

PARISH OF DURNESS.

PRESBYTERY OF TONGUE, SYNOD OF SUTHERLAND AND CAITHNESS

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I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—THE name Durness, or, as it is pronounced by the natives, Duirinish, is evidently of Gaelic origin. * By some it has been derived from *Dorrain*, i. e. storms or tempest, and *nis* or *ness* a promontory. Others derive the word from *Dubh*, black; *raon*, field; and *ness* or *nis*, a promontory,—*Dubh-thir-nis*. But as the word *ness* or *nis* is seldom, if ever, used to signify a point or promontory in Gaelic, it may with greater probability be derived from *Durin*, the principal township in the parish, and *innis*, a green patch or grazing,—literally an *oasis* in a desert. Hence the word *Shininess*, a green knoll near the Deer Forest in this parish, is derived from *sithin*, venison, and *innis*, a grazing.

Formerly the parish of Durness comprehended the whole of the district known by *Lord Reay's Country*, or, as it is called in Gaelic, *Duthaich Mhic Aoi*, i. e. *The Land of the Mackays*, extending from the river of Borgie near Strathnaver, to the Kyle of Assynt and comprehending a space of about 800 square miles! Since 1724, it has been divided into three parishes, viz. Edderachillis, Durness, and Tongue: with the parish of Farr, it was disjoined from the presbytery of Caithness, and by Act of Assembly attached to the presbytery of Tongue.

Boundaries.—It is bounded on the N. by the Northern Ocean on the E. by the parish of Tongue; on the S. and S. W. by Edderachillis; and on the W. by the Atlantic Ocean. Its greatest length from east to west is twenty-five miles, and its average breadth about twelve miles,—there being thus, including friths and lakes, about 300 square miles.

Topographical Appearances.—The general aspect of this parish

* Notwithstanding the frequent incursions of the Danes and other northern tribes it is remarkable that they never succeeded in establishing themselves as separate colonies, or in giving names to the different places in the country, which, as every scholar knows, are all, with hardly an exception, of Gaelic origin.

is mountainous; and its surface is naturally divided into three parts, viz. 1st, the Parf district, or that which lies betwixt the Atlantic and the Kyle of Durness. 2d, Durness, properly so called, including all between the Kyle of Durness and Loch Eriboll. 3d, Westmoin, which extends from Loch Eriboll to the middle of the moorass below Loch Hope, commonly called the Moin.

Mountain Ranges.—In the Parf division, comprehending a surface of from 60 to 80 square miles, there are several mountain-ranges from 1500 to near 2500 feet in height, from Serebhisbheinn on the north, to Fairemheall on the south. Fairbheinn has a conical shape, and appears isolated from these and the other ranges of Creigriabhach and Bendearg, which have a S. W. direction, gradually diminishing to the Western Ocean.

In the second division, the mountains are, Ceannabinn, Meallmeadhnoch, Ben Spionnadh,* and Cránstackie, which take a S. W. direction, and the mountains of Foinnebheinn and Meallhorn, which take a S. E. direction. This division contains an area of about 80 square miles.

The third, or Westmoin division, having a surface of about 100 square miles, contains several ranges of high and precipitous hills on the east side of Loch Eriboll, and clustered in various shapes and directions betwixt Strathmore and Strathbeg. In this division also is the lofty Ben Hope, 3150 feet above the level of the sea; it extends in a S. W. and S. direction along the narrow vale of Strathmore. The view of Ben Hope from the west has been always admired by travellers, as perhaps the finest of its kind in the kingdom. The best view is at the inn of Cassildubh, near the upper end of Loch Hope. As there is no table-land, it rises within a few feet from the level of the sea, in abrupt and towering magnificence. The mind is filled with awe at the grandeur and sublimity of the scene, and the eye is overcome with beholding the mountain as a whole,—except when occasionally relieved by viewing the trees of varied hue that diversify the scene, and adorn its base and its dark-blue terraces. Here is often seen the eagle soaring aloft; and amidst its deep ravines, the red-deer and roe, pasturing in security, as if defying the stratagems of the hunter. Nor is the view from its summit less interesting. On a clear day, may be seen Lewis to the west, and the Orkney Islands to the north-east, as well as the principal mountains of Sutherland and Caithness, while

* 2566 feet above the level of the sea by Mr Burnet's measurement.

the numerous lakes through the country appear like specks, and its friths (when the view is not obstructed by adjacent hills) like rivers.

Valleys.—In the Parf district, though there are several deep ravines, there are no valleys of any note. It consists chiefly of marshy loans and deep morasses several miles in extent, and intersected by the mountain-streams. A few green and fertile spots may be seen on its eastern shores. With the exception of the light-keepers at Cape Wrath, there are only four families, shepherds, who reside in this extensive district. In the second district, Strath Dinard runs up the Kyle of Durness, and by the water of Dinard, to the south base of Fairemheall, and then takes a south-east direction along the side of Foinnebhinn, extending a distance of about fourteen miles. At the upper end of Loch Eriboll is Strathbeg,—a narrow but fertile vale of about two miles in length, and scarcely half a mile in breadth. The only other valley deserving notice is Strathmore, commencing at the north base of Ben Hope, and extending about six miles along the river. It is now inhabited by one family; whereas, formerly, it was inhabited by upwards of twenty, by no means affluent, but virtuous and contented. To the south, betwixt the mountains of Strathmore and Strathbeg, are Glengollie and Corinessie, both celebrated by the muse of Rob Donn, as the favourite haunts of the deer and the hunter. These contain almost the only remains of birch trees in the parish, which at one time diversified and beautified its straths and glens. It may be remarked, that, with the exception of those last mentioned, the straths are but a very few feet elevated above the level of the sea, and give an Alpine grandeur to the contiguous mountains.

