

## PARISH OF LATHERON.

PRESBYTERY OF CAITHNESS, SYNOD OF SUTHERLAND AND  
CAITHNESS.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Extent, &c.*—THE parish of Latheron is situated on the south-east coast of Caithness, and bounded in that direction by the German Ocean and Moray Frith; on the west, by Sutherlandshire; and on the north and east, by the parishes of Halkirk, Watten, and Wick. It is 27 miles in length along the sea coast, and from 10 to 15 in breadth, containing about 300 square miles.

*Name.*—By the last Statistical Account, the ancient name of the parish is said to be "*Loinn*, derived from *Luidhoin*, which signifies, in the Gaelic, *lodged or bedded bear*, because the lands contiguous to the church are of a good quality, and yield excellent bear." But there is another derivation, which has always appeared to the present writer equally probable and rather more natural, viz. from the Gaelic words *Làthair Ròin*, which signifies the *resort of seals*,—a species of animal with which the whole coast is covered. Numbers of them are still taken, as will afterwards be noticed, and no doubt, in former times, the oil obtained from them afforded one means of support to the inhabitants. Besides, this derivation seems to accord best with the Gaelic name *Làtharn*, and to admit of a more easy transition into the modern or English name of Latheron. But especially it will be found by a reference to the Norse or Icelandic language, that the derivation here preferred is much confirmed as to its probable correctness,—the words in that language having very much the same meaning.

There is also another derivation suggested by the aspect of the parish, which seems scarcely less probable than that now conjectured, viz. from the Gaelic *Lath-àr-shònn*, signifying the day of the slaughter of heroes, or *Lathair shònn*, the place of heroes. Indeed, considering the ancient predilection for commemorating

the warlike achievements of heroes who had particularly singalized themselves, together with the many relics of bloody warfare still extant, this derivation has strong claims to a preference to the former.

*Topographical Appearance.*—The general aspect of the parish is remarkably diversified, presenting a continued and frequently rapid succession of “hill and valley;” in which respect, it forms a striking contrast to all the other parishes in the county. In the western extremity, in particular, the ravines are so deep and precipitous as to render the access to them difficult and sometimes dangerous; whilst in the same quarter, the hills and mountains of various height and figure are in great abundance. Of the former the Ord of Caithness, Brenahegleish, and Benachielt are of chief importance, and of the latter Mòr-bhèin or Morven, Scaraben, and the Pap, are most conspicuous. The view from their summits is very extensive, embracing, in a clear atmosphere, a great part of twelve different counties, besides a vast range of the Atlantic and German oceans. Of the three, Morven, as its Gaelic name indicates, is by much the highest, and is supposed to be more than a mile above the level of the sea, whence it is generally the first land in this quarter seen by mariners, and, as a landmark, is of great use in stormy weather. It is worthy of notice that, as indicating wet or dry weather, it possesses the confidence of the whole county. During harvest especially, all eyes are directed towards it, and it never deceives. Near its summit, there is a delicious spring, which is very refreshing to the traveller exhausted in gaining its top. The straths are numerous and very beautiful, particularly those along the rivers of Langwell, Berriedale, and Dunbeath. Scenery more highly romantic and picturesque than that on the two former, is not to be met with in the north of Scotland. They are admired by every traveller. Their steep banks were once densely and extensively wooded, and still there is as much remaining as to contribute to their beauty, if not to their value. The whole line of coast is composed of bold and perpendicular rocks, rising from 100 to 300 feet above the sea; forming a barrier to the tremendous surge which frequently rolls in from the ocean. It is also much indented, in consequence of the numerous streams that flow from the interior, and at their junction with the sea form inlets more or less spacious. These afford a very convenient shelter for the boats engaged in the herring-fish-

ing. The caves are numerous, and some of them from 50 to 60 fathoms long. Very fine massive specimens of crystallized lime have been taken from the tops and sides of them, and are still preserved. But they are chiefly celebrated for the great numbers of seals that frequent them at all seasons, which renders them not merely convenient but often lucrative. The caves are usually visited in November, and entered by means of a boat during the night when the seals are at rest. The boat is well manned with experienced hands, having each a large piece of wood, and a torch or candle. They require to use great caution in approaching the cave, as the seals are always on the alert, and upon hearing the least noise rush forward with astonishing rapidity towards the sea, in which they immediately disappear, putting the water into great agitation. When the boat is perceived before taking the ground, most of them escape in this way. As soon as the boat has grounded, the men leap out with great agility, and, intercepting the seals in their progress downwards, strike them on the head, when they instantly fall. On any other part the blow has no effect. In this manner, several scores have been captured at a time; but of late from twenty to thirty is considered a good taking.

The principal headlands are the Ord, Berriedale-head, and Clyth-ness.

*Climate.*—The climate, generally speaking, is dry, and, for ordinary constitutions, extremely healthy; to which the elevation of the land and the consequent rarity of the atmosphere much contribute. These circumstances, however, seem to favour heavy gales of wind, which are frequently experienced, particularly from the west and north-west. The temperature of the atmosphere may be about 56° Fahrenheit.

Considering the extraordinary density of the population, diseases are by no means frequent. Fever and rheumatism are certainly most prevalent. It has been observed that the former is very commonly carried by infection from the lower parts of the county, and the latter appears to be much occasioned by the want of warm clothing suited to the laborious habits of the people. Formerly, all the small tenantry were in possession of a few sheep, and by this means provided themselves with suitable clothing; but of late, owing to the great increase of population, and the consequent demand for land, their farms have been so reduced in extent by division and subdivision from year to year, that comparative-

ly few sheep can be kept by them, which, both in respect to food and clothing, is most disadvantageous. Instances of longevity are very frequent,—several persons now living are nearly 100 years of age, and one man has completed his 105th year, and is still in possession of all his faculties. As formerly stated, the Moray Frith forms the boundary of this parish on the south-east. It varies in breadth from 50 to 60 miles, possesses fine fishing-ground; but in stormy weather the sea is easily raised into what sailors call a short tumbling swell, which frequently proves fatal to fishing boats. The tides are of considerable rapidity, and may be about two hours and three-quarters before Leith. Perennial springs abound throughout the parish, and the temperature of such as have been tried was found, some of the more copious at  $54^{\circ}$ , and the less so at  $56^{\circ}$  and  $58^{\circ}$ . Many of them are much impregnated with iron. There are three rivers in the parish, viz. Dunbeath, Berriedale and Langwell, which abound with trout and salmon. They have their source from twelve to sixteen miles from the sea, but are very small in summer, though much swollen in winter, and very rapid. The only lakes are Rangay and Stempster, in both of which there is plenty of trout and eels. On the east side of the former, there are the remains of a small fortification, which was evidently surrounded by the water of the lake by means of a ditch; and contiguous to the latter are the ruins of a Druidical temple and the Arch-Druid's house.

*Geology.*—The geological features of this parish are totally different from those of the rest of the county, and merit more notice than the prescribed limits of this Account admit of. The greater part of Caithness is what is called a secondary formation, consisting chiefly of clay flagstone, having more or less calcareous matter, with a few instances of the red sandstone, elevated into lofty headlands at Dunnet and Duncansbay. On approaching the northern boundary of the parish, betwixt Ulbster and Bruan, a great change is observable in the physical character of the country. Beyond this point, the southern portion of the county, embracing this parish, along the eastern coast is hilly and much diversified. A number of streams intersect it, swelling in the winter to a great size. The elevated portion of this district rises from the knotty promontory of Clyth-ness, and forms several irregular terraces, occupying the north part of the parish. The lowest of these dip  $25^{\circ}$  to  $30^{\circ}$  inland, while the higher and more rotund incline only  $8^{\circ}$  or  $10^{\circ}$ .

