

## PARISH OF SKIRLING.

PRESBYTERY OF BIGGAR, SYNOD OF LOTHIAN AND TWEEDDALE.

THE REV. JOHN ALPINE, MINISTER.

### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name and Boundaries.*—THE name has at different periods been written *Scrawline*, *Skirlin*, *Scarlane*, and *Skirling*; but the origin of these various designations cannot now be traced with certainty. The parish is only about two miles and a-half in length, the same in breadth, and approaches nearly to a square. It is bounded on the east by Broughton; on the south by Kilbucho and Biggar; on the west by Biggar; and on the north by Dolphinton and Kirkurd.

The character of its surface is uneven, never rising into any great elevation, and never spreading out into any wide extent of plain. The soil is generally fertile; and with a very few spots excepted, where there is short heather, even those parts which have been undisturbed by the industry of man, are covered with a lively green.

*Botany.*—One rare plant was discovered about two years ago in this parish, named the *Asperula taurina*. It was found by a medical gentleman in a mouthful of grass plucked by his horse. It was examined by several eminent botanists, who expressed much astonishment at its being found in the open fields, and with difficulty believed that it was not the production of a garden, being found in this high latitude, and so far from the sea coast; where it grew, however, no garden had ever been.

### II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

*Historical Notices.*—Very few facts are known as to the history of this parish. The earliest period to which any known record refers is the reign of King Robert Bruce, who granted to John Monfode the barony of Scrawline, with the advowson of the church; and in this family it seems to have continued a considerable time, for we find that a Margaret Monfode, granted an annuity\* of two merks

\* Robertson's Hist. Ind. pages 24 and 72.

Sterling, out of the lands of Scrawline, to a chaplain in the church of Dunmanyn,—which grant was confirmed by David II. in 1362. From this date there is nothing known till the sixteenth century, when the lands of Skirling, with those of Robertson, Newholm, and Heeds, in the parish of Dolphinton, were in the possession of the Cockburns.\* Haying passed from them, the barony appears to have descended with rapid succession from one family to another, for about a hundred years. In 1647, it belonged to Sir James Hamilton of Priestfield. Thence it passed to a Sir James Murray, probably one of the Murrays of Stanhope, who then held a powerful sway in this district. “In 1683, David Oswald of Dalders was infest in the lands and barony of Scrawline.” At the revolution, the estate of Skirling was possessed by a General Douglas of the Queensberry family, who, according to tradition, † fell at the battle of the Boyne. Immediately after this, it was purchased by John first Earl of Hyndford, for his second son, the Honourable William Carmichael, and in that line it has continued ever since, the present sole proprietor of the parish being Sir Thomas Gibson Carmichael of Skirling, Bart. ‡ great-grandson of the Honourable W. Carmichael by Helen, his eldest daughter, married to Sir J. Gibson of Durie.

*Parochial Registers.*—The date of the earliest parish record is the 6th of July 1654. From that time till the year 1674, the most pointed regularity seems to have been maintained, in recording every transaction connected with the session. Afterwards, to the close of that century, few entries appear to have been made. On the 23d of August 1700, regular registration again commences, and is carried on with care down to the 16th of March 1713, when it is again given up as to every thing except births: and that, too, ceases to be at-

\* “In December 1513, a cause was heard by the Lords of Council, against William Cockburn, laird of Scrawline, for taking by violence a part of his own goods, which had been escheated and granted to Mathew Campbell, viz. three verdour beds, an arras bed, three pair of sheets, a buird-claith of Dornik, (a damask table-cloth,) six frocks of Dornik, a linen buird-claith, a feather bed, with a bolster and four eods (pillows), two verdour beds, a pair of fustian blankets, a ruff and curtains, two pair of sheets, one pair of blankets of small white, a feather bed and two saddles, with their reparings, all which goods extend by good estimation to thirty pounds Scottish money.—Parl. Record, page 538.

† The same tradition says, that immediately before his leaving Skirling, he called the inhabitants together. All were alarmed, supposing that in the night of feudal dominancy, which then was little diminished, he was about to draft the stoutest to share in the perils in which he was about to engage: but it was merely to take an affectionate farewell of them, and advise them to the maintenance of brotherly kindness till his return—a return never permitted.

‡ *Retour* book in the library of the Writers to the Signet; Wodrow's *Hist.* vol. iv. p. 245.

tended to in the month of April 1719, and in the last entry made the date is omitted. After this there is a complete chasm till 1750, from which period the records are regularly and carefully kept. The population being small, the parochial registers are not voluminous.