Caves.—*Smo, &c.*—In a country so extensive and mountainous, and abounding in limestone, we may naturally expect to find caves, deep ravines, and fissures. Of these, Smo* is the most remarkable. It is about two miles east of the church, and may be approached either by sea or by a pathway from the road. Directly above the cave, a beautiful waterfall arrests the eye. Descending from the road, about 100 yards to the shore, and crossing the water, after walking twenty yards, the traveller is suddenly arrested by the grandeur and magnificence of the cave,—whether he views the singular and massive construction of its Gothic-like and transverse arches, or its immense height and width;

* In "Daniell's Coast Views," a front view of this cave may be seen.

for, in some places, it is about 100 feet wide, and as many in height. Here, also, the noise of the waterfall steals on the ear; and when the voice is raised, an echo is distinctly heard. Near the entrance, its stratified rocks have several tufts of ivy mantling over them, which add to the interest of the scene. The dark perforation on the right hand of the arch has of late years been explored; it was believed by several of the natives, upon traditional information, to be the abode of *fairies*, and the spirits of the dark! *

There are also several extensive caves at Presgill, at the east side of the entrance of Loch Eriboll. Sir Walter Scott visited these in 1814, and they excited his admiration equally with that of Smo. They are approached only by sea. The grandest of these has a waterfall over its mouth. The deep and unknown extent of the fissure of Polaghloup, half a mile west of the church, has been frequently admired. The immense *stocks* or detached Gothic-like pillars at Kervic bay near Cape Wrath, and at the Whiten Head, have been also much admired. Several other caves, fissures, and cascades, in the interior of the country, if found in parishes of less extent, would be deemed deserving of more detailed description.

Coast.—That part of the coast which is bounded by the Atlantic and the Northern Ocean is bold and lofty. On both sides of Cape Wrath, of the Farout Head, and Whiten Head, the rocks are magnificent, towering in most places from 200 to 700 feet of perpendicular height. At Kervic bay, the shore is low and sandy. At the bay of Balnakiel, there are several hills of sand, which frequently shift their places and forms, though generally covered with bent. Along the friths of Keoldale and Eriboll, the shores are generally precipitous and rugged, with intervening bays of sand or shingle.

Islands.—These are, 1. *Gärvellan*, within 4 miles of Cape Wrath to the east, and 1 mile from the shore; it is about 60 feet high, 100 yards long, and about the same breadth; here thousands of

* The following is a short account of this cavern, as given by a young gentleman, one of a party who entered it in August 1833. "After providing ourselves with a small boat and lights, and raising them over the arch, we found ourselves in a lake about thirty yards long, and nearly as broad; we now lighted our candles, and approached an arch in the rock, under which we could just pass by lying flat on the boat. This opened to another lake of equal length, but gradually diminishing in breadth. Having at the upper end left the boat, we walked over the rock about thirty paces in the same direction. The height of the roof is various, from twenty to sixty feet, and its sides and bases are almost covered with stalactites and stalagmites, formed from the dropping roof of the cave, which is entirely composed of limestone. The temperature of a well at the upper end we found to be 48° Fahr."

different species of sea-fowl are reared. 2. *Hoan*, 1 mile long, and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile broad; it lies near the entrance of Loch Eriboll; is green and fertile, and supports four families. 3. *Choari*, in Loch Eriboll, about the same dimensions, and equally fertile. In both of the two latter islands, there are places of sepulture, which have been discontinued as such for upwards of a century. Tradition reports, that they were used for sepulture to prevent the depredation of wolves, which at one period infested the country.

Meteorology.—Cape Wrath is the only place in the parish where observations have been recorded. * After the autumnal equinox, and about two hours after sunset, the polar lights frequently appear most splendid, and occasionally extend from the north or north-west like a belt over the whole horizon. On the 3d September 1833, the horizon, from three to four P. M., presented a peculiar appearance, and that during sunshine,—as if tinged, though faintly, by the polar lights, rushing with great rapidity. For some days after, the weather was dry and squally. When the Orkney Islands or the neighbouring mountains are clearly seen, either a storm, or the continuation of bad weather, is the certain consequence. When the sound of the breakers on the shore is heard distinctly, it indicates frost. The appearance of the swan is a precursor of snow.

In a country so contiguous to the ocean, and so mountainous, it is to be expected that high winds and frequent showers should prevail; but, from these very causes, snow does not last so long as in more southern latitudes. Though the climate, in general, be moist and variable, yet the atmosphere is purified by high and frequent winds; and the inhabitants are in general healthy. Fevers, small-pox, &c. are seldom, if ever, spread by infection. In spring, however, colds, inflammatory sore throats, and rheumatism, are not infrequent. In summer and autumn, cases of dyspepsia and bowel-complaints among the lower orders are of common occurrence. These are supposed to arise from a sudden change of their diet, which in the summer consists of oatmeal, milk, &c. and afterwards, of potatoes.

Hydrography.—The *friths* that intersect the parish are, 1st, the *Kyle of Durness*, which is about six miles long, and averages nearly one mile in breadth. Near its entrance on the west side of the

* A monthly report is transmitted to the Board of the Lighthouse Commissioners, of the readings of the thermometer, barometer, and rain-gage.

bay of Balnakiel, are bars and shallows, which frequently shift their position with north winds. This frith is little visited by vessels, either for shelter or commerce. At ebb, it appears a large field of sand, which is gradually accumulating from the debris of the Dinard and tributary streams. On its banks, may be frequently seen considerable numbers of seals (*Phocæ vitulina*,) and different species of shell-fish. 2d, *Loch Eriboll*, which is about ten miles long, with a south-west direction, and varying from one to four miles in breadth. Its waters are of a depth varying from fifteen to sixty fathoms; and no perceptible current is felt, while its saltness does not materially differ from that of the ocean. Camisendunbay, near the ferry, is one of the best anchorages in the kingdom, and is pretty often resorted to by vessels unable to double Cape Wrath, or attempt the Pentland Frith. The tides off Cape Wrath, Farout, and Whiten Head are very strong—running about ten miles an hour.

Springs.—As might be anticipated in such a mountainous country, and where such quantities of rain fall, the springs are innumerable. There are several chalybeates; and those which give a reddish colouring to the gravelly banks are reckoned salubrious by the natives.

