

PARISH OF ECCLESMACHAN.

PRESBYTERY OF LINLITHGOW, SYNOD OF LOTHIAN & TWEEDDALE.

THE REV. JOHN SMITH, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—THE name of this parish, so far back as can be traced, has been written Ecclesmachan. It is usually pronounced Inchmachan, a custom, apparently, of considerable antiquity; for in a list of parishes existing in 1581, and contained in "the Booke of the Universal Kirk," it stands Inchmachame. Of this name, various Celtic etymologies have been proposed, but none of them appear satisfactory. The most probable is that assigned in the former Statistical Report, viz. Ecclesia Machani, or, in Gaelic, *Eaglais Machan*, "the Church of Machan." In Keith's Calendar of Scots Saints is mentioned a St Machan, who, it is said, died about the middle of the ninth century. What connection he had with this part of the country, it is presumed, cannot now be ascertained.

Extent and Boundaries.—The parish is divided into two unequal portions, distant about one mile from each other, and separated by an outlying district of Linlithgow parish. The western division is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ broad; the eastern division is $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles long, by $1\frac{1}{2}$ broad; and the extreme points are nearly 5 miles from each other. The extent in square miles is 3.83, or 2458 imperial acres. The outline is very irregular. It is bounded on the north by the parishes of Abercorn and Linlithgow; on the west, by Bathgate; on the south, by Livingstone and Uphall; and, on the east, by Kirkliston and Auldathie, a detached portion of Dalmeny parish.

Topographical Appearances.—The two sections are each composed of a ridge of land. That on the west is the higher, ascending, perhaps, to the height of 600 feet, intersected in several places by shallow ravines, and sloping chiefly to the south. The eastern ridge is lower, having on its southern edge a pretty steep

acclivity, called the Tar Hill, or perhaps the Tor Hill. The climate in the upper district is cold; but in general it is salubrious, and, so far as has been observed, is not marked by any epidemical peculiarities. Several small streams, tributaries of the Almond, flow eastward through the parish.

Geology.—The district is on the edge of the great Lothian coal-field, and it appears that coal was formerly worked in various places on the north. Sandstone occurs on most of the farms. The most prominent rocks are of trap, which seem to have disturbed greatly the strata in this neighbourhood. In the vicinity of these are found immense beds of indurated clay, interspersed occasionally with seams of clay-ironstone. The upper soil, which is chiefly formed from decomposed trap and indurated clay, is heavy, and highly retentive of moisture. From the trap rocks of the Tar Hill issues a spring, weakly impregnated with sulphuretted hydrogen. It is called the Bullion Well, and, though formerly visited by invalids, is now neglected.

From the uniform nature of the soil, and the extent of tillage, the vegetation of this parish, though repeatedly examined, has been found to exhibit nothing peculiar. On the western heights, some of the subalpine mosses, such as *Trichostomum canescens*, and *T. heterostichum*, occur.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Eminent Men.—Mr Alexander Hamilton, the first minister of this parish after the Revolution, was a man of distinguished talent and courage. It is said, that when a student, he took down the head of the celebrated James Guthrie from the Netherbow Port of Edinburgh, where it had stood a public spectacle for many years; and numerous stories are still current among the old people here about his skill as a swordsman, before he became a minister. He was translated first to Airth, and subsequently to Stirling, and was deeply involved in the “Marrow Controversy.”

The estate of Bangour gave designation to William Hamilton, Esq. a celebrated Scottish poet, in the early part of the last century. He was descended from one of the ancient families of the name of Hamilton, once numerous in the county of Linlithgow; but whether he was born in this parish, or indeed resided in it, the writer has not ascertained. In his youth he distinguished himself by numerous songs, and among these, “the Braes of Yarrow,” published in the “Tea Table Miscellany.” He is said

to have been a man of elegant accomplishments, and of amiable manners. His poems are thus characterized by no mean judge, the late Lord Woodhouselee: "Hamilton's mind is pictured in his verses. They are the easy and careless effusions of an elegant fancy and a chastened taste; and the sentiments they convey are the genuine feelings of a tender and susceptible heart, which perpetually owned the dominion of some favourite mistress, but whose passion generally evaporated in song, and made no serious or permanent impression." Having entertained Jacobite predilections, he was engaged in the Rebellion in 1745; but, after a few years of exile, contrived to make his peace with the Government, and returned home. In 1754, he died at Lyons, in the fiftieth year of his age, leaving behind him, besides some unpublished pieces, a volume of poetry, which has been repeatedly inserted in collections of the British Poets. His patrimonial estate is now in the possession of his great grandson, James Hamilton, Esq. of Bangour and Ninewar, in East Lothian.