*Antiquities.*—Various ancient coins of the reigns of Adrian and Antoninus were found about twenty years ago near a place called Greatlaws, in the north-east quarter of the parish: they are now in the possession of Laurence Brown, Esq. of Edmonstone, Larnarkshire. Such, we are assured from the recollection of living witnesses who had seen them, were the dates of these coins: but nothing farther can be ascertained, as the original collector is dead, and they, through carelessness, are now intermingled with other similar relics of the past. Near the same spot, when opening up a new communication with the Edinburgh and Dumfries mail-road, about fifteen years ago, the labourers employed came upon some graves of very ancient construction. They had at each side, and at each end, a whinstone flag, and were covered with slabs of the same material. Human bones were found in them, but nothing to elucidate the time or the occasion of their formation.

In another district there are evident traces of a religious establishment belonging to Popish times. The very name by which the farm in which it is situated is at present known bears testimony to this,—Kirklawhill being clearly corrupted from Kirklandhill. Part of the ruins still remains. Its extent appears to have been considerable; but with what abbey it might be connected, and whether its chapel might be the one then called Dumanyn, (Dumanyn signifies in Celtic the hill of the maiden, or of the good maiden,) to which Margaret Monfode made a bequest for the support of a chaplain, when it flourished, and when it decayed, it is impossible to say, for its history is lost in obscurity.

Of the house or castle of Skirling, to which reference is made in the former Statistical Report, nothing now remains to arrest the stranger's eye. All that might give a melancholy interest to the spot is utterly swept away. Its very foundation-stones, embracing more than a rood of land, are removed, and the plough may be seen passing over, and cattle grazing, where lady fair once sat, and stalwart knight once trode. While, however, it has thus vanished away, something is still known as to the causes and progress of its decline. Its possessor in the sixteenth century, Sir James Cockburn of Skirling, was married to a sister of Lord Herries, and was

not only thus connected with Queen Mary's party, but even had the honourable station assigned to him of holding the castle of Edinburgh in her name, \* and was appointed one of her commissioners at the conference at York. The downfall of her power was accordingly ruinous to him, and being deeply involved in the efforts made in behalf of the imprudent and unfortunate queen, he was peculiarly obnoxious to the triumphant party, and, by the command of the Regent Murray, his castle was demolished by a strong military force on the 12th of June 1568; and being thus overthrown it was never afterwards rebuilt and reinhabited, but was left to the destructive energies of time, and the unsparing hand of the spoiler till its desolation was completed. Though the property afterwards belonged to the Cockburns, they returned not to dwell in the ancient home of their fathers, but inhabited, as did likewise some of the succeeding proprietors, a house in the village, which, like its more venerable predecessor, has now also entirely disappeared.

*Eminent Men.*—Mr Howe, son to the late clergyman of this parish, has attained to high eminence in his profession as a painter. His panoramic representation of the Battle of Waterloo commanded general admiration at the time of its exhibition; and in the department of animal painting he stood for many years without a rival.—Nor must we pass over one who, though he was born, and continued in a humble sphere of life, is entitled to an honourable remembrance. In the disastrous days of the persecution under the cold-blooded Stuarts, Peter Gillies, of the Wauk Mill, Skirling, was one of those who were devoted unto death in the sacred cause. Having had a presbyterian minister preaching in his house, he was, in 1674, hunted from his home by Sir James Murray, the laird, and Mr James Buchan, the curate. For several years he wandered about from place to place. At last he was apprehended in the month of April 1685, at Muiravonside, was carried by the lawless soldiery to the west country, and, after endur-

\* The castle of Edinburgh was surrendered to Cockburn of Skirling for the queen. The same day the wind blew away the weathercock of the steeple of St Giles. This, saith Birrel in his Diary, fulfilled an old prophecy,

Quhen Skirlin sall be captain,  
The cock sall lose his tail.

In the *Life of Queen Mary*, by H. G. Bell, Vol. ii. page 168, when reference is made to Anderson, Vol. iv. Part ii. page 33, Sir James Cockburn of Stirling is named among the commissioners: but this is a mistake, arising from the similarity of the orthography, the difficulty of deciphering old records, and from the promineny of the one place in our national history, while the other is almost unknown. Upon examining the original manuscript with this key, and comparing it with collateral facts, it will be found that it was Sir James Cockburn of Skirling.—The present celebrated Solicitor General is, we believe, one of the descendants of this family.

ing many insults, and much cruelty, was, on the 6th of May, executed at Mauchline. "No coffins" (saith the venerable Wodrow \*) "were allowed, nor dead-clothes, but the soldiers and two countrymen made a hole in the earth, into which they cast him, together with other four, his fellow-martyrs."