Lakes are also abundant, varying from a few hundred yards to six miles in extent. Of these, *Loch Hope* is the largest, being six miles long, by one half mile broad. Its mean depth does not exceed six fathoms. Its upper end is gradually filling up by the alluvial deposits of Strathmore water; and its banks occasionally diversified by a few tufts of birch. *Loch Borley* and *Loch Craspul*, near the manse, are beautiful lakes; both of which are supplied by subterraneous streams through the limestone rocks in the neighbourhood. The former is one mile long, and has a small green isle 200 yards long. It abounds in *char*, which spawn in October, and are seldom or ever caught by the fly. *Loch Craspul* is half a mile long, and abounds with excellent trout, which do not spawn till January. There are several other lakes around the above and in the interior,—all abounding in trout, which appear reddish, dark, or silvery, according to the clearness of the water. Among these, the largest are *Dinard*, the source of the river *Kescaig*, and *Ishour* in the Parf or western division. *Marl* has been found at *Loch Borley*, but has not been applied to any extent for the purpose of manure.

Rivers.—The only rivers deserving notice are the Hope and the *Dinard*. The former is merely a continuation of the Strathmore Water, which has its source from Glengollie and the contiguous

mountains, and empties itself about three miles from the mouth of Loch Eriboll,—running a distance of fifteen miles. The latter has its rise from Loch Dinard, and empties itself at the head of the Kyle of Durness,—running a distance of ten miles. Both these rivers are very rapid, especially when swelled by their tributary streams. In both, the cruives are shut in March; but very few salmon are found till summer, owing, it is supposed, to the coldness of the snow water descending from the higher mountain streams. Salmon are, also in small quantities, found to ascend the *Sandwood* water from the Atlantic, *Dal* water from Balnakiel Bay, and *Strathbeg* water, at the head of Loch Eriboll. All these are tolerably good angling rivers, especially for trout, during the months of May and June. During heavy rains, the mountain streams present to the eye some fine cascades, the most noted of which are at Altnacailish in Strathmore, and at Benspionnadh on the north-west side.

Geology.—There are few parishes in Scotland that furnish such a rich field to the speculations of the geologist—both from its extent and the variety of its formations. These have been examined by Professor Jameson, Professor Sedgwick, and Dr M'Culloch. Following the geographical divisions of the parish we find the high and precipitous rocks on either side of Cape Wrath, chiefly sandstone and gneiss, with numerous veins of granite and felspar. The central mountain of Fasbheinn is gneiss; but all the other mountains are chiefly of the red sandstone formation, and puddingstone—the strata of which are horizontal. At Handa Island, and Store in Assynt, the same formation of sandstone appears.

In the second or Durness division, the mountains are all composed of quartz, gneiss, and mica-slate, with occasional veins of porphyry and granite. The dip of the strata is chiefly north-east. The higher mountains present their steeper and bolder fronts to the west and north-west,—with the exception only of the Farou Head, composed of dark gray slate. The greater part of the low lands of Durness from the Kyle to Smo, consists of an immense triangular bed of primitive limestone, of about fifteen square miles, and of unknown depth. It is of different colours—gray, blue, and pale white. These often alternate with each other, and are of various depths, often horizontal, but generally inclining to the north and east. The fissures almost always cut the strata at right angles, and frequently consist of thin veins of carbonate of lime, pure, white, and crystallized. This bed at its southern angle disappears under the Foinnebhinn and Meall Horn Mountains, and

is seen minutely in the adjoining parish of Edderachillis at Lochmore and Glencul, and to an extent of several miles in the parish of Assynt, where it appears under the same general character and of the same formation.

In the third or Westmoin district, a section of this bed also appears, to the extent of about five miles in length by half a mile in average breadth. It is separated from Durness by Loch Eriboll, the quartz mountain range of Ceannabinn, and Benspionadh. The mountains of Hope and Strathmore are quartz and gray slate, either horizontally stratified, or with a small inclination to the east and north. The limestone caves present fine specimens of stalactites and stalagmites, and some of the lakes in the limestone formation abound in marl. Immense circular blocks of granite are frequently resting upon the limestone rocks: * and pieces of porphyry have been discovered near Rispond, which are easily cut into seals. *See specimens near Cape Hope*

Soil.—Over the limestone, the soil is chiefly clay, of various depth, and yielding rich pasturage. The alluvial deposits carried down by the mountain streams make the straths equally fertile. But with these exceptions, the whole soil of the parish is a continuous surface of peat moss, varying from a few inches to twelve feet in depth,—below which there are deep strata of clay or gravel.

Zoology.—The high mountains in the interior, commonly called the “Forest”—(a leafless one!) abound in red-deer (*Cervus elephas*.) The roe (*Cervus capreolus*) is occasionally seen at Ben Hope. Foxes (*Canis vulpes*,) notwithstanding the high premiums given, are numerous and difficult to extirpate. Badgers (*Ursus meles*) are almost extinct. Wild cats (*Felis catus ferus*) are pretty numerous. Otters (*Mustela lutra*) are found in the rivers. Hares common (*Lepus timidus*,) and alpine (*L. variabilis*,) are seen, the latter more numerous; also rabbits (*L. cuniculus*;) pole-cats, ferrets, and weasels (*Mustelæ*,) Moles (*Talpa Europea*) are rare, and only found in one district of the parish, on the eastern bank of Loch Hope. Rats (*M. rattus*) are of late immigration.

Birds.—Among the land fowls, the following are the principal: Hawks (*Falco*) of different kinds. Owls, both gray and brown, with ears resembling horns. The Royal (*fulvus*,) and fishing (*haliæetus*,) eagle. A colony of rooks (*C. frugilegus*) may be seen in September for a few weeks, and almost all the small birds common

* From one of these on the glebe, the monument erected in the church-yard to the memory of Rob. Donn, was formed.

to the latitude; such as the starling (*Sturnus*,) thrush (*Turdus*,) wagtail (*Motacilla alba*,) lark (*Alauda arvensis*,) green linnet (*Loxia chloris*,) swallow (*Hirundo*,) blackbird thrush, (*T. merula*,) cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*,) kingsfisher (*Alcedo ispida*,) wild pigeon (*Columba ~~Ænas~~*,) black-cock (*Tetrao tetrix*,) ptarmigan (*T. lagopus*,) moorfowl (*T. Scoticus*,) partridge (*T. perdix*,) plover (*Charadrius*,) &c.