Near the shore, blue calcareous flagstone occurs, and is overlaid by a series of sandstone beds of considerable thickness. Bena-cheilt is the highest part of this region, and round it the strata are arranged in a fan-shaped form, so that while the beds on the coast, at Nottingham and Latheron, dip westerly, at Braehungay on the south side of this hill, they veer round to the N.E. against the hill; and still farther inland, at Achavanich, the dip is E.S.E. Between Latheron and Dunbeath, the beds rise into micaceous sandstones alternating with blue calcareous flagstone. At the latter place they consist of bluish and gray close-grained sandstone, with occasional alternating of greenish and bluish flagstones, and are prolonged into hills in the interior, distinctly resting upon the old red conglomerate, or puddingstone of Braemore, connected with the chain of mountains forming the southern boundary of the county. Along the coast, the same slaty beds continue to prevail in high cliffs to the south of Berriedale. At Borgue, there is an isolated mass of the old conglomerate, probably owing its existence to the degradation of the nearest point of the Scarabins, a primary mass of quartz rock. This range of high bare rock is clasped on each side by the conglomerate series, composing nearly the whole of the surrounding hills, which, being prolonged between the Scarabins and the granite of the Ord, terminate in the cliff between Berriedale and Ausdale. The coast thence to the Ord is occupied by red micaceous flagstone, succeeded by some beds of red sandstone rising into a perpendicular cliff about 300 feet high at Trefad. Masses of the conglomerate also present themselves occasionally, particularly in the cliff at Badbea. Farther south, the cliff again changes its character, and is occupied by great crumbling masses of red marl and sandstone, containing a few bands of bluish flagstone. These gradually pass into a strong red sandstone, which is separated from the granite mass of the Ord by a high cliff of conglomerate. The junction is nearly marked by a cascade of the Ausdale rivulet, which tumbles into the sea from the height of 100 feet over these conglomerate rocks.

The necessarily brief and imperfect outline here given affords no adequate idea of the interesting geological character of this district. To convey a more complete view of it would be inadmissible here. It may be proper, however, to state that the old conglomerate, composing the southern hills of this parish, and stretching thence along the borders to the west side of the

county, is considered as forming the lowest bed of the secondary formation, being succeeded by beds of siliceous and calcareo-siliceous flagstone and slate-clay, which occupies the great body of the county from sea to sea, sinking at length under the highest or uppermost of the secondary series, the new red sandstone of Dunnet and Duncansbay Heads.

*Soil.*—The soil varies considerably in nature and quality in different parts of the parish. On the estates of Langwell and Dunbeath in the west end, it is generally of a sharp gravelly description, and very dry. Latheronwheel and Latheron, being next in order, are less gravelly, but sufficiently sharp and mellow. Torse, Swiney, and Lybster rather wet and cold, having for the substratum a strong tenacious clay, which renders it later in bringing the crops to maturity; whilst the estate of Clyth in the eastern extremity very much partakes of the dry, sharp loam of the centre and western districts. Upon the whole, the soil may be pronounced shallow, but easily wrought, and, with good management, capable of producing all kinds of grain, together with clover, turnips and potatoes. In many parts it abounds with detached rocks and large stones, which form a serious obstacle to the plough; and though much has been done towards the removing of them out of the cultivated ground, yet still much remains to be done, and this circumstance presents a great discouragement in the way of improvement; yet it is, nevertheless, progressing rapidly.

*Zoology.*—Before the introduction of sheep-farming, deer were to be found in considerable numbers on the estates of Langwell, Braemore, and Dunbeath, but for many years back they are rarely to be met with; but grouse, ptarmigan, and blackcock are in great abundance. The salmon on the rivets are of uncommonly fine quality. The rivers of Berriedale and Langwell unite when about 200 yards from the sea, and it is remarkable that the native fish of one river are rarely to be found in the other. At the spawning season, the salmon of both rivers seem to bear one another company till they come to the point of separation, when, from a curious peculiarity of natural instinct, each selects its native stream. There are about twenty different species of fish caught on the coast. Those of greatest importance in an economical point of view are, herrings, cod, haddocks, skate, and flounders.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

From the want of authentic records as to the early history of

this parish, very little can be noticed under this head. Judging, however, from the number and variety of the remains of those places of strength which it contains, together with the other war-like relics of barbarous and feudal times with which it is everywhere bestudded, there can be no doubt that it formed the scene of many a well fought field. But, as usually happens in such cases, tradition has been very fertile in supplying the lack of more correct information. One tradition out of many may be noticed as highly probable. It refers to the last invasion of this county by the Danes. On that occasion they landed near the town of Thurso, under the command of the young Prince of Denmark, and the natives, not being in sufficient strength to oppose them, retreated across the county, followed by the invaders, till they came to the hill of Ben-a-gheil, in this parish, distant twenty miles from Thurso. By this time, the ranks of the natives having been greatly increased in number, and being now in view of the coast where their retreat must be stopped, deriving courage also from the very favourable position they occupied on this hill,—they resolved to try the fate of a pitched battle. Having taken their ground, the enemy soon came up and attempted to dislodge them, when they poured down in one dense mass, broke the enemy's ranks, killed their leader, and routed their whole force. A huge stone, placed perpendicular in the ground, resembling a pillar, marks the place where the Prince fell; and from this occurrence the hill itself seems to derive its Gaelic name, Ben-a-gheil, signifying the hill where they yielded, or were overcome.

*Eminent Men.*—One of the most eminent men known to have been connected with this parish, was the late Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, Bart., author of the former Statistical Account of Scotland, the Code of Agriculture, &c. &c.; a man who was an ornament to the age in which he lived, and of whom any parish or county might deservedly boast. Sir John was principal proprietor in this parish, and the estate of Langwell, then in his possession, was his favourite resort during the periods of his residence in the county. Here he commenced some of his earliest and most extensive improvements in the several departments of plantation, agriculture, and sheep-farming, in the first and last of which he completely succeeded; and much of the beauty and utility of this valuable property is owing to his spirited and persevering exertions, seconded, as they were, by the skill and good

taste of his successor, the late James Horne, Esq. of Langwell. On Sir John Sinclair's merits as a man of varied talent, an able and extensive author, an accomplished scholar, or skilful statesman, it is not intended here to enlarge, as the subject more properly belongs to his native parish of Thurso. He was possessed of a singularly intelligent, active, and benevolent mind, insomuch that no parish or district of country could have enjoyed his presence for any length of time without being benefited thereby. Indeed, such was the quickness of his perception, and the warmth of his philanthropy, that even in his passing visits to quarters where he had no personal interest, he seldom failed to suggest some measures for the improvement of the soil, and especially of its inhabitants, and was always ready, from his own resources, to assist in carrying them into execution. Of this a very striking instance occurred in the highlands of Perthshire, and was communicated to the writer when visiting the person with whom the transaction was entered into. On one occasion Sir John happened to be travelling along Loch Tay side, and observing the country very densely peopled with small tenantry, and that the lofty range of mountains, green to the very summits, with which this beautiful lake is surrounded, were chiefly pastured by sheep, inquired how the people, in so remote a quarter, disposed of their wool; and being informed that each family employed one, two, or three spinning wheels, according to the number of females it contained, it readily occurred to him that a spinning mill might prove a great acquisition in the district, and find abundant employment. He accordingly sought out the ablest person for such an undertaking, and was directed to a Mr M'Naughton in the vicinity of Kenmore. To him he immediately repaired, and, after enumerating the advantages likely to arise to the whole neighbourhood from such a concern, together with the great probability of its success, and the prospect of the emoluments which it held out, strongly urged him to undertake it. This Mr M'Naughton at first declined, assigning as a reason, that neither he nor any other individual in the place could afford to run the risk of a failure. "Well," said Sir John, "but will you conduct it, provided I take the risk upon myself?" To this Mr M'Naughton, after some hesitation, assented. The mill was soon procured and commenced operations, and so completely were Sir John's predictions realized, that in a few years thereafter, Mr M'Naughton erected other two

at his own expense in other parts of the country; a circumstance no less gratifying to the originator, than advantageous to the surrounding community.

