill of Ruggy, which is partly in this parish, and partly in the parishes of Thurso and Bower. The market is principally a cattle one ; the situation is central ; and people from all parts of the county can conveniently attend. Five roads may be said to lead to the place where it is held : one from Thurso, one through Bower and Watten, one from Wick, one from Latheron, and one through this parish.

There are two bridges on the river of Halkirk ; one at the village not more than a quarter of a mile from the church. It was built in 1731, consists of three arches, and is very convenient and useful. It has of late undergone considerable repairs, and, if no unforeseen accident happen, it may stand for centuries to come. The other bridge is at Dale, five miles farther up the river than the Halkirk bridge. It contains two arches, each thirty feet span. It is quite new, having been finished in 1834. There is also a timber bridge in the Mission at Dirlot. It is intended for the convenience of people coming to hear preaching at the Mission-house, and is equally convenient for general and ordinary communication.

There is a mile of turnpike road passing through a corner of the parish, and the mail-coach passes through this part of the parish twice every day, but the inhabitants do not enjoy the benefit of it, for all letters for the parish are carried to Thurso, and sometimes lie there a day or two before they are brought to the Bridge-end of Halkirk, to which there is a penny-bag thrice a week. This is kept up at an expense of L. 9,—a much greater expenditure than could be incurred were there a bag with all letters for the parish left at one or other of the houses in that part of the parish through which the mail passes. Besides this mile of turnpike, there are three branches of county road,—the whole making an aggregate of about fifteen miles.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church is situated on the east side of the river,—near the extremity of the parish on that side,—on the other, however, the parish extends three miles towards Thurso.

The distance from the church to Achpheadair (Peter's-field) and Knockglass, the extremities on the west and north-west, is from five to six miles and a-half; the distance to Banniskirk and Achchipster, the extremities on the east and south-east, is three miles and a-half to the former, and six and a-half to the latter; and the distance to Dalghanachain, Glutt, and Rumsdale, the utmost extremity to the south, is from twenty to twenty-four miles. The church was built in 1753, and underwent a substantial repair in 1833. It accommodates about 756 individuals; 18 sittings are set apart for the poor by the heritors, and about 20 are provided for them by the minister and session, by placing benches in wide passages. Till after the last repair of the church, none of the heritors rented their proportion of sittings in the church; some of them have since let the sittings to the tenants, and others have not. A few farmers have claimed and obtained the same right to a seat in the church that they had previous to the repair. The highest rent charged for a sitting is 4s. and the lowest 1s. The manse was built about the same time with the church, and underwent some repairs in 1823. The extent of the glebe is from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 imperial acres; this includes the site of the manse, the garden, &c. The annual value of the whole is from L. 8 to L. 10. The stipend is 15 chalders of victual, half meal and half barley, and L. 10 for communion elements. There is a missionary employed in the most distant parts of the parish, who is partly supported by the Committee for managing the Royal Bounty, and partly by the inhabitants of the mission district of the parish. The missionary has three preaching stations—one at Achrenny in this parish; one at Halsary in the parish of Watten; and the third at Halladale in the parish of Reay. To the Halsary district there is attached a part of the parish of Latheron. The population in this parish within the bounds of the mission is 784; these are very much scattered, and are often prevented from attending the missionary's preaching by the river and other streams, which, especially during the winter and spring, are so much swollen, and that perhaps on the day the missionary is to preach in the district, that it is impossible for many to attend, and very likely they will not hear sermon again till the missionary is there three weeks thereafter. This produces great evils,—it begets indifference to the means of grace, and at last, in too many cases, a total neglect of these means. This is not to be attributed to the missionary, nor, humanly speaking, to the people, but to the system on which the mission is established;

and the utter impossibility of any one man being able, however gifted with abilities and zeal, to discharge aright duties requiring continual devotedness and unwearied labours to perform them either with success or efficiency. Is it to be supposed that a minister can administer religious instruction to a population of at least 2500, scattered over the remote parts of three parishes, and the greater number of the distant glens and valleys in the high and mountainous districts of the county of Caithness? Here is committed to the pastoral superintendence of a missionary a boundary, the extremes of which, by a practicable road, are from forty to fifty miles distant from one another. The distance, however, is the least of the obstructions in the missionary's way, and of the difficulties he has to encounter in the discharge of his highly important duties: there are moors, mosses, and quaking fens which disjoin one valley from another, and which make it impossible, except by circuitous routes, to pass from glen to glen during the winter and spring months. The number of sittings in the mission house is 403, of which 351 were let when a survey was made during the spring of last year; the highest rent charged is 1s. and the lowest 6d. per sitting. The whole church accommodation then in the parish is 1159 sittings, which is by far too few were the people within a distance that could enable them to attend regularly. It is questionable, however, how far the mission-house, from the circumstances mentioned, with preaching once in the three weeks, ought to be reckoned church accommodation. There are two catechists employed by the minister and session, but they are principally paid by the parishioners. The parish church and the mission chapel are the only places of worship in the parish. The total of all denominations who do not attend public worship in the Established Church is about 33 individuals; some of these are Seceders, others Independents, and a few Baptists and Episcopalians.