### III.—POPULATION.

1. Dr Webster's Report in 1755 gives a population to this parish of	335
Armstrong's in 1775,	230
Former Statistical Account,	234
Government census in 1801,	308
1811,	310
1821,	345
1831,	358
2. There are residing in the village,	98
In the other parts of the parish,	160
3. Yearly average of births for the last 7 years,	3 $\frac{3}{7}$
of deaths,	3
of marriages,	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
4. The average number of persons under 15 years of age,	126
upwards of 70,	10
5. There is one fatuous person in the class of persons betwixt 30 and 50.	
6. Number of unmarried men upwards of 50,	6
of women upwards of 45,	8
7. Number of families in the parish,	64
chiefly employed in agriculture,	22
in trade, manufactures, and handicraft,	17

It is worthy of remark, that there is one woman, a widow, in the parish, now in her ninety-fourth year, and that about two years ago the writer of this account met her in her own house, along with her three brothers and her sister, all children of the same father and mother, and all hale and healthy, though their united ages amounted to 438 years.

*Character and Habits of the People.*—As to the outward circumstances of the people of this parish we must report very favourably. While there are some who can afford to live in the most comfortable manner, there is the absence of every thing like squalid poverty; for, even in our humblest cottages, through the abounding beneficence of Sir Thomas G. Carmichael, poverty in its sterner features is not seen. The general fare of our peasantry, though plain, is agreeable and wholesome: and having in a reasonable degree the means of subsistence, and being enabled to clothe themselves in decent apparel, they show themselves contented with their condition and circumstances. They are at the same time cleanly in their habits, orderly in their deportment, and attentive to the observances, while many of them, I trust, are acquainted with the power, of religion.

During the last three years there has not been a single illegitimate birth in the parish.

\* Vol. iv. 245 and 246.

## IV.—INDUSTRY.

*Agriculture and Rural Economy.*—By a plan of the parish, taken by Mr Bell of Edinburgh, and lying in the possession of the proprietor at Castle-Craig, it appears that the measurement of the parish in Scotch acres is 2642. Of these there are under cultivation 2072 acres; 320 capable of a profitable cultivation, were the markets to become a little more favourable; and 250 incapable of a profitable cultivation; in undivided common, 8; under wood, 27. The trees planted are ash, elm, beech, plane, and fir of different descriptions.

*Rent of Land.*—The average rent of arable land, per acre, is 15s.; of sheep-walk, 2s. 6d. per acre.

*Rate of Wages.*—The rate of labour for agricultural purposes is, for hired male-servants, per year, from L. 8 to L. 12; hired female do. in summer, from L. 3 to L. 3, 15s., and in winter, from L. 1, 15s. to L. 2, 5s.

*Breeds of Live-Stock.*—The few sheep kept are of the black-faced description, and form but an inconsiderable item. As stock, they have, we believe, received but little attention; but the dairy being here a principal source of income to the cultivators of the soil, the cows, chiefly of the Ayrshire breed, are objects of great care, and so attentive have the farmers been to their improvement, that at the neighbouring exhibition at Biggar not a few of the prizes annually fall among us.

*Husbandry.*—The system of cultivation pursued is of the most approved character. The rotation followed is that which has found most favour with experienced and intelligent judges in modern times. Lime, though brought from a distance, is much employed; and draining and irrigation, so far as they are practicable and profitable, are highly popular. From the spirit of activity introduced, there are not many acres remaining unreclaimed which could be cultivated with profit, while grain is so low in price; and there are a few spots now under the plough of a rather thin soil, which perhaps would yield a better return in pasture than in crop.

The farm-buildings, though not so excellent as in some other parts of the country, are in general commodious and suitable to the requirements of their occupants. The leases are ordinarily of nineteen years' duration; and though probably too short where there is much new land to be broken up, they seem sufficiently answerable in the circumstances in which husbandry has already been placed.

*Produce.*—As to the average gross amount of raw produce, we give the following as a probable approximation to the truth :

Raised in the parish of oats and barley, value	-	L. 3088	0	0
Potatoes and turnips,	-	998	0	0
Pasture,	-	918	0	0
Rye-grass and meadow-hay,	-	610	0	0

Total yearly value of raw produce,	-	L. 5614	0	0
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The present rental of the parish is about L. 1500 a-year: but as nearly one-third of the parish is let on an old nineteen years' lease, a considerable rise may be expected at its termination.