Among the water-fowls are gulls (*Larus ridibundus*, and *L. marinus*;) wildgoose (*Anser*,) swan (*A. cygnus*,) duck (*A. boschas*,) teal (*A. crecca*,) solan-goose (*Pelecanus Bassanus*,) puffin (*Alca arctica*,) auk (*A. torda*,) and great auk (*A. impennis*,) crane (*Grus*,) *3*

Fishes.—Skate (*Raiæ*,) piked dog-fish (*S. acanthius*,) eel (*Murena anguilla*,) conger, or sea eel, (*M. conger*,) cod (*G. morrhua*,) haddock (*G. ~~Æglefinus~~*,) coal-fish (*G. carbonarius*,) whiting (*G. merlangus*,) ling (*G. molva*,) mackarel (*Scomber*,) turbot (*Pleuronectes hippoglossus*,) sole (*P. solea*,) flounder (*P. flesus et punctatus*,) salmon (*Salmo*,) trout (*S. trutta et fario*,) char (*S. alpinus*,)

The shell-fish are:—Oysters (*O. edulis*,) cockles (*C. edule*,) mussels (*M. edulis*,) &c.; univalves of different kinds, as well as lobsters and crabs, are very numerous. The sands of Balnakiel present beautiful specimens of conchology.

Reptiles, &c.—Among the reptiles are: the viper (*Coluber berus*,) adder (*Anguis eryx*,) lizards (*Lacerta*,) frogs (*Rana*,) toads (*Bufo*,) Among the various species of insects and flies, the most peculiar and numerous are gnats, provincially called *midges*; these are so annoying during the months of August and September in calm warm and moist weather, that they interrupt all labour without doors.

*Botany.**—The vegetation of this parish is materially affected by its latitude, the vicinity of the sea, its position towards the western shore, its diversity of surface, and its soil. On the northern confines of Britain, the ordinary law by which the geographical distribution of plants in regard of latitude is regulated, brings to very moderate elevations plants which, in the southern parts of the Grampians, are found only on the ridges, and which are not produced at all in the south of Scotland, for want of a sufficient elevation to give the Alpine climate. In the parish of Durness, however, the descent of Alpine vegetation is greatly increased by its

* This article was kindly communicated by Dr Graham, Professor of Botany in the University of Edinburgh.

western position. Several plants which, to the eastward in the same latitude, grow upon the sides of the mountains, grow here on the beach.

On the top of the cliff overhanging the sea at Cape Wrath, we have *Salix herbacea* and *Silene acaulis*; and near Keoldale we have *Thalictrum alpinum*, close to the high water mark. Even a very few miles off, these plants have disappeared from the shore, and are met with only on the mountains, at a height increasing as we proceed eastward. On the other hand, the neighbourhood of the sea secures that mild temperature during winter, which enables less hardy plants to thrive; or otherwise fits the fields of Durness for the growth of species which require a maritime climate. This is true with respect to many plants which appear in the pastures. The *Primula Scotica* abounds here, and in many places near the north shore of Scotland, but it has not been observed anywhere upon the mountains either to the eastward or southward.

The soil in the parish is various; but perhaps the only kind which, apart from the degree of moisture, seems to exert a sensible influence in modifying the natural productions, is that formed over limestone, which abounds in the immediate vicinity of the manse, and crops out in many places. It is no doubt on account of this that *Dryas octopetala* is so profuse in Durness. To the eastward and in the south, it is met with on the mountains, and on various rocks, but here it seems confined to the limestone, and is most abundant at the level of the sea. Equally circumscribed, and on the same rock, is *Epipactis latifolia*, and perhaps *Draba incana* extends no farther. *Centaurea scabiosa* is abundant in the fields around, and very seldom with white flowers. All these, except the last, are likewise found on limestone in Assynt, but rarely, if at all, in the intervening district, where limestone does not exist. A great part of the flat land towards Cape Wrath is bog, wholly different from the close fine turf which forms the surface near the manse. It produces in abundance the ordinary coarse herbage which is found to cover wet ground throughout the country, as the various common species of *Juncus*, *Carex* and *Eriophorum*, while on the neighbouring drier banks we have *Nardus stricta*, and the other grasses which generally grow along with it. These form very productive sheep pasture, and support a very excellent stock. In the bogs, there is abundance of *Pinguicula Lusitanica*, and of *Drosera Anglica*. Upon the shores of Sandwood and of

Durness, we have a profusion of *Gentiana amarella* and *Thalictrum minus*. *Elymus arenarius* and *Juncus Balticus* are met with in both places, the latter particularly abundant to the north of the house of Keoldale.

The mountain tops are generally dry and stony, and nothing has hitherto been observed upon them but such Alpine plants as are found on many other mountain ranges in Scotland, except *Luzula arcuata*. *Azalea procumbens* and *Arbutus alpina* abound chiefly on the low shoulders. *Luzula arcuata* has been found only in three stations in Britain, the summit of the mountains at the source of the Dee, Ben More in Assynt, and Foinnbheinn in this parish; and along with it, on the two last mountains, *Apargia alpina*. On Foinnbheinn there is great abundance of *Arabis petraea*. It is among the mountains in this and the adjoining parishes, forming the north-west of Scotland, that botanists expect to discover several of the plants common to the north of Europe and America, but which have not yet been added to the British Flora.

With the exception of a few acres of *Birch copse* on the banks of Loch Hope, and a few birch, poplar, and holly trees in the clefts of rocks and glens, the parish may be said to be quite destitute of wood. In low and sheltered situations, however, the mosses retain the roots of fir, birch, willow, &c. and decayed trunks of from thirty to fifty feet in length are occasionally dug from the mosses. In sheltered situations, and where the soil is open and dry, there is little doubt but forest and fruit trees might grow, from the few specimens tried at Eriboll. Culinary vegetables thrive well. Notwithstanding the great quantities of rain in harvest, the crops are ripe, and secured at least three weeks earlier than in the neighbouring county of Caithness,—which may be occasioned by the difference of soil, as well as the shelter, and the radiation of heat from the adjacent rocks and vallies. With the exception of six acres of winter sown wheat, tried for the first time at Balnakiel, the whole of the crops were cut and secured before the 23d September 1833.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

It cannot be expected, that the annals of a parish so remote and so thinly inhabited, should at any time have excited much public interest. Some accounts of the local conflicts of the clans Mackay, Gordon, and Sutherland, may be seen in Sir Robert Gordon's History of the Sutherland family, and Mackay's History of the Mackays.—A correct survey was taken of the coast in 1827 by or-

der of the Commissioners for the Northern Lights: and a map of the parish on a large scale, by Mr Burnet, land-surveyor, is preparing for publication, under the patronage of the Duke of Sutherland, who is now sole proprietor.