*Land-owners.*—The chief land-owners of the parish are, Sir George Sinclair of Ulbster, Bart.; William Sinclair, Esq. of Freswick; John Sutherland, Esq. of Forse; Donald Horne, Esq. of Langwell; Colonel Gordon of Swiney; Lord Duffus; Sir Ralph A. Anstruther, Bart.; Temple Frederick Sinclair, Esq. of Lybster; and Donald Munro, Esq. of Latheron.

*Parochial Registers.*—The earliest date of the parochial records now extant is 1755. They have been pretty regularly kept till 1770. There is then a chasm of nearly thirteen years to 1783, after which they have, with few exceptions, been correctly kept; especially since 1813, the entries are scrupulously correct.

*Antiquities.*—From the great number of castles in this parish, it would appear as if the chief strength of the county were concentrated in it. There are no fewer than eight of them along the sea-coast, and for the most part built on the very brink of high and perpendicular rocks overhanging the sea, and inaccessible from that quarter. They were also so constructed as to admit of separation from the land at pleasure, the chief connection being by means of a draw-bridge. The greater number of them are now in ruins, but, from the height, strength, and thickness of the walls of those that remain, it may easily be conceived what a formidable obstacle they presented to an invading enemy in those times, standing as they do in such close succession. Beginning at the south, their names are Berriedale, Achastle, Dunbeath, (still inhabited,) Knockinnan, Latheron, Forse, Swiney, and Clyth. Several of them are still celebrated for the warlike deeds of their brave, though ferocious original possessors, and it is highly instructive to contrast the security, peace, and tranquillity of those who now surround them, with the insecurity, rapine, and bloodshed that prevailed in former days. It is hardly necessary to add, that these ruins present not the slightest traces either of the graces of ornament, or the embellishments of art, which so tastefully adorn more modern architecture.

*Modern Buildings.*—The only buildings of recent erection deserving of notice are the churches of Berriedale and Lybster. The former is a Government church, of very neat construction, though small in size. It was built in 1826, and contains about 300 sitters.

There is a very comfortable manse close by it. Both are very compact, and a great ornament to the district in which they are placed. The latter, viz. Lybster, was built by subscription in 1836. It is a substantial, well-finished, and most comfortable church. It contains 805 sittings, and cost L.830. It is placed in the village of Lybster, from which it takes its name, and to the importance of which it contributes not less by its utility than its acknowledged ornament.

### III.—POPULATION.

From the want of correct records, it is impossible to ascertain the ancient state of the population with accuracy. There can be no doubt, however, that it has been progressing during the last century at a very rapid rate. It is stated in the former Statistical Account, that the population had nearly doubled during the seventy years preceding 1794, when it amounted to 4006; and such has been the extraordinary rapidity of the increase during the forty years that have since elapsed, that it is now fully double that amount. Where this extraordinary increase of country population is to terminate, and by what means a suitable provision is to be made for their comfortable support, it is difficult to imagine. At present there are no indications of a decrease, unless sheep-farming, which commenced some time ago, should become more general.

The chief cause of the recent astonishing increase in the population is unquestionably the great and growing extent to which the herring-fishing has been prosecuted along the whole coast, and the extraordinary success with which it has generally been attended. Upon its permanency or failure, therefore, mainly depends the future continued increase, or rapid decrease of the population.

The present number of the population residing in villages is	555
In the rest of the parish,	7445
The yearly average of births for the last seven years, is	197
No record is kept of deaths.	
The yearly average of marriages,	52
The average number (in 1831) of persons under 15 years of age, is	2899
betwixt 15 and 30,	1730
30 and 50,	1501
50 and 70,	791
upwards of 70,	169
The number of proprietors of land of the yearly value of L. 50 and upwards,	9
Males unmarried, upwards of 50 years of age,	57
Females, do. 45 do.	348
Number of families in 1831,	1408
Average number of children for each family in the parish,	2

Number of families employed in agriculture in 1831,	1068
trade, manufacture, or handicraft,	161

Number of fatuous persons, 20 ; blind, 3.

*Language, Habits, &c.*—The Gaelic language is generally spoken by the lower class of people throughout the greater part of the parish, but it has certainly lost ground during the last forty years, and, in proportion as the improved system of education advances, it will no doubt continue to decline still more. In proof of this, the presbytery of Caithness have lately come to the decision to discontinue the preaching of the Gaelic language in the eastern district of the parish occupied by the mission of Bruan, where a missionary was last year appointed, who has no Gaelic. Formerly the missionary always preached in both languages, but, in all probability, this system is not likely to be again resorted to. It is a singular circumstance that, for a long period, the burn of East Clyth seems to have formed the boundary between the Gaelic and English languages. On the east side of it, scarcely a word of Gaelic was either spoken or understood, and on the west side the English shared the same fate ; and this was the more wonderful, as both sides were rather densely peopled. Now, however, the English has not only made encroachments upon the Gaelic territory, but has extended itself over the whole neighbouring district ; and, indeed, were it not that its progress was considerably impeded by the importation of several colonies of Highlanders from the heights of Kildonan and other parts of Sutherlandshire about twenty years ago, when the sheep system commenced there, its triumphs, ere now, would have been still more extensive.

A very decided improvement has, for many years back, been observable both in the external appearance and internal comforts of the cottages of the peasantry. The old hovels are fast disappearing, and neat substantial houses, having vents and chimney tops in one or both ends, are occupying their places. With these improvements in the accommodations and comforts of the people, there has, as might naturally be expected, been a somewhat proportional advance in their habits of cleanliness and manner of dress, in both of which many of them display considerable taste and neatness. Indeed, there is reason to fear that the youth of both sexes are, in the article of dress, rather in danger of exceeding their means. The ordinary food consists of oat and bear

meal, potatoes, and fish of various kinds, of which there is usually an abundant supply. In the latter article, few parishes are possessed of equal advantages, for, in addition to the opportunities of obtaining white fish of excellent quality when the weather is moderate, each family lays in a regular stock of from one to three barrels of cured herrings, according to the number of persons of which it consists. This, with potatoes, milk, and a moderate quantity of bread, together with a little animal food occasionally, forms a wholesome and nourishing diet at all seasons.

Considering the many disadvantages in respect to religious and moral training under which this parish has long laboured; arising from its immense extent, and the density of its population, crowded together, in many quarters, in large masses,—the extraordinary lack of respectable and exemplary families located among them, so necessary to give a tone to the morals of the lower classes,—the very unfavourable nature of their ordinary avocations towards the fostering and maturing of religious habits,—together with the scarcity of competent instructors to maintain a strict and continuous pastoral superintendence among them,—considering these acknowledged disadvantages, it is wonderful and pleasing to perceive the hold which religious principle and moral responsibility possess over the people generally; whilst in very many particular cases, the acuteness and intelligence discoverable on religious subjects, combined, as frequently happens, with fervent and unobtrusive piety, are not less striking and refreshing to contemplate, than diffusive and beneficial in their consequences. That instances of ignorance and irreligion, attended by their natural offspring, vice and immorality, are to be met with, cannot be denied; but, in a community so circumstanced, the great wonder is, that they do not prevail to a much greater extent. This is to be attributed, under Providence, to the wholesome checks and remedies which have more recently been applied, by extending, as far as possible, the improved system of education, and providing additional facilities of religious instruction and pastoral superintendence over the more remote and destitute districts; a system which, even in its infancy, is already producing a marked improvement on the habits of the people generally.

