

# PARISH OF BALMAGHIE.

PRESBYTERY OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT, SYNOD OF GALLOWAY.

THE REV. ALEX. GIBSON, MINISTER.

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## I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

THE name of this parish has been adopted from that of the principal estate which it contains. An Irish chief named M'Ghie settled here in early times, and the property he acquired was long retained by his descendants. Hence the name of the family estate and also of the parish. The Gaelic prefix Bal signifies a dwelling.

*Boundaries, &c.*—The parish lies about the middle of the stewardry of Kirkcudbright, and is of irregular figure. To the eastward it is separated from the parishes of Kelton, Crossmichael, and Parton, by the river Dee; to the northward, from Kells, by the Black water of Dee; on the west, it is bounded by the parish of Girthon; and on the south, by those of Twynholm and Tongland. The greatest length, from south-east to north-west, is about nine miles, and the greatest breadth from east to west, about seven.

*Topographical Appearances.*—To the south-east the surface of the parish is in general level, but in all other directions it is hilly, though not mountainous. The higher parts of the parish command a very extensive view, including, among other objects, the Cars-

phairn and Minnigaff hills to the north and west, those of Cumberland to the south-east, and also, in clear weather, the Isle of Man.

In the valley of the Dee the soil is kindly and fertile, and in a few places deep. Immediately adjoining the river, there are some extensive meadows, the advantage of which is felt by the farmer in the supply of much excellent keep for his dairy stock during the winter months. These meadows, in connection with the remarkable stillness of the river, which expands in many places to a great width, impart a peculiarly peaceful air to the landscape in this part of the parish.

*Hydrography.*—At Lochinbreck, on the estate of Woodhall, the property of William Kennedy Laurie, Esq., there is a mineral spring possessing considerable medicinal virtue, and which has in consequence been resorted to from time immemorial. The mineral ingredients which enter into its composition are sulphate of iron and carbonic acid. The water is transparent; a powerful tonic and diuretic, and not unpleasant to the taste. In complaints of the stomach, and disorders arising from obstruction or debility, it has often proved a very efficacious restorative. Patients afflicted with aguish complaints have generally derived much benefit from it; and even in obstinate intermittents, when bark and other medicines have failed, it has frequently been instrumental in effecting perfect cures. For the accommodation of visitors and invalids, an inn has been provided in the vicinity of the well; but there is reason to believe, that, were the accommodation more extensive, the resort to it would be still greater than it is.

There are five considerable lochs in the parish. Grannoch or Woodhall Loch is the largest, and is about two and a-half miles long, and at some places half a mile broad. In all of them, with the exception of Lochinbreck, pike and perch are to be found in considerable numbers, and on this account the trout are few. Lochinbreck, however, contains neither pike nor perch, but abounds in trout; and hence its name, which signifies the *lake of trouts*.

In general these lakes are situated in the upland districts of the parish, and their shores are for the most part unclothed with wood. Even in these circumstances, however, they please the eye by the variety and freshness they impart to the landscape; but Woodhall Loch, which is situated at the bottom of a steep bank, covered in various places by trees, possesses much beauty.

The Blackwater of Dee, taking its rise in the parish of Minni-

gaff, runs along the northern side of the parish. Flowing to the eastward, it meets the Ken at right angles, and the united stream thereafter takes the name of the Dee. This river flows to the south, forming the eastern boundary of Balmaghie, and, passing between the parish of Kelton on the east, and that of Tongland on the west, it expands into an estuary below Kirkcudbright. It is proper to remark, that, in its progress along the parish, the Dee has for the most part the aspect of a lake. In some places it is very deep, and its greatest breadth may be nearly a quarter of a mile. From the nature of the soil through which it flows, its waters are of a particularly dark colour.

The fish which frequent the Dee are, trout, sea trout, salmon, parr, pike, and perch. Trout do not abound, but of the few which are to be met with, most are of the red or better sort. During the season, the means employed by the tacksman of the fishery at Tongland for taking the salmon are so effectual, that few or none find their way to this portion of the river, with the exception of such as pass during high floods, and in the interval between Saturday and Monday, when the law requires the obstructions to be removed. The fishery opens at the beginning of February, and closes in September; after this the salmon ascend the river to spawn, and, in the spring months, retreat towards the sea. Here, as elsewhere, numbers are annually destroyed in close time by the illegal means usually resorted to for such a purpose.

In the upper district granite abounds, but in the other parts of the parish the prevailing rock is greywacke or whinstone. No limestone is to be found; and all that is used for building and agricultural purposes is brought from the shores of Cumberland.

*Zoology.*—Considerable numbers of waterfowl frequent the streams and lakes. In winter, wild ducks of various kinds, geese, and, in hard seasons, flocks of swans are to be seen on the wing and in the waters.