Eminent Men.—Among the most eminent characters who were natives of this parish are the following:—1st, General Mackay, who distinguished himself in the civil wars in the reign of King Charles II. His father, who was a branch of the Reay family, resided for some time in Borley, but afterwards had his principal residence at Scowrie, in Edderachillis. 2d, Robert Donn or ~~Calder~~, or, as he is sometimes called, Mackay, the celebrated Reay country bard, was also a native of the parish. His lyrics, satires, and songs, are much admired and sung by the natives, and have rendered our mountains and glens classic ground. A volume of these was published in 1829 by Dr Mackay of Dunoon; to which is prefixed a memoir of his life.

Parochial Register.—The earliest date of the parochial register is 4th November 1764. It does not contain any register of deaths.

Antiquities.—Among these, the first that claim attention are the circular Duns, which appear to have been very numerous in the Highlands. The ruins of ten of these Duns are to be seen in this parish. They appear to have been the residences of some native chieftain; they are often built in low and fertile spots, and, in some places, they are surrounded by several circles of from 12 to 20 feet diameter, which in all probability have been the foundations of the circular booths of the chieftain's dependents. The form of these Duns is the simplest mode of structure that would occur to a rude people. There is a tradition among the natives, that they were built to defend the inmates from the incursions of the wolves. The only remains from which we can judge of the form and structure of these Duns are—a segment of one in Strathmore, about sixteen feet high, near the south base of Ben Hope. It is called "*Dùn Dornigill*," i. e. Dornadilla's Tower. The tradition is, that it was built by the Scottish king of that name, and used as a hunting residence. The outer circumference is about fifty paces in extent, and consists of two concentric walls, connected by large flags, which served the purpose of strengthening each other, and forming a pathway to the top. The triangular stone which forms the lintel is still seen in the building. The slaty stones of which it is built, bear no marks of

having been shaped by tools, the acute angle being always uppermost.*

There are also some subterraneous buildings, called "*Leabidh fholaich*," i. e. hiding-places: one of these, lately discovered at the west side of Loch Eriboll Ferry, is about 40 feet long, 6 feet high, and about 6 feet wide, built of dry stone, and covered over by flags; the descent is by regular steps, and the entrance is covered by a flag. It is still in good preservation.—There are several large stones placed on end, either in a circular or elliptical form, which appear to have been places of sepulture; but no traces of writing have been seen on any of these.—Tumuli, and heaps of stones, called "cairns," are of frequent occurrence. In one of these, called "*Cnoc na cnamham*," i. e. the hill of bones, near Keoldale, a small brass elliptical cockade was found two years ago, and a small polished bone, supposed to be used for fastening the military plaid. The tradition is, that it contains the remains of those who fell in battle.—Heads of arrows are occasionally found in the mosses; they are from two to three inches long, formed of a brown, red, or whitish flint-like stone.†

Buildings.—There is a pretty large mansion-house at Balnakiel, where some of the Lords of Reay occasionally resided. It was built about ninety years ago. Another building of importance is the Light-house at Cape Wrath, the tower of which is fifty feet high. The building is altogether 350 feet above the level of the sea. It was built in 1827 of granite found at the Cape. Previous to its erection, seldom a winter passed without one or more wrecks; but these are now of rare occurrence. At Rispond there is a good dwelling-house, and a pretty extensive range of houses and sheds for the salmon-boiling and herring-fishing. There is also a pier for sloops of ordinary size to load their cargoes.—The houses of the tacksmen merit no particular notice. Those of the small tenants and cottars are all built of turf or dry stone, plastered on the inside with clay, with the exception of two or three in some hamlets whose western gable has a vent and chimney-stalk.

* See Antiquities and Scenery in Scotland by Rev. Charles Cordner of Banff, and Agricultural Survey of the County of Sutherland, 1808, Appendix.

† The noted Donald M-Leod, *alias* Mac Mhorchie-ic-coim-mhòir, who was the *Bob Roy* of the North, always carried his bow and arrows, either to the field or the forest. He died in 1623. His figure, represented in relief on the gravestone over his vault in the church of Durness, exhibits him with his bow and arrow. A drawing of this vault, and the gravestone and inscription, was lately executed by order of the Duke of Sutherland.—For farther particulars of the history and character of this Geebooter, see former Statistical Account of the Parish of Edderachillis, and Mac Kay's History of the Mackays.

Several neat cottages, however, built with lime or clay, are commenced in those hamlets where the lots are divided.

III.—POPULATION.

By a census taken in 1724, the population did not exceed 1000 souls. In 1790 the population was 1182. In the Durness, or second district of the parish, there has been an increase of nearly 50 per cent. since 1815; but in the third or eastern district, Eriboll, the population has diminished since 1815 from 517 to 220. The decrease has been owing to the whole district having been converted into two extensive sheep-farms. The increase in the Durness, or second division, has been owing to the establishment of the herring fishery, and the subdivision of lots in the different hamlets. In 1815 from thirty to forty families emigrated to America.

Population in 1801,	-	1208
1811,	-	1155
1821,	-	1004
1831,	-	1153

The average of marriages, for the last 7 years, is	-	-	8
of baptisms,	-	-	33 $\frac{1}{2}$
Total number of persons 1st January 1834,	-	-	1180
Of these, there are under 15 years of age,	-	448	
from 15 to 30,	-	343	
from 30 to 50,	-	185	
from 50 to 70,	-	164	
above 70,	-	40	
			1180
Number of bachelors and widowers above 50,	-	-	13
Unmarried women above 50, (excluding widows,)	-	-	44
Average number of children in each family,	-	-	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Number of families in the parish,	-	-	266
chiefly employed in agriculture,	-	-	123
in trade, manufactures, or handicraft,	-	-	13
Insane persons,	-	-	2
Fatuous,	-	-	10
Blind,	-	-	4
Deaf and dumb,	-	-	3

Clans.—The principal clans in the parish are, those of M'Kay, Sutherland, Campbell, Morrison, and Gunn; the two former generally distinguished by fair hair and blue eyes,—the Campbells and Gunns, by dark eyes and dark complexion.