Upon the whole, the peasantry may be said to possess a tolerable degree of knowledge for their station in life. With few exceptions, they are well acquainted with the catechisms and leading

doctrines of our church, which maintain a powerful influence over them in all the relations of life. In particular, their minds are deeply imbued with suitable impressions of an overruling Providence governing all things according to the Divine will; a principle which, whilst it moderates their joy in prosperity, powerfully supports them under adversity. Of this there were innumerable instances of a very pleasing nature during the three past years, when, as is well known, the crops were almost a total failure all over the Highlands. The patient resignation and deep submission with which this heavy calamity was borne, could not fail to excite the admiration of every attentive observer. Instead of riot, robbery, and bloodshed, which in many other quarters follow in the train of less formidable privations, here the public peace was never disturbed; but, on the contrary, life, and even property in general, were alike secure as in more favourable circumstances. To behold 7000 people suffering under the most distressing destitution for three successive years, many families without a handful of meal in their houses for weeks together, others satisfied with a little water-gruel once a-day, and still nothing but quietness and submission prevailing, what a triumph for that sound Scriptural education to which they are early habituated, and consequent religious principle of which it seldom fails to be productive! A high veneration for the being, attributes, and worship of the Deity is everywhere observable. The sanctity of the Sabbath is universally upheld. Scarcely a movement is to be seen during that sacred day excepting to or from the places of public worship, which are remarkably well attended. The important duty of family worship, so necessary for the formation and exhibition of the Christian character, is also very generally observed.

But whilst it is truly pleasing to dwell upon the ascendancy which these principles and habits possess among the great body of the peasantry, yet a regard to truth requires the admission, however painful, that instances do occur, from time to time, of a character directly opposite. Of these one of the greatest irregularities is that of drinking ardent spirits, to which not a few are addicted, especially during the winter season. This degrading practice was formerly occasioned by the extent to which the smuggling of whisky was carried on; but the system of heavy fines or imprisonment, introduced many years ago in all cases of detection,

was the means of checking it in a great degree. But this system was soon relaxed on account of the expenses attending the imprisonment of delinquents. Then followed a more vigilant and active *surveillance* on the part of the excise, particularly the indefatigable exertions of one active officer, a Mr M'Mahon, whose very name spread terror all over the county, from the Ord of Caithness to John O'Groats, by the havoc he made upon this nefarious and demoralizing trade. He was neither to be bribed nor deceived, and scarce a single case escaped his detection in the whole range of the county. This has given the finishing blow to smuggling in this quarter, and for several years not a single case has occurred here. The good effects of this change are already apparent in the districts where the practice most prevailed; but it is only when the present generation shall have passed away, that the full advantage will be appreciated. Another practice attended with very pernicious effects is that frequently adopted by fishcurers, of giving from five to seven gallons of whisky to each boat's crew during the herring-fishing season, which, on an average, will be at the rate of one bottle to each crew of four men every fishing night; and although some have the prudence to reserve a considerable part of it, yet others consume their whole allowance. By this means young men are led into drinking habits very early. It is a great evil, and loudly calls for a remedy.

Poaching in the moors and rivers can hardly be said to exist, owing to the strict regulations adopted by the proprietors. Indeed such is their authority over the tenantry, that it is completely in their power to suppress smuggling, thieving, and even habits of excessive drinking at any time, were they to put that authority in vigorous execution, and to act in concert. But so far is this from being always the case, as it certainly ought to be, that it is no uncommon occurrence to see individuals notorious for one or other of the above practices, when removed from one property, received on that immediately adjoining it; by which means they sometimes become more injurious to that from which they have been removed, (by theft for instance,) than if they had been permitted to remain unmolested. Besides, how cruel is it towards those among whom such characters are placed! Were certificates of moral character strictly insisted upon from every new tenant, many irregularities would be greatly checked—a precaution urgently called for.

## IV.—INDUSTRY.

*Agriculture and Rural Economy.*—Although the lands in this parish are well adapted for agriculture, and although it contains several farms in the very highest state of cultivation, yet, as the great body of its inhabitants are engaged in the herring-fishing, and make the cultivation of the soil little more than a secondary concern, it is, perhaps, less agricultural than many other parishes in the county, that are greatly inferior in extent, population, and internal resources. Its pastoral qualities are peculiarly valuable, and likely to be put in still more extensive requisition.

It contains fully 140,000 imperial acres, of which about 9000 are arable, and about an equal quantity capable of being made so, though at a considerable expense, from the great number of rocks and isolated large stones near the surface. There are probably not more than 250 acres of undivided common in the whole parish, and about 720 acres of wood of all descriptions; by far the greater part of which consists of natural brushwood, chiefly along the romantic banks of the rivers Berriedale, Langwell, and Dunbeath. At the former, however, there is a considerable extent of planted wood of all kinds, and well attended to in respect to pruning, &c.; and at the latter, there is a tasteful plantation just laid out, which will in a few years appear highly ornamental as well as useful. At Braemore and Latheronwheel also a good deal has been done, and with considerable success; as also at Lybster, where neither pains nor expense have been spared for many years back. But here the roots have to contend with a less favourable soil, whilst the trees themselves are much exposed from the want of natural shelter, the ground being flat, and the soil damp and tenacious,—two obstacles formidable in an ungenial climate; yet there is a striking evidence of what can be done by pains and perseverance.

*Rent.*—The average rent of arable land is certainly very high, considering the indifferent crops raised by the small tenantry generally. It is about L. 1, 5s. per acre,—more than can be realized by the occupiers generally,—but then the fishing is expected to make up the deficiency. The rate of grazing may be about L. 2, 10s. for a cow, and 9s. for a sheep on arable ground, and 15s. for a cow, and 8s. for a sheep on hill pasture.

*Wages.*—Day-labourers, employed in ditching, draining, or roads, usually receive at the rate of 2d. per hour, or 9s. per week. Masons and carpenters from 2s. to 3s. per day; men and women employed for harvest work, the former L. 1, 10s. and the latter L. 1,

with an allowance of meal and potatoes sufficient to support them until the crops are secured. Farm-servants obtain from L. 6 to L. 8 a-year, according to their qualifications, and 6 bolls of meal, together with potatoes and a little milk. Women for household work are from L. 3 to L. 4 with their victuals, &c. in the family.

*Breeds of Live-Stock.*—Much attention is now being paid to the improvement of the breeds of sheep and cattle. Cheviot sheep of the finest description are reared on the farms of Langwell and Dunbeath, and frequently obtain prizes at the shows at Inverness. On several corn farms, crosses between the Leicester and Cheviot breeds are becoming common. The same system is pursued in respect to cattle, and the crosses most in repute are between the Teeswater and good Highlanders. For this description there is a ready demand at good prices, and, in all probability, the great attention now paid to the rearing of stock is only in its infancy. The great facilities now afforded for the conveyance of stock by steam to the Edinburgh and London markets with such regularity and rapidity, is fast drawing forth the resources of this county generally, and every parish in particular.