The late incumbent of this parish, the Rev. Henry Liston, deserves to be noticed among its few eminent men. He had a strong natural turn for mechanics and music. He was equally distinguished for his scientific and classical attainments, and was in many other respects a man of genius. With talents adapted for a far wider sphere of usefulness, he spent his whole ministerial life of more than forty-two years in this secluded spot, endeared to his numerous friends by great warmth of heart and simplicity of character. His son is now a celebrated surgeon in London.

Parochial Registers.—These exist in nearly unbroken sequence from 1662. The oldest, which is written in a fair hand, is entitled "Episcopall Discipline exercised by the Kirk-Session of Ecclesmachan." On the 28th of March 1683, it is minuted, "Mr John Moubray, according to the appointment of the presbytery, preached, and thereafter gave institution to Mr William Smairt to the ministry in this place, and the rest of the brethren off the presbytery gave the said Mr William the right hand off fellowship." The only other noticeable peculiarity is a commission from the Bishop of Edinburgh, in exercise of the civil power now vested in presbyteries, to certain ministers, authorizing them to visit and report on the manse and kirk of Ecclesmachan. The registers, subsequent to the Revolution, are kept in the usual form, and contain nothing remarkable.

Land-owners.—The proprietors are, the Earl of Hopetoun;

James Hamilton, Esq. of Bangour; Robert Warden, Esq. of Blackcraig; the Earl of Buchan also possesses a small pendicle of land. There is no country seat, nor any resident heritor in the parish.

III.—POPULATION.

The population has probably diminished during the course of the last century, chiefly on account of the union of small farms, and the decay of the villages. There is now scarcely an individual in the parish who is not directly or indirectly employed in agriculture. The following table will show the variations at the several dates. We cannot account for the smallness of the number in 1792.

The population in 1755, according to Dr Webster, was	330
1792, former Statistical Account,	215
1801, Government census,	309
1811, Do.	267
1821, Do.	303
1831, Do.	299
1841, Government census,	303

The last amount was partially increased by an influx of railway labourers. A private census in 1839, which ascertained only 263 inhabitants, gave the following results: Persons under fifteen years of age, 103; between fifteen and thirty, 76; between thirty and fifty, 55; between fifty and seventy, 19; above seventy, 10. The number of unmarried men above fifty, 6; number of unmarried women and widows above forty-five, 10. There are 51 families. The average number of children in families where there are any, is 3. The number of inhabited houses is 50; uninhabited, 4. For the last three years, the average number of births is seven annually; of deaths, two; of marriages, one. In these three years have been born three illegitimate children.

Forty-one families and 220 individuals belong to the Established Church; ten families and 43 individuals are attached to the Dissenters. Of these are eleven farmers, three blacksmiths, two carpenters, one mason, one tailor, two weavers, and ten day labourers. The rest of the males, and many of the females, are employed in agriculture. For many years past, there has not been a public-house in the parish.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—The whole parish has been enclosed mostly by hedge and ditch, and only a few acres in it have never been subjected to the plough. The whole surface employed in tillage and pasture, little of which is permanent, may be estimated at 2310

imperial acres. On many of the farms, the most improved system of husbandry has been introduced; much, however, remains to be done in the way of draining. In the western district of the parish, where, on account of the elevation, wheat is seldom or never grown, the usual rotation of crop is the following: oats green crop or fallow; barley or oats; hay; pasture for one or two years. In the lower district, on heavy land, the crops are usually arranged thus: fallow, wheat, beans, barley, hay or pasture, oats; and, on the drier soils, thus, oats, turnip, barley, hay or pasture. In general, the tenant is restricted only to the extent that he is not permitted to take two green crops in succession without manuring each of them. Throughout the whole of this country, there is an inclination to diminish the green crop, and to return to the old fallow system.