Character, &c. of the People.—The natives are generally lively in their dispositions, social in their habits, and when engaged in labour, either at sea or on land, endure a good deal of fatigue. There are few artisans among them: and, having little or nothing to do in the winter months, many of them are in the habit of visiting and spending the evenings in each other's houses in the different hamlets, hearing the news of the country, repeating the songs of their native bard, or listening to the legendary tales of some venerable *Senachie*.

With the exception of eight families from the south of Scotland, all the natives speak Gaelic. Though a considerable proportion of the young can speak English, yet very few are able to follow out or understand an English sermon. Indeed, even those who speak and understand the English well, always prefer the Gaelic services. Whether this predilection arises from early associations, the influence of habit, or the greater ease, familiarity, and simplicity in the style of the speakers, they think themselves more edified by discourses in that tongue. It cannot be said, however, that the Gaelic language is spoken with such emphasis and purity in this country as in some parts of the western Highlands; and, though it has been a good deal corrupted by the younger people who now speak English, it has not lost much ground.

The principle *amusements* are—playing at the ball and shinty on the fine sands of Balnakiel. The whole population turns out on old Christmas and new-year's day, and even old men of seventy are to be seen mingling in the crowd, remaining till night puts an end to the contest. Indeed, the inhabitants of this parish have always been noted for the enthusiasm with which they engaged in these sports. To keep up the tone of action, they retire in the evening, and mingle in the dance to the music of the bagpipe, regardless of the bruises and scars of the contest. Of this sport, Dr M'Leod of Campsie has given a very humorous and graphical description in his "*Teachdaire Gaidhleach.*" Hallow-e'en eve is also a festive day in the calendar, but is not kept with such enthusiasm as formerly. Superstitious observances, belief in witches, and other enchantments, are gradually wearing away,—though even a grave elder may occasionally be met with, who will quote scripture, and relate many traditionary stories, as evidences of his faith.

As to the *habits* of the people,—it cannot be said that they are remarkable for cleanliness: the huts they occupy,—the smoke arising from the fire in the centre of the house, and forming a canopy over them,—and the cattle entering by the same door with the inmates,—are not favourable to personal cleanliness. The change of *dress* within the last twenty or thirty years has been very marked, both with males and females. Instead of the tartan or kelt coat and trowsers, spun and dyed at home, when each family had their own wool, hardly any thing is to be seen on the young but the fustian jacket and trowsers, or the lighter tartan of the shops, and here and there the blue and fancy cloths of Leeds. The blue

mantle and the well-spun blue gown of the fair sex is superseded by the prints and Merinos of modern times. The head is in many cases adorned or covered by a gauze or muslin cap, and now and then by a straw-bonnet. Umbrellas are more numerous than great-coats or mantles. It is questionable whether, with these changes, the morals or comforts of the people have been improved.

It could not be expected that a people who had led chiefly a pastoral life were to be soon reconciled to the change which placed them in crowded hamlets upon the shore. The manufacture of kelp, herring-fishing, road-making, and other occasional sources of industry during the summer and harvest, have, however, called out the latent industry of the young; but, as there has been, of late years, no encouragement to enter the army, and as they have no opportunities of learning trades at home, they are tempted to marry too young; they then reside for some years with their parents, and divide the lot of two or three acres, chiefly reclaimed from moor, at the very time it promised to support the family with bread and potatoes. Thus, the wants of a new and rising family are to be provided for, and poverty and a high rate of population are kept up.

The habits of dram-drinking, acquired by both sexes in their annual migrations to Caithness, and in the course of their mixing together in crowded lodgings there, have tended to deteriorate the morals of the people considerably. Their attendance on religious ordinances, however, is pretty regular; and in most cases, the evening and morning devotions of the family are offered up. On the Sabbath evenings, the Shorter Catechism is taught; or they congregate together in some commodious house in the township, to repeat the Shorter Catechism and read the Scriptures. These meetings are always commenced and concluded by prayer and praise, and often tend to spread a moral and religious influence over the hamlet. Smuggling, foreign and domestic, is now totally suppressed.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture and Rural Economy.—The whole of this parish, (with the exception of about one-twentieth part,) has been converted into four extensive sheep-walks, yielding on an average L. 500 each of rent. From the irregular surface, and small patches in cultivation, it is impossible, without measurement, to ascertain the exact number of acres. The following is an approximation:—

SUTHERLAND.

G

	Imperial acres.
1. Balnakiel farm and herds, - - - - -	100
2. Keoldale, do. - - - - -	60
3. Eriboll do. and subtenants, - - - - -	80
4. Ben Hope do. for herds, - - - - -	6
Glebe, - - - - -	12
120 small tenants and cottars, with 2 acres each, on an average,	240
Total,	498

Along the shores, straths, and glens under sheep, a considerable proportion of the land is arable,—perhaps about 300 acres. Of good pasture capable of being brought into cultivation by spade husbandry, there are 1000 acres at least. The amount might be made equal to what is already in cultivation by the tenants and cottars, and capable of supporting three times the present population,—even though the whole of the mountain pasture and some of the straths and shores should be left under sheep.

Rent of Land.—The average rent of arable land per acre is from 20s. to 30s.; but to all arable land there is attached a right of pasture on a common hill. The estimated value of grazing for sheep or wedders is about 2s. 6d. each on the great sheep-farms. Cows are pastured on rich meadows at L. 3 per annum. Including stock farms, kelp, and salmon fishery, the rental of the parish is about L. 2550.

Wages.—Day labourers receive 1s. 6d. per day; artisans, from 2s. to 3s.; farm-servants L. 6 per annum, 7 bolls meal, and 20 barrels potatoes, and one cow's grass; farm or domestic female servants L. 3 per annum and board.