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Means of Communication.*—The length of the turnpike roads in the parish is three miles; and there are five bridges. The means of communication are good, as we have excellent roads in all directions. The nearest market-town is Biggar, distant two miles.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The parish church is very conveniently situated, the house most distant from it being within two miles. At what time it was built it is impossible to say; but it seems to have undergone large repairs in the year 1720, and is at present in a state of decent repair. It has sittings for upwards of 200 persons: four of these are free; but as the people are very regular in their attendance, some families are complaining of a want of accommodation. Perhaps something might be done to remedy this evil, by a slight alteration of the allocation of seats.

The manse was built in 1803, and is commodious and elegant. The glebe is an excellent one, and has been made so chiefly by the exertions of the present incumbent. In the former Account of the parish, it is stated that the house of Skirling was surrounded by a morass: and when the present manse was erected, it was considered better to fix its site near to this, than to have it in the village, where the former one stood. In consequence of this, an exchange of land was proposed and effected under the authority of the presbytery,—twenty-four acres, from the difference in quality, being given for eight, the extent of the old glebe. This bog, or rather quagmire, (for into various parts of it neither man nor beast could then penetrate,) came thus into the minister's possession, and he, instantly and vigorously commencing a system of draining, and drawing the different springs to one point, from which they flow off in a considerable rivulet, has succeeded in reducing it to a dry and fertile state. A stronger proof of the improvement effected cannot be given, than by the simple statement, that though land generally cannot be rated higher, it was valued by good judges at L. 24 when

transferred to him, but is now worth L. 72 at a moderate calculation. It is now beyond doubt a great advantage to him, and this, with 14 chalders of victual, one half meal and the other half barley, together with L. 8, 6s. 8d. allowed for communion elements, forms the living of the incumbent. The stipend for 1832 amounted to L. 193, 4s.

The number of families and persons attending the Established church, and the chapels of dissenters, is as under:

Number of families attending the Established church,	53
of persons,	270
of communicants,	160
of families attending Burgher chapel,	6
of persons,	21
of families attending Relief chapel,	5
of persons,	23

It may here be remarked, that what may be considered as the fluctuating population of the parish, the servants, adds considerably to the numerical strength of the dissenting interest, and that the children of some of the parents who belong to the dissenters are connecting themselves with the Established church.

*Education.*—There is only one school, the parochial, which, however, is quite sufficient for the accommodation of the parish. The branches of instruction taught in it are English, English grammar, writing, and arithmetic, practical mathematics, geography, Latin, and Greek. The schoolmaster has the full legal accommodations, the maximum salary, and may receive of school fees, on an average, nearly L. 26 per annum. There is a library belonging to the school, formed in 1828, and upheld by public subscriptions and collections. It contains 142 volumes, and appears to be much valued. The annual expense of education is, for English, 10s.; English and writing, 12s.; English, writing, arithmetic, &c. 14s.; Latin, 22s.; Latin and Greek, 24s.

The school is excellently taught and well attended, and if there be any cause of complaint, it is, that parents are too much inclined to take advantage of the improved mode of teaching to shorten the attendance of their children, and thus in some instances sacrifice the substantial benefit of their children for the present saving of a little money. There are only two persons in the parish upwards of 15 years of age who cannot read or write: one of these is from Ireland, and the other fatuous.

*Friendly Society.*—There is in the parish a friendly society for the mutual benefit of the members in sickness. It was instituted in 1800, and has 78 members. Its stock is L. 128, 2s. 11½d. It

gives an allowance of 3s. a-week for the first sixteen weeks of sickness, and 1s. 6d. a-week thereafter, with this proviso, to prevent injury to the society, that when any person shall have received L. 16, 13s. 8d., his claims shall thenceforth cease and determine. It is evidently a very useful institution, often aiding those in distress who would otherwise be cast upon the fund of common charity; and I have not the smallest doubt that it has a powerful effect in preserving that spirit of independence so beneficial to the interests of our country.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—The average number of poor upon the session's roll is five; weekly allowance to each, 1s. 3d.; annual amount of collections made in the church on their behalf, no mortcloth or extra profits included, L. 11, 10s. 6d. This is the only fund from which they are supplied, and any deficiencies that may occur are met by the liberality of Sir Thomas G. Carmichael, the proprietor. The number has been larger than usual for some years, and may be expected to decrease; but the diminution is to be looked for chiefly from the natural effects of time, in the removal of those advanced in life, of whom the list of paupers is at present principally made up, and not, we fear, in any indisposition generally to apply to this source of relief. It is still, without question, considered to a certain extent degrading to come upon the parish, and there are some who would submit to very severe privations ere they would consent to receive public aid; but the feeling of delicacy upon this point is certainly not nearly so intense as it was in former times.