The number of communicants in the parish is 110. These bear a small proportion to the population; but it is better to have a few whose walk and conversation are in conformity with the faith and the doctrines of Christianity, than to admit a promiscuous multitude, whose only motive might be the enjoyment of the outward privileges conferred on the partakers of this sacrament.

Education.—The number of schools taught in the parish during the last two or three years is 13. One of these is the parochial school; another is supported by the Society in Scotland for Pro-

pagating Christian Knowledge; and the others, three of which are female schools, are wholly supported by the parents of the children. The branches taught are, reading, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping, English grammar, and at the parochial school Latin and all the other branches. The salary for the parochial school is the maximum, and the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge allow their teacher at Assary L.15. The amount of fees varies according to attendance, from L. 3 to L. 5, per quarter; the quarterly fees for each individual is 1s. 6d. for reading; 2s. for reading and writing; 2s. 6d. for arithmetic; 3s. for book-keeping and English grammar; and 5s. for Latin and geography. That the people are alive to the benefits of education, is evident from their supporting so many schools at their own charges, to instruct their children in the elements of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Were schools established at all the stations at which the people employ teachers, the inhabitants generally would be within such a distance of a school as would put it in their power to cause their children attend. The total number of children who attended the different schools during the year 1835 was 411, and the average number for some years is 390.

Friendly Societies.—There are five Friendly Societies in the parish. The object of these is to give a weekly allowance to sick members, a sum for funeral charges when any of the member's family dies, and a quarterly allowance to the widows of members, who shall have contributed to the funds of the society at least seven years previous to their death. The total number of members in these five societies is 644; and the number of widows supported by them is 29. The funds of the Halkirk Village Society amount to L. 300. This is the first that was established in the parish. The others have been instituted at various periods since; and one thing that stimulated their founders to get them established may have been the success that attended the first. These societies are useful, inasmuch as they put in the power of heads of families to provide so far for their wives and children, as to leave them independent of parochial relief.*

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The annual average number receiving parochial relief during the last ten years has been 95; and the average yearly sum given to each is 5s. Some of the absentees

* Since the above was written, an innovation has been introduced into these societies, which is likely to end in the dissolution of some of them. The cash was given out to some necessitous members, and, as this in too many instances was done without proper security, the money is not likely to be all repaid.

heritors give occasionally a donation of L. 1 or L. 2, in aid of the poor's funds. There has been received in this way since 1828, about L. 13, 7s. There are two legacies of L. 100 each, the interest of which is given to the poor. The average of the church collections for the last few years has been L. 20, which, with the interest of the L. 200 and the donations, generally amount to L. 30 or L. 32. Out of this sum the session pay their clerk, precentor, officer, &c. This, the only mode of supplying the wants of the poor, is, (except in very few cases,) found adequate to relieve the poor and the needy, on whose part there is no desire to become chargeable to the parish when they can avoid it; indeed, the very small sum the funds afford is no inducement to any, except the truly destitute, to apply for parochial relief. In addition to what the very poorest receive from the session, they beg among the farmers, who are sufficiently liberal in giving them meal and other provisions, fully as acceptable to, and necessary for the poor as money.

Inns.—In the village of Halkirk there are three inns, and four in other parts of the parish. Of the whole, three might be required, but it is most surprising how such public nuisances are allowed to increase to so alarming an extent, to the manifest injury of the morals of the youth of the parish.

Fuel.—There is great abundance of moss in every part of the parish, from which the inhabitants have an excellent supply of peats, the only fuel used in the parish. Every farmer is allowed to cut as many peats on his landlord's property as he requires, and, as farmers either cut and bring home their own peats, or employ their servants in doing so, the expense is very little, and seldom thought of, as the people have more time than money.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

The most striking contrast betwixt the present state of the parish and its state forty years ago is, that there is more cultivation carried on,—more of the waste grounds improved,—a better system of husbandry introduced,—and the quantity of grain raised is much greater than at the former period. The new roads lately made, and those intended to be made, as soon as an increase in the funds at the disposal of the trustees permits, will, in the course of some years, enable landlords and tenants to carry on improvements, which must convince almost every one how little has yet been done of what it is possible to accomplish.

Drawn up in 1834,

Revised October 1840.