Breeds of Live-Stock.—The only breed of sheep is the Cheviot or white-faced, with the exception of about 300 cross or black-faced, kept by small tenants and cottars on the common grazing. To the improvement of the former very great attention is paid; both wool and carcase fetching average prices at market. The principal breed of black-cattle is the Highland, reared by small tenants. The few milch cows on the sheep-walks are chiefly Ayrshire. With the exception of six pair of Clydesdale horses kept for husbandry by the sheep-farmers, all the rest of the horses are small Highland ponies.

Husbandry.—Several acres of waste or marshy land have been drained at Balnakiel, but are laid out in pasture. The mode of reclaiming waste land was by making *lazy beds*, i. e. by peeling one part of the ground and laying it over another of equal space. Trenching was never used, but a better and more economical

system is now employed. The runrig system is wearing out, and every township is in the course of being lotted out in regular divisions, and cottages are building on each lot. Though the expense and labour of building these be great to the small tenants, especially in a country where masons and carpenters must be brought from other places, yet they submit to the charge, though no leases are given, and have every confidence, that, under the liberal and enlightened management of the family of Sutherland, they will be furnished with new sources of industry.

The sheep-farmers have leases of nineteen years; and all of them have lately made considerable improvements in diking and surface draining.

Fisheries.—Herring.—The principal fisheries are the herring, salmon, and lobster. The early herring fishing commences in June. At this season, the fish are so rich that it is difficult to cure them, and they are sent off weekly to market. The late fishing commences about the middle of July and continues till September. It was only of late that the out sea fishing commenced on this coast. And even yet, it hardly remunerates those engaged in it. A smaller but superior species of herring is found occasionally in Loch Eriboll; but it is chiefly used for home consumption. Ten boats are employed at Rispond: they are each manned by four men and a boy, and cost each L. 36.

Lobster Fishing.—The lobster fishing commences in May and is carried on with little intermission till August. Six boats of fourteen feet keel were employed last season, each boat having two men, and being furnished with twenty or more nets inclosed in circular iron cylindrical hoops or rings of two and a-half feet diameter; a piece of herring or gray fish being tied in the centre of the mesh for bait. The nets are cast into the sea within a few yards of the shore by one of the men, while the other rows forward; and they are raised in about an hour after. This is continued from sunset to sunrise. When a lobster is caught, the large claws are fastened together by a strong packing thread,—otherwise, by the muscular strength of their claws, they would soon destroy each other. When thus secured, they are conveyed in the morning to the perforated floating chest, until they are called for weekly by the *welled* smacks.

Cod and Ling Fishing.—Cod and ling, though abundant on the coast, have not been much fished by the natives.

Salmon Fishing.—The only rivers in which salmon are caught

are the Hope and Dinard; on both of these there are cruives and coble fishing. The fishing commences in the end of March and ceases in August. The spawning months are October and November. The following table shows the weight of salmon and grilse caught during the last two years.

	lbs. Salmon.	lbs. Grilse.	Rivers.
1832,	624	1946	- Dinard.
1833,	181	887	
1832,	1488	4650	- Hope.
1833,	2166	7895	

Several of the larger burns or streams have salmon but, from their distance and the difficulty of access, fishing in these would not remunerate the expense.*

Produce.—The following is the average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, viz.

900 bolls of grain of all kinds, at 18s.	-	-	-	L. 800 0 0
20 acres turnip at L. 5,	-	-	-	100 0 0
1000 bolls potatoes at 8s.,	-	-	-	400 0 0
11000 stones hay, cultivated and meadow,	-	-	-	270 0 0
Cattle sold by small tenants,	-	-	-	100 0 0
Sheep sold by stock farmers, being the average for the last six years, viz.				
1890 ewes at 11s.,	-	-	-	L. 1006 0 0
2000 widders at L. 1,	-	-	-	2000 0 0
3210 stones wool, at 15s.,	-	-	-	2407 0 0
				<hr/> 5413 0 0
500 barrels herring at L. 1,	-	-	-	500 0 0
5842 lobsters at 3d.,	-	-	-	73 0 0
2346 lbs. salmon at 5d.,	-	-	-	L. 47 0 0
8782 lbs grilse at 4d.,	-	-	-	146 0 0
				<hr/> 193 0 0
40 tons kelp at L. 3,	-	-	-	120 0 0
Miscellaneous produce,	-	-	-	27 0 0
				<hr/> L. 8000 0 0

N. B.—It must be observed, that meal is imported to the parish to the average amount of 300 bolls annually.

Kelp manufacture.—The only manufacture worthy of notice is the kelp. It commences in June, and in favourable seasons is finished early in July. It is cut every alternate year, spread out on the shores, and when nearly dried is put up in heaps and burnt in

* It is the universal belief of the oldest and most experienced fishermen acquainted with different waters, that salmon never deposit their spawn except in rivers; that they universally and instinctively frequent the rivers on which they were spawned; that, however numerous the fish in traversing the shores, and when entering the estuary or frith, each turns to that direction where the river in which it was spawned empties itself. Where a stranger can hardly discern any difference, a practised eye will single out the fish of different rivers from each other, and view them almost as varieties of the same species. It is true, that large shoals of salmon belonging to different rivers, on their return from the ocean, often congregate at estuaries, and are caught in the net; but the stranger fish, on tasting the water, and entering fairly into the channel of the river, soon returns, not finding the velocity, temperature, colour, or taste of the water congenial to its habits.

long narrow kilns of loose stones of 2 feet wide, and 12 or 16 feet long; when thoroughly melted and well-wrought, it is, after cooling, broken up to heaps, and covered with turf till it is shipped.

Navigation.—There are three small sloops at Rispond, of the respective tonnage of 25, 37, and 51. These are managed by ten men, and are principally employed in the coasting trade. One of them goes occasionally to Hamburgh with early herrings.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—Thurso is the nearest market-town, 65 miles distant. There are no villages, the population all residing in hamlets along the shores, containing from 4 or 5 to 20 families. The means of communication have been much improved during the last three years, by the liberality of the late Duke of Sutherland. Formerly, the post-office was at Bonar Bridge, a distance of 62 miles, to which there was a runner sent once a-week at the sole expense of a few subscribers. There is now a post-office twice a-week to Tongue. The days of dispatch are Monday and Thursday; of arrival, Tuesday and Friday,—to suit the Golspie mail, which crosses the interior to Tongue every Monday and Thursday. There is a weekly runner to Scowrie. There is also a monthly carrier to Tain; but almost all imports and exports are by sea.