*Prisons.*—There is a jail in the parish, the proprietor having a baron-bailie appointed, who has the power of imprisoning for forty-eight hours, but fortunately it is required only for holding the mortsafes and other parochial implements.

*Fairs.*—There are fairs held here on the third Tuesday after the 11th of May, on the first Wednesday after the 11th of June, and on the 15th of September. The first of these is a small market now limited to cattle, but the other two, especially that in June, have a large attendance of queys, cows, and horses, and there is much business done. At a former period we had a fair also on the Tuesday before the 12th of May, which now has no existence save in the almanack, and at a still more remote date the market for sheep, hogs, now held at Linton the day before the third Wednesday after the 11th of June, was held at Skirling. The traces of the bughts are still to be seen, and not long since an aged person died who recollected distinctly his having seen more than once

the bustle of the sheep fair. Why it was removed cannot now be accurately ascertained, but it may possibly be accounted for, in the tendency of the seller in dull times to draw towards the buyer; and about eighty or ninety years ago, the demand being small might induce store farmers to make a nearer approach to those arable districts of the country, where they could secure an outlet for the extra produce of their stock.

*Inns.*—There are two inns, clean and comfortable, for the accommodation of the people attending the markets.

*Fuel.*—There is scarcely such a thing as peat, the principal if not sole fuel being coal. It is brought from Douglas and Wilsontown, both places being nearly fourteen miles distant. In consequence of the long drive, it costs when laid down here at the rate of 2s. 4d. per load, or about 8d. per cwt. By the wealthier this evil is not so sensibly felt, but it presses hard upon the poorer class, and were it not for the attention of Sir T. Carmichael in clearing all the direct outlay, and of the tenantry in driving coals for them, they would necessarily and frequently find themselves sufferers from the inclemency of winter.

#### MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

In the Statistical Account given by the late Rev. Mr Howe, it is stated that every farmer sow'd five or six lippies of flax seed, and those having small possessions and even cottages two or three lippies, but now this article has scarcely a name among the productions of the parish. Cottagers and smaller tenants grow no lint, and it is rarely to be met with on any of the larger farms, as it is considered more profitable to purchase it dressed or manufactured into the fabric than to incur the necessary expenses of raising it at home. The great advance of rent not only intimates that changes favourable to the prosperity of the nation have been passing during the last forty years, but likewise that agricultural industry and improvement have been progressing. The ten smaller possessions around the village which formerly were rented at L. 1 and L. 1, 5s. an acre, now rate as high as L. 3 and L. 4; and the average rental over the whole parish, instead of 4s. is now 15s.; while, from any thing we can learn, the tenant has far less difficulty in answering the money demands made upon him by the proprietor, and has received a mighty addition to his personal, family, and domestic comforts.

But though much has already been done, there are still improvements of great benefit which remain to be accomplished. Within

these thirty years, at great expense, and with much labour in banking and draining, upwards of 100 acres have been raised from a boggy barren condition, yielding a little coarse dry hay, into a very productive state, and, by deepening Biggar water, which lies on the southern boundary, eighteen inches or two feet, up from Broughton bridge, that already reclaimed would be rendered a great deal more fertile, and more would be recovered in this parish, while in those adjacent several hundred acres would be gained. The thing has been proposed, and we have no doubt as to its ultimate accomplishment.

There is another thing which demands attention, and that is the present want of plantations and fences. Were these in greater abundance, while they would afford shelter, a thing greatly needed generally in Scotland, they would likewise render Skirling one of the sweetest parishes in her mountainous domains; nor are we without good expectations that this will not be long overlooked. There are a number of farms let upon tacks of fifty-seven years' duration, and these, unfortunately, are so scattered up and down, as every where to fetter the proprietor in the free exercise of his pleasure, but they are now drawing to a close; and from the well-known disposition of Sir Thomas Carmichael to do what is for the advantage of his estates, and from what he has actually done on his property in the parish of Kirkurd, we anticipate the period when the ditcher shall be preparing the thorn-bed, and the diker shall be plying his hammer, and the planter his spade, and the bleakness of the unenclosed plain, and the unwooded hill, shall no longer glare upon the eye of the observer.

*May 1834.*