*Husbandry.*—Although the greater portion of the land is occupied by small tenantry, with whom the cultivation of the soil forms but a secondary concern, yet there are several extensive and well-managed farms in the parish, on which crops of the best description are raised. The six-year shift is that in most general use, viz. turnip, bafley or bear, two crops grass, one cut and the other pastured, and two crops oats, one of potato or Hopetoun, and the other of Angus or dun oats. Wheat is sometimes raised of good quality; but in the general run of seasons it has not been found a profitable crop, owing chiefly to the want of sufficient warm weather to bring it to maturity. Pease and beans are also tried, and sometimes succeed; but they may be considered a very precarious crop, owing to the wet weather often experienced during harvest, when it is extremely difficult to secure them in a good state.

Draining has of late been practised to a very great extent on the principal farms, and with evident advantage. For example, one small field of about four acres has been drained this year at an expense of about L. 20. Even furrow draining has been tried on a small scale, and in all probability will become more general. Lime has been found most serviceable on dry lands, and has been a good deal in use; but the depressed state of farm produce for many years back has operated as a great discouragement to the

use of this expensive but valuable manure. Considerable tracts of waste ground have been reclaimed by almost all the proprietors during the last twenty years; chiefly, however, with the view of extending the farms under their own management. Among these improvements, none have been so perfectly executed as those on the beautiful estate of Langwell, by the late proprietor, James Horne, Esq. A considerable portion was trenched at a great expense where the soil was shallow, and other parts of moor-ground, having from one to two feet of moss on the surface, were first ploughed, then burnt, and laid down with a large allowance of lime, carted a distance of ten miles. This was done twelve or fourteen years ago, and has never yet been turned up, yet it continues to retain a rich and close sward of pasture grass, without discovering any symptoms of relapsing into its original heath, as so generally happens when the work is done in a less perfect style. On the estates of Dunbeath, Latheronwheel, Forse, Lybster, and Clyth, much has also been done, though in a less expensive manner. The system pursued by the smaller tenantry has in several respects been improved of late. Instead of four small horses and a driver to every plough, two horses without a driver are now universally used. And, instead of the clumsy awkward plough formerly in use, the neat iron plough is becoming very general. The land is also better cleaned, although the rotation of oats and bear alternately is very little changed; only a greater breadth of potatoes is planted, and good white and dun oats have supplanted the old black and gray inferior qualities. In a few cases also small patches of grass are sown out after potatoes. This practice would speedily become general, were it not for the want of enclosures to preserve the grass from being injured during winter, and that there is no winter herding.

*Leases.*—Leases of fourteen or nineteen years are granted on the larger farms, but the small tenantry generally hold their farms only from year to year—a system alike prejudicial to their comforts, and the interests of the proprietor. Short leases are, however, becoming more common, and will no doubt speedily become universal.

The condition of some of the farm-buildings is excellent, others of them again are exceedingly bad. But, as in all other things connected with rural economy, there has been a progressive improvement of late. The same observations are applicable to the enclosures. These chiefly consist of stone fences, together with whin and thorn

hedges. Most of the stone fences are old and decayed, and do not suit the improved system of keeping a suitable portion of each farm under sheep. Should the present system be persevered in, as is most probable, they will require to be renewed. Indeed, this is to commence immediately on the farm of Clyth, the property of Sir George Sinclair, where a new farm-steading and proper enclosures are forthwith to be erected on a new lease of that excellent farm. All the new houses are slated, and in other respects very commodious.

*Improvements.*—The principal improvements which have taken place within the last thirty years, in as far as agriculture is concerned, may be briefly enumerated as follows: fully 2000 acres of waste ground reclaimed; better accommodations in farm-buildings; a vast extent of enclosures executed; agriculture much more systematically and advantageously pursued; more attention given to the culture and clearing of the land; draining practised much more extensively, and executed in a more skilful style; better breeds of horses, cows, and sheep; superior facilities both for expedition and security in conveying them to the southern markets; a much wider breadth of turnips sown and heavier crops raised, and consequently a much larger quantity of stock reared and fed, and fitted in a much shorter time for the butcher. After shipping the stock at Wick in the morning, it is possible for them to be shown in the Edinburgh market next afternoon; thus accomplishing in the astonishingly short period of thirty hours what used to occupy nearly as many days, to the much greater damage of the stock.

Great as these improvements are, nothing but the want of capital prevents their proceeding at a much more rapid rate; and were additional encouragement to be given by proprietors, by granting leases to the small tenantry on reasonable terms, a great deal more might be done, even upon the existing resources of the people. One of the greatest obstacles with which the spirit of improvement has now to contend, is the non-residence of almost all the proprietors; a circumstance which did not exist, to the same extent, until very recently; and hence the same interest can hardly be expected to be taken, either in promoting the comforts of the inhabitants, or in reclaiming or ornamenting the lands. But it is hoped that this inconvenience may only be of short duration.

*Fisheries.*—There are four descriptions of fisheries prosecuted in this parish, viz. the herring, cod, salmon, and lobster. Of these the herring fishery is the most considerable, forming as it does,

the principal source whence the revenue of the parish is derived. This fishing commences about the middle of July, when the herring usually make their appearance in small shoals on the coast, and continues till the middle of September. Great numbers of young men come from Assynt in Sutherlandshire, and Lochbroom and Lewis in Ross-shire, to engage as hired hands. They are employed by the owners of the boats to make up the boats' crew along with themselves, and receive from L. 3 to L. 4 each, for six weeks, besides their victuals. Each boat carries four men, and is furnished with from twenty to thirty-eight nets, according to the size of the boat. A good boat costs L. 50, and her drift of nets L. 76; a sum too large for one individual, and consequently there are generally two and sometimes more who share in the same boat. They usually last in a seaworthy state about twelve years, and the nets six years. No employment can be prosecuted with greater spirit and assiduity; and few scenes are more enlivening, both on land and water, than it occasions, especially when any measure of success attends the labours of the fishermen. The boats usually leave the shore from five o'clock to seven o'clock in the afternoon, according to the direction of the wind and the distance at which the fish are supposed to be found, and shoot their nets about dusk. In this state they remain, with the boat attached to each drift by means of a head rope, and slowly carried east or west by the tide, until about three o'clock the next morning. Then all hands are employed in hauling in the nets and fish at the boat's stern, where they remain together, dispersed all over the boat, till it comes to shore, when they commence the operation of disengaging the fish from the meshes of the net, by shaking the nets. This operation is frequently performed at the time of hauling the nets, should time and the weather permit. The herring being thus separated from the nets, are immediately landed and deposited in the curing box, where a number of women are engaged in gutting and packing them in barrels with salt. Having delivered their fish, they bundle up their nets, carry them on shore, and spread them out carefully one over the other. Here they remain to dry, until taken up again in the afternoon to be used as formerly. After securing their boats, they return to their homes, take some refreshment, and a few hours repose, as their time permits, and proceed to take up their nets, and put to sea again for the next night's fishing. In this manner they proceed for five successive nights, every week. Sometimes, however, when the quan-

tity of fish to be delivered is large, they do not get to bed for days together. This makes it a very fatiguing and even oppressive employment. But the prospect of success is so very enticing, that it is submitted to with wonderful cheerfulness.

The boats used in this parish may contain from 30 to 50 crans or barrels (for both are nearly alike,) of herrings, and it is difficult to say which of the sights is most pleasingly interesting to a stranger, that of beholding on a fine evening the whole coast, as far as the eye can reach, covered with human beings in their little barks, as they issue forth from every creek, and disperse in different directions, full of life; or that of attending at one of the stations in the morning, and witnessing the return of 40, 60, or 100 boats, all crowding into one creek, most of them, perhaps, laden with fish to the gunwale, and then the scene of bustle and animation that succeeds and continues till night! And what ought not to be omitted as being still more delightful to a seriously contemplative mind, it is not unusual, where there are boats having individuals of acknowledged piety, for the crew to engage in worship after shooting their nets. On these occasions a portion of a psalm is sung, followed with prayer, and the effect is represented as truly solemn and heart-stirring, as the melodious strains of the Gaelic music, carried along the surface of the waters, (several being similarly engaged,) spread throughout the whole fleet.