The *roads* are, 1st, a road from the Kyle of Durness to Cape Wrath, executed by the Light-house Commissioners in 1828, 11 miles in length; 2d, from Eriboll by Strathmore, till its junction with the Tongue road to the south, 19 miles; 3d, the main line leading from west to east,—34 miles round by Loch Eriboll, or, by crossing the ferry, 24 miles. With the exception of 12 miles, commenced ten years ago by statute-labour, these roads were completed by the late Duke of Sutherland, and have completely opened up the country to new sources of industry, and the gratification of the traveller, and the speculations of the capitalist. There is an excellent bridge over the Dinard, and a chain-boat over the Hope.

The *harbours* are, Loch Eriboll, Rispond, and Port Our, at the termination of the Cape Wrath road, and Smo; the last only for boats. At Rispond, there is a basin and pier, and rings fastened to the rocks in the bay; but this is not reckoned very safe in north-east gales and spring tides. Loch Eriboll, in the bay, where there is a church, is reckoned a very safe anchorage. A slip for boats has been also made at Clashcarnach, three miles east of

the cape, where the light-house yacht lands the oil and necessaries for the light-house; but is seldom attempted in stormy weather with northerly winds.

Ecclesiastical State.—The church is situated within half a mile of the manse, at Balnakiel Bay. About three-fourths of the population, or all within six miles, attend. Its distance from the extremity to the south-east is 26 miles, and from the western extremity 12 miles. It was built in 1619, and the aisle added in 1692; it has no galleries, and contains 300 sittings, which are all free. It stands much in need of repair and enlargement. The practice of burying within the walls has been discontinued for nearly a century. The manse was rebuilt in 1830, and is commodious. The glebe, including its hill grazings and pertinents, may be worth L. 30 per annum. The stipend is L. 150, and is on the list of small livings augmented by act of Parliament in 1812.

In the Eriboll district, there is sermon preached every alternate Sabbath; it is connected with the Milness district of the parish of Tongue, twelve miles distant. The missionary here is supported solely by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, on a salary of L. 50. There are no Dissenters or Roman Catholics. The sacrament is dispensed once a-year, in summer. The number of communicants is 70; but, on such occasions, tokens to the amount of 150 are distributed to communicants who attend from neighbouring parishes. Collections in aid of religious and charitable institutions are occasionally made,—the average annual amount of which may be L. 3.

The schools in the parish are, parochial, 1; Assembly, 1; subscription, 2; in which the ordinary elementary branches are taught. The salary of the parochial schoolmaster is the minimum, or L. 24: of the General Assembly's L. 20. The school-fees in either of these do not exceed L. 4 per annum. The former has not the legal accommodations; those of the latter are new and sufficient. The subscription schools are chiefly taught during the winter. In some remote hamlets and families, boys are hired during the winter months to teach, at the rate of 20s. per month, and board. A considerable number of cottars and poor tenants, who have access to the parochial school, have not of late years been much alive to the benefits of education,—which may arise from their poverty, or want of confidence in the ability and diligence of a teacher so indifferently remunerated.

The number of persons betwixt 6 and 15 who cannot read or

20.; of those upwards of 15, is 216. It must be borne in mind, however, that the majority of those not included in this category cannot write. It is to be hoped that the district where the assembly school is situated will, ere long, derive considerable benefit from the school, both in a moral and intellectual point of view.

and Parochial Funds.—The number of poor receiving parochial aid is 45,—in sums of from 3s. to 8s. or 10s. each. The amount of contributions for their relief does not exceed the parochial church weekly contributions, L. 12, with the interest of the parochial fund, L. 2, and alms, L. 6. It must be noticed, however, that in this, as well as in other Highland parishes, where the circulating medium is very scarce, the poor are regularly furnished with meal, fleeces, clothes, &c. in value at least equal to the amount of money annually divided by the kirk-session. It is to be regretted that, of late, the poor do not consider it degrading to be on the roll of the session funds. There are no assessments for the poor, or charitable institutions; yet, when extraordinary calls are made, the inhabitants have always manifested a commendable liberality.

Inns.—There are three inns, or rather houses licensed to retail whisky. But hitherto, travellers have been in most cases obliged to draw on the hospitality of the inhabitants. Comfortable inns and stabling are, however, now in progress.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The most important change since the last Statistical Account has been the introduction of sheep-farming, which commenced about thirty years ago, and has been extended since. Though in some respects this may have augmented the revenue of the proprietor, and added to the commercial wealth of the nation, yet it is very questionable, if it has added, in the meantime, to the intellectual, moral, or religious superiority of the inhabitants.

The division of the parish into such extensive farms has also suppressed almost entirely the *middle classes* of society, who paid rents of from L. 10 to L. 50, and has thereby tended to extinguish, in a great degree, the intelligence and laudable emulation of the poorer classes. The former generally felt a desire of giving every advantage of education to their children at school, and their example diffused an emulation among the latter. The great sheep-farmers who are resident employ teachers in their families; the schools are attended by the poorer classes, who are all on the same

level,—and that, for the most part, during the winter only. Lads when they can handle an oar remove to Caithness, and after two or three years training there, getting the share of a boat on credit, they have arrived at the summit of their ambition, and marry. From the extinction of the middling classes of society, the writer hereof, in common with several of his brethren, has to regret the difficulty of finding men suitable for being ordained elders. It cannot be expected, however worthy the individuals may be who may be nominated to this office, that while poor and in some cases illiterate, they can be so influential in checking immorality, stimulating to intellectual and religious attainments, and suppressing superstitious and enthusiastic feeling.

While such improvements have been made on the physical aspect of the parish, by the liberality of the late Duke, and which there is every confidence will be continued, in making the harbours and creeks more accessible and available, it is hoped that the tenants will gradually acquire the knowledge of artisanship, as well as of fishing, and thus add to the productive capabilities of the country, and their own individual comfort.

September 1834,