With the exception of two or three, the farms are all under 150 imperial acres. They are all let on leases of nineteen years. The maximum rent is about L.2 the Scotch acre, and the minimum, L.1, 5s. The average rent is about L.1, 10s. the Scotch acre. On the Earl of Hopetoun's property, the rent is paid chiefly by the value of grain, ascertained from the annual fairs of Linlithgowshire. The gross average rental of the parish is about L.2845. It may be worth while to add, that the annual value of real property, as assessed by Government in 1815, was L.3051.

Live-Stock.—The rearing of cattle is not pursued to any great extent; but a few short-horned bulls have been introduced, and between them and the Ayrshire breed, a valuable cross has been obtained, which is likely to be cultivated with success. Most of the grass is depastured, and the green crop consumed by Highland or Angus-shire oxen, purchased at the northern fairs, or by black-faced sheep procured from the same quarter.

Produce.—The following may be taken as an estimate of the gross value of products from land in ordinary years:

Grain,	L.5225
Green crop, including beans,	1100
Hay,	765
Pasture,	870
	—————
	L.7960

Plantations.—There are about 130 imperial acres of growing wood. It is mostly young, and little or none of it has ever been brought to the market. A considerable part of it was planted by the late Robert Warden, Esq., who thereby greatly improved and adorned his estate of Blackcraig. Shelter is still wanted in some quarters of the parish.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Villages.—There is scarcely a village in the parish, the hamlet at the church containing only eighteen houses.

Post-Office.—The nearest post-office is at Uphall, which is distant little more than a mile.

Market-Towns.—The markets frequented by the farmers are those of Linlithgow and Bathgate, which are about five miles respectively from the centres of the two districts of the parish.

Means of Communication.—The road from Edinburgh to Falkirk passes through the northern extremity for about half a mile, and the middle Glasgow road nearly touches the southern border. The parish roads are kept in excellent repair.

Ecclesiastical State.—The parish church is situate in the southern corner of the smallest section of the parish; but in the most convenient position possible for the generality of the inhabitants. It was in a great measure rebuilt in the beginning of last century, and having undergone a thorough repair in 1822, it is at present in excellent order, and is neat and comfortable. It is provided with 153 sittings, which might easily be increased, if required, to about 200. It is about four miles by the road from the most distant house. Considering the smallness of the population, the attendance is generally good. The manse is supposed to have been built about 1606; but an addition was made in 1800; and though the accommodation is not extensive, it is, on the whole, sufficiently comfortable. The glebe and garden contain about four and a-half Scotch acres of good ground. The stipend consists of 58 bolls, 3 firlots, 3 lippies of oatmeal; 58 bolls, 3 firlots, 3 lippies of barley; and L.146, 11s. of money. In the Report of the Religious Instruction Commissioners, it is valued at L.256, 11s. 8d., from an average of five years previous to 1836. The same report valued the unexhausted teind at L.140, 11s. 1d.

Education.—The parish school and school-house, recently rebuilt, are in good order. The teacher has the maximum salary; but the fees are small, and sometimes not well paid. The average attendance may be about 50 scholars; who are instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic. On the extreme border of the parish, where it meets those of Uphall and Livingstone, a school was erected by the late Robert Wardeu, Esq., to whom the parochial institutions were, in many respects, beholden. Though highly useful in the locality, its attendance has fluctuated much; and it would be greatly benefited by an endowment. In summer,

it is used as a preaching station in the Sabbath evenings. Every person in the parish, of suitable age, is able to read. It is not ascertained that they can all write.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—At present there are three paupers on the roll; viz. an aged woman, who receives 5s. a month, an illegitimate child, and a lunatic confined in a private asylum. The heritors support the latter by private assessment. A few receive occasional assistance. The ordinary collections amount to about L.11, and there is, besides, the sum of L.2, 12s. per annum, the interest of bonded money. Hitherto, there has been no legal assessment; but, it is feared, that one may at length become necessary, from the demand of aliment for illegitimate children, to which this parish, owing to the shifting habit of its youthful population, and other unfavourable circumstances, is much exposed.

April 1843.