But not unfrequently the scene is sadly reversed, for in the midst of the joys of life, we often are in death. A storm suddenly arises during the night. The boats are all riding quietly at their nets and unprepared to meet it. Some endeavour to haul their nets, others cut from them, and make for the place of greatest shelter, whilst others, afraid to put up sail and encounter it, abide by their nets in the hope of the storm's abating. In proportion to the danger at sea, are the confusion and anxiety on land. The shores are instantly crowded by inquiring relatives, hurrying from place to place in search of husbands, brothers, or sons. Astonishing instances of preservation often occur; but no season passes without serious losses to individuals, either of boats, or nets, and sometimes of lives. The risks are very great, and the employment, even when successful, most trying to the constitution.

The following presents a pretty correct state of the fishing of 1838 at the different stations in the parish. The fishing stations with the boats attached to each are, Dunbeath, 76; Latheron-

wheel, 35; Forse, 32; Swiney, 10; Lybster, 101; Clyth, 53; and East Clyth, 18: in all 325 boats. Connected with these there are 1321 fishermen, 106 coopers, 937 women as packers, and 178 labourers, in all 2540 persons,—besides about 50 fish curers, many of whom take an active part in the business. The number of barrels cured at all these stations in 1838, was 39,093, exclusive of the fish cured by the fishermen and others at their own houses, which may be estimated at about 2800 barrels,—besides quantities of green fish purchased at all the stations by strangers from all parts of the county in exchange for cash, milk, butter, cheese, &c. &c.—say 907. The average price per cran of green fish was 9s., and that per barrel when cured, L.1. The barrels are made at the different stations, the hemp spun and the nets wrought in the fishermen's families during the winter and spring months. From all this, it may be conceived what an engrossing and important concern the herring-fishing has become in this parish.

But, notwithstanding these advantages, which are confessedly great in a temporal point of view, yet it is very doubtful whether they are not more than counterbalanced by the pernicious effects upon the morals of the people, which never fail to result from this employment, especially the young of both sexes. No doubt the sound religious education now becoming so general, has a tendency to counteract such habits. Indeed, this is already apparent, and it is to be hoped, if persevered in, will become still more so. At all events, as matters now stand, it is evident that the failure of the fishing would be attended with the most ruinous consequences, so that it becomes no less the duty than the interest of the landed proprietors, whilst encouraging the fishing, by which the value of land has been so greatly enhanced, to afford every practicable facility to the diffusion of knowledge, by means of education and religious instruction both to young and old. These have ever been found the best safeguards of morality in a country, and are the surest means of rearing and perpetuating an enlightened, intelligent, and industrious peasantry.

The cod-fishing is not carried on to any great extent, although there are immense quantities to be found on the coast, particularly at the commencement of the herring fishing. At this period there are a good many caught; but as soon as the herring appear in such numbers as to induce the fishermen to shoot their nets, then the cod-fishing is deserted, that of the herring being

much more profitable. On an average there may be about 10,000 cod cured in a season, for which 6d. each may be obtained.

Lobsters also are in great abundance, and frequently many of them are taken in boxes; but this trade is little attended to, as the herring trade has been the all-engrossing business for many years back.

There are two salmon-fishing stations in the parish, viz. at Berriedale and Dunbeath, the former belonging to Mr Horne of Langwell, and the latter to Mr Sinclair of Freswick. At Berriedale, salmon and grilse are frequently caught in great abundance, particularly since the herring-fishing was discontinued there. It is rented by the Messrs Hogarth of Aberdeen, and the fishing at Dunbeath by Mr Martin of Dundee, the former at L. 275, and the latter at L. 27. This great difference in rent is chiefly occasioned by the herring-fishing at the latter place having a tendency to annoy the fish, and frighten them from the shore. In other respects, Dunbeath seems the preferable station, as the channel of the river is always open. The fish on both rivers are good; that of Berriedale particularly so. Very few of them are sold in the parish, on account of the high price demanded; salmon 1s., and grilse 6d. per lb. They are kitted and sent to the London market.

*Raw Produce.*—It is difficult to ascertain with accuracy the precise amount of raw produce raised in the parish; but an attempt has been made to approach it pretty nearly, though with considerable difficulty, under the following heads:

Grain of all kinds, about 11,882 qrs. at L. 1, 5s. per quarter,	L. 14,852	0	0
Potatoes, 4585 bolls, at 10s. per boll,	2,267	10	0
Turnips, 236 acres, at 1.6 per acre,	1416	0	0
Hay, meadow and cultivated, 40,300 stones, at 6d. per stone,	1,007	10	0
Land in pasture to graze, 3765 cows, at L. 1 each,	3,765	0	0
Do. do. 12,000 sheep, at 5s. each,	3,000	0	0
Fisheries—herring, 42,800 crans, at 9s. per cran,	19,260	0	0
Do. cod, 10,000, at 6d. each, L. 250; salmon rented at L. 302,	552	0	0
Miscellaneous produce not enumerated above,	750	0	0

Total yearly value of raw produce raised, L. 46,870 0 0

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Market-Town.*—There is no market-town in the parish. The nearest to it is Wick, the county town, which is at the medium distance of twenty miles. Several villages have been projected, but none of them have yet arisen to any consequence except Lybster, which contains many excellent houses, and a population of fully 400 individuals. Several new buildings are now in progress, and many of the inhabitants are very respectable. It was com-

menced by the late proprietor, Lieutenant-General Sinclair, in 1802; but it is only within the last twenty years that the spirit of improvement has been particularly called forth. It is now a rising place, and evidently promises to be of considerable consequence at no very distant period; should the herring-fishing continue to flourish, of which there is every prospect.

*Means of Communication.*—There are two post-offices in the parish, viz. Dunbeath and Lybster, the former of old establishment, and the latter more recent.

The great north road runs from one extremity of the parish to the other, a distance of twenty-eight miles along the coast, and is of immense importance in facilitating the means of communication. The mail-coach from Inverness to Thurso has continued to run since the completion of this road, about twenty-two years ago. The weekly communication by steam from Leith and Aberdeen to Wick and Orkney, has considerably lessened the number of passengers by the coach.

The bridges along the Parliamentary and county roads are kept in excellent repair.

*Harbours.*—Considering the vast importance of this coast in a commercial point of view, the great number of vessels that frequent it in connection with the fisheries, and the many risks to which life and property are exposed in consequence of its bold, rocky, and exposed character, it is much to be regretted that so little has hitherto been done in order to obtain safe and commodious harbours. With the exception of a neat little pier at Clyth, which is occasionally of service in loading vessels in very moderate weather, the only attempt that has yet been made in this way is at Lybster, where the proprietor, T. Frederick Sinclair, Esq. has, in a very spirited manner, and at considerable expense, been engaged for several years back in providing a harbour for the encouragement of the increasing trade and population of that place. This has been effected by running a stone pier of about 300 feet in length along the west bank of a rivulet which runs into the sea at this place, and which formerly was usually choked up by the shifting beach, now confined behind the pier. By this means shelter and accommodation have been effected for upwards of one hundred boats of from ten to fifteen tons burden, besides admitting decked vessels of one hundred tons burden. Within the last three years, from sixty to eighty of the latter have loaded and discharged cargoes during the summer and harvest seasons; and it

is supposed that it is practicable, by a small additional outlay, to deepen the harbour so as to receive vessels of the necessary tonnage even at low water. The value of such an improvement on the coast would be incalculable, considering the thousands of individuals engaged in the herring fishing. At present, there is not a single place to run to at low water, when vessels or boats are suddenly overtaken with a heavy storm, as not unfrequently happens, to the great loss of life and property. Dunbeath is also remarkably well calculated for a harbour, and in all probability the time cannot be far distant, when something on an extensive scale will be attempted there. Nature has done her part admirably, and it only requires the hand of art to turn her varied resources to good account. Petitions have this year been numerously signed and sent to the Admiralty, praying the appointment of a survey of this coast, in order to select one or more of the fittest stations with the view of erecting harbours for the protection of property, and the lives of the fishermen, now exposed to such imminent hazard. Should these applications succeed, as it is to be hoped they eventually will, then a new era will arise with respect to agricultural and commercial pursuits, and it will only require the united efforts of enterprising and intelligent men to occupy the field thus opened up, and call forth a spirit of industry hitherto unexampled in this quarter.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The parish church is situated close by the sea, and is seventeen miles from the western extremity of the parish, eleven miles from the eastern, and ten from the northern extremity. It is, however, sufficiently central for the population, though it must be obvious, from the great territorial extent, that comparatively few of the inhabitants, were they solely dependent upon it, could derive much benefit on account of the distance to which they are removed. The church seems to have been built about the year 1734. It received a large addition by way of an aisle in 1822, and was, besides, new roofed and new seated. It may contain about 900 sitters, and no seat-rents have been demanded since it received extensive repairs in 1822. It is one of the largest and most commodious country churches in the county. The only thing wanted to its comfort is that of having it ceiled above, which it is hoped may, ere long, be accomplished.

The manse was built about forty years ago, and is a substantial building, with sufficient accommodation. The glebe consists of 15 acres of arable land. Its extent was a little increased by an

excambion about fourteen years ago, and it may be worth about L.20 per annum. The amount of the stipend is 16 chalders, the one-half meal and the other barley, with L.10 for communion elements.

As stated under a former head, there is a Government church at Berriedale, in the west end of the parish. It was built in 1826, and accommodates 300 sitters. The district connected with it now forms a *quoad sacra* parish. In consequence of some of the families having been removed since the church was built, it is now too remote for the more populous districts connected with it, but is, notwithstanding, still very useful; and were a small church to be erected in the eastern quarter, where the minister could preach every alternate Sabbath, it would be still more so. There is an excellent manse near the church, as also a garden and small glebe. Both the latter were furnished by the late proprietor Mr Horne of Langwell, and are continued by his successor Mr Donald Horne. The stipend, amounting to L.120, is paid by Government, and the population is fully 1400. There was also a church built at the village of Lybster in 1836 by subscription, and the district connected with it constituted a parish *quoad sacra*. It is four miles east of the parish church, has a regular minister settled in it, and a population exceeding 2500 souls. A manse has not yet been built, nor a glebe assigned, but the minister has been provided with a good house in the meantime, and a stipend of L.100 per annum, which is paid from the seat-rents. The church is a neat, commodious, and well-finished building, constructed of the best materials. It contains 805 sitters, and the contract price was L.830, all of which was cleared off the same year in which the house was finished. Its great utility in that district is universally acknowledged. All the seats are let, the church crowded, and yet the parish church as well attended as formerly. This is the only attempt hitherto made, on the Church extension plan, in any of the counties north of Inverness, and it has succeeded far beyond the most sanguine expectations of its promoters. How long the people, who are almost all composed of the poor and working classes, may be able to afford seat-rents equal to their minister's stipend, must depend upon the future success of the herring-fishing. It is hoped, however, that Government will ere long see the expediency and necessity of appropriating a small sum by way of stipend to assist such necessitous places. The proprietors connected with the district contributed liberally towards its erection, as also several others both in and out of the parish, together with

the whole body of the inhabitants of this and the other parishes of the county. It was a favourite measure, in which all felt interested; and it would have delighted the writer to record here the names of all the principal subscribers, could it be admitted, in testimony of the grateful sense he entertains of the handsome and cordial manner in which his appeals in behalf of this important object were responded to by all classes.

There is a mission on the establishment of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, at Bruan, in the eastern extremity of the parish. This station was formerly connected with Berriedale, where the missionary resides. The disjunction took place in 1826, when the Government church was erected at the latter place. A comfortable manse has been erected at Bruan for the missionary, which cost L.232, and the expense was defrayed by the people connected with the district. A glebe of four acres of excellent land was handsomely made over to the mission by the late Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, Bart., whose estates are chiefly benefited thereby. The mission-house stands on the boundary betwixt this parish and Wick, and now accommodates about an equal number from each parish. The church is seated for 600. The population from both parishes is 1800, and the mission is one of the most compact anywhere to be found. The present missionary's stipend has recently been augmented to L.100, only L.25 of which is paid by the Society—the remainder is paid, or at least promised, by the people, and raised from the seat-rents as far as these can be realized. This district also ought to be made a parish *quoad sacra*, more especially as it is now completely disjoined from the parish church, by that of Lybster intervening betwixt them.

About 350 of the inhabitants of the interior of the parish are connected with the Royal Bounty Mission of Dirlot, in the parish of Halkirk, and attend public worship at the meeting-house of Halsary, where a new and more suitable house is about to be built, and is much needed.

There are four catechists in the parish. They are appointed by the kirk-sessions, with the consent and approbation of the people among whom they labour, and by whom they are paid. There are no Dissenting or Seceding chapels in the parish. An attempt was made a few years ago to introduce dissent into the village of Lybster, where the most strenuous exertions were made and great expense incurred by the United Secession body to establish a congregation, but it has signally failed, and is now given up as hope-

less. This might have been foreseen from first, as there were no members of that or any other Dissenting denomination there, and the inhabitants generally neither desired nor countenanced such a measure.\* With the exception of a few strangers who may settle among them, the people are most devotedly and conscientiously attached to the Established Church, to which the whole population of 8000 belong, with the exception of about twelve families in the eastern extremity of the parish. One, and sometimes both the heads of these families usually attend the Secession church at Wick, but the young people belonging to them generally attend at the mission of Bruan on Sabbath. Considering the poverty of many of the inhabitants, excepting those from the very remote districts where meetings are frequently kept by the catechists or others for the convenience of the people, divine service is remarkably well attended in the several places of worship. On this subject it is recorded, with peculiar satisfaction, that, within the last few years, a marked improvement has taken place in the attendance of the young, and there is every reason to hope that it will be progressive. This is to be attributed not merely to the public exhortations addressed to parents from the pulpit, but also to the more than ordinary attention of the parochial and other schoolmasters in inculcating this most important duty upon their scholars.

The average number of communicants has varied from 130 to 180 during the last seven years. The fewness of their number is to be ascribed to the feelings of reverential awe with which they view this solemn ordinance, and the diffidence they experience as to their being possessed of the necessary qualifications for engaging in it.

The yearly collections for the poor may be averaged at L. 52, and those for religious purposes at L. 30.

*Education.*—Hitherto there has been only one parochial school in this extensive parish. There are, however, 14 unendowed and three Society schools; two supported by the General Assembly, and one by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge; in all 18, besides a few female schools where reading as well as needle-work is taught. The languages and the higher branches of mathematics are taught in the parochial and Assembly's schools;

\* Since the above was written, the United Secession have returned to Lybster, in the hope of better success, as the church there is about becoming vacant, by the translation of its able and popular minister to the Gaelic Church in Edinburgh.

when required; but only the elementary branches in those unendowed; and many of the latter, being in remote districts, where the people are very poor, are kept open during only six months of the year, viz. winter and spring. In all the schools the Scriptures are read daily, and the catechisms taught. The salary of the parish teacher is the maximum, and the fees may amount to from L. 20 to L. 30 a year. That of the Society teachers is from L. 20 to L. 25 each, and their fees from L. 8 to L. 10. The unendowed teachers are by far the worst paid; their emoluments may average from L. 3 to L. 4, including fees, though usually they have their victuals in addition. From the smallness of their emoluments it will readily be conceived that the acquirements of these teachers cannot be great. They are selected from the most talented and promising of the scholars in attendance at the parish school, where they are again to be found in attendance how soon their own schools close in the beginning of summer. Here they spend the summer and harvest in revising their former studies, and adding as much as possible to their stock of already acquired knowledge. By these means they return with fresh vigour and increased resources to their former stations in winter. Thus they continue to advance in the higher branches of education, until qualified for the Society or even parochial schools. But to these schools again, the different districts look for other young men to supply their places, so that the district schools are a kind of nurseries for the more advanced seminaries, which in their turn liberally repay the debt they have incurred. There have been five of these district teachers prosecuting their studies most creditably at the university for several years back.

It is proper to notice that there is another parochial school being built at Dunbeath, in connection with the Government parish of Berriedale. Mr Sinclair of Freswick, at the recommendation of his curators, has, in the handsomest manner, agreed to bear the whole expense of furnishing the necessary accommodations. These will at least cost L. 300; they are upon a scale more than ordinarily liberal, and will be finished this season. The benefits to result from such an establishment in that quarter, it is difficult to calculate, and the example of Mr Sinclair and his liberal minded curators cannot be too highly recommended. From the exertions made in furnishing the means of education, there are few of the young who cannot read; the greater number also learn to write; but among those who are far advanced in life,

there is a considerable number who can neither read nor write. The people in general are certainly alive to the benefits that arise from a good education, and therefore make considerable exertions, according to their small means, for supporting schools among them. No doubt several of the unendowed schools are of very inferior quality, as may be expected from the trifling remuneration that some districts can afford, so that what is wanted is not so much additional schools as additional salaries, and consequently better qualified teachers. Without the former, it is hopeless to attempt to raise the character of the latter beyond what has already been done. There are four stations at least, where Society schools could be most advantageously located, and for which applications have frequently been made, though hitherto without effect. It has already been observed, that the improvement in the conduct and morals of the young people is everywhere recognized by those who are acquainted with the parish; and that this change is in a great measure to be ascribed to the additional facilities and improved system of education, cannot be doubted. The proprietors have already done much, and it is to be hoped, that the altered state of society for the better will encourage them to persevere, until all the scattered hamlets of this extensive and populous parish, second perhaps to no landward parish in Scotland, are brought under the influence of a sound, moral, and religious education.

Having already noticed the recent improvements of an agricultural nature under that head, it may not be improper here to enumerate briefly those of an ecclesiastical and educational nature, which have taken place during the last twenty years, being the period of the incumbency of the present writer. The parish church, remodelled and greatly enlarged,—a Government church, manse, and glebe, established at Berriedale, and that district formed into a *quoad sacra* parish, with a separate minister,—a new church built at Lybster, with a separate minister settled there, and also formed into a *quoad sacra* parish,—the mission of Bruan, confined to that station, instead of two as formerly, and a commodious manse built for the missionary, with a suitable glebe attached;—all of these ministers, actively and laboriously engaged in communicating religious instruction, and discharging the duties of pastoral superintendence among the people. As to education, there has been a new parish school, with schoolmaster's accommodation erected; another parochial school in the course

of erection at Dunbeath; an Assembly school established at Berriedale, with schoolmaster's accommodation; another Assembly school similarly provided at Reisgill, together with eight unendowed schools in different localities; the general qualifications of the teachers considerably raised; the system of teaching vastly improved; and, consequently, the number of scholars almost incredibly increased: the general average exceeds 1200. But still much remains to be done in both departments; and as it is pleasing to reflect, that, in carrying forward these improvements, the harmony and good understanding subsisting betwixt the heritors and the present incumbent, have never been interrupted; a circumstance not a little creditable to the heritors, considering how many demands were necessarily made upon them; so it is to be hoped that the same cordiality and good feeling will be mutually maintained in prosecuting those that are still in contemplation. The readiness with which they have promoted these improvements, is very commendable.

*Friendly Societies.*—There are two of these of long standing, one at Dunbeath and the other at Lybster. In many instances they have been remarkably useful, both in respect to widows and orphans, and also the aged and infirm; but for several years back, they have not been becoming more flourishing, either as to members or funds. However, it is to be hoped that they may yet revive.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—The number of persons at present on the poor's roll is 202; each of whom only receives at the rate of from 4s. to 8s. at the time of distribution, which is once a-year. Such of them as are able, make their rounds through the parish occasionally, in order to obtain aid from those families whose circumstances enable them to assist them; and those that are bed-ridden or infirm have assistance sent them by the charitable and well disposed around them. There being no parochial assessment, the collections made at the church doors, together with the interest arising from a few benefactions, furnish the funds from which the poor receive the small pittance which can be assigned them. The average church collections may amount to L. 52 yearly, and the interest from benefactions to L. 18. The latter consist of L. 100, left many years ago, by the late Rev. Dr James Oswald of Glasgow; L. 100 by the late John C. Sutherland, Esq. of Forse in this parish; L. 100 by Conductor Sutherland of North America; and L. 40 by Mr Alexander Finlayson Macdonald of same place. Much to the credit of the poorer classes, they very

generally manifest a strong disinclination to seek relief from the poor's funds. There is a degree of virtuous pride, as well as strong natural affection very prevalent, which induces the children to support their aged and infirm parents to the utmost of their ability; and when applications are made for parochial relief, the cases are usually found to be very necessitous. This feeling is always encouraged, and its opposite discountenanced by the kirk-session, by every possible means. Hence, in ordinary seasons, very few indeed apply for certificates of poverty; and it is truly astonishing among such a large population, almost solely composed of the poorer classes, how very few are to be met with, asking charity. The numbers of this description from the south are very great, and generally of very indifferent character; but resolutions have recently been entered into by the county gentlemen, with a view of checking this great grievance, which, it is hoped, will have the desired effect. No year passes without many gross deceptions being practised upon the unsuspecting inhabitants, by designing persons of this description.

*Fairs.*—There are four fairs held in the parish for general purposes, two at Dunbeath and two at Lybster, during the year.

*Inns.*—There are not fewer than 26 public-houses, for retailing spirits, &c. in the parish, when six would have been quite sufficient for every necessary purpose.

*Fuel.*—Almost all the fuel used consists of peats. The expense attending its manufacture and carriage makes it ultimately very little cheaper than coal; only, it is more convenient, being always at hand.

October 1840.

#### ADDENDA.

The following is a list of the Ministers of the parish:—1637, Gilbert Anderson; — Mr Munro; 1652, John Ross, translated to Inverness in 1663; 1667, Niel Beaton, died 1715; 1717, Andrew Sutherland, died 1732; 1734, James Brodie, died 1773; 1775, Robert Gun, died 1819; 1820, George Davidson.

There are no Crown teinds in Latheron; but there are unappropriated teinds belonging to other persons, which amount to nearly £400.

CAITHNESS.