In the part of the Dee bounding this parish, a shell-fish is found which often contains a pearl. This fresh-water mussel has lately been pronounced by a scientific gentleman to be a very scarce variety of the *Unio Roissyi* of Michaud. The pearls have various hues and considerable beauty.

*Wood.*—Plantations thrive remarkably well, and were they of more frequent occurrence, they would tend to increase the beauty and promote the improvement of the district. In those of younger growth, larch forms the staple; but in various parts of the parish,

oaks have been planted in considerable numbers, and are found to thrive well.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

The most remarkable antiquity which the parish contains is that of the Castle of Threave, which is still standing. It is situated upon an island, several acres in extent, formed by the river Dee. The walls are very thick and strong, and bear the marks of great antiquity. It was formerly the residence of the Douglasses, and is said to have been built by one of that family upon the site of a more ancient castle, which belonged to the ancient lords or petty kings of Galloway. The remains consist of a great square tower, which has been surrounded at a small distance by a wall with three round towers. Part of the wall, with one of the towers, is still standing, and the ruins of the other two may be seen lying upon the ground. Upon the fall of the house of Douglas, and the annexation of Galloway to the Crown of Scotland in 1455, this castle came into the hands of the King; but it was afterwards transferred to the family of Maxwell. The Lords Maxwell, afterwards Earls of Nithsdale, possessed the heritable office of Stewards of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and keepers of the Castle of Threave until the year 1747, when all the heritable jurisdictions in Scotland were annexed to the Crown.

The keeper of the Castle of Threave received from each of the parishes of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright what was called "a lardner mart cow," that is, a cow in such condition as to be fit for killing and salting at Martinmas for winter provisions. These cows were regularly paid to the Earls of Nithsdale till the forfeiture of the last Earl in 1715, when the practice went into disuse; but formerly, so attentive were the family to that right, that when, in the year 1704, they sold the estate on which the Castle of Threave stood, they reserved the island and castle, that it might afford them a title to the cattle; and they regularly, by a written commission, appointed a captain of the Castle of Threave.

During the troubles under Charles I., the Earl of Nithsdale held this castle for the King, and armed, paid, and victualled a garrison of eighty men, besides officers, all at his own expense; till at length His Majesty, unable to send him any assistance, directed him to make the best conditions he could for himself and his garrison.

The same Castle of Threave was, A. D. 1451-2, the scene of an outrageous and cruel insult upon the royal authority. The

fortress was then held by William, eighth Earl of Douglas, who, in fact, possessed a more unlimited authority over the southern districts of Scotland than the reigning monarch. The Earl had, on some pretence, seized and imprisoned a baron, called Maclellan, tutor of Bombie, whom he threatened to bring to trial by his power of hereditary jurisdiction. The uncle of this gentleman, Sir Patrick Grey of Foulis, who commanded the body-guard of James II., obtained from that prince a warrant requiring from Earl Douglas the body of the prisoner. When Grey appeared, the Earl instantly suspected his errand. "You have not dined," said he, without suffering him to open his commission; "it is ill talking between a full man and a fasting." While Grey was dining, the unfortunate prisoner was, by Douglas's command, led forth to the court yard and beheaded. When the repast was finished, the King's letter was presented and opened. "Sir Patrick," said Douglas, leading Grey to the court, "right glad had I been to honour the King's messenger, but you have come too late; yonder lies your sister's son without the head; you are welcome to his dead body." Grey having mounted his horse, turned to the Earl, and expressed his wrath in a deadly oath, that he would requite the injury with Douglas's heart's blood. "To horse!" cried the haughty baron; and the messenger of his prince was pursued till within a few miles of Edinburgh. Grey, however, had an opportunity of keeping his vow; for, being upon guard in the King's antechamber at Stirling when James, incensed at the insolence of the Earl, struck him with his dagger, Sir Patrick rushed in, and dispatched him with a poleaxe.

The Castle of Threave was the last of the fortresses which held out for the house of Douglas after their grand rebellion in 1453. James II. writes an account of the exile of this potent family to Charles VII. of France, dated 8th July 1455, and adds, that all their castles had been yielded to him except Threave, which, at the time of his writing, was besieged by the royal troops.\*

Mr Joseph Train of Castle Douglas has in his possession eight small stone balls, four of them  $3\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. each, four about 1 lb. each, and a gold ring, which were found in the Castle of Threave in the summer of 1843 by some labourers whilst clearing away mould to be used as manure in the adjoining farm of Kelton Mains.

\* See Pinkerton's History, Appendix, Vol. i.; note in the Border Minstrelsy to the ballad titled Lord Maxwell's Good Night; and Forsyth's Beauties of Scotland; from which works the particulars in the text are transcribed.

There was also found, the preceding summer, a stone ball, about nineteen inches in diameter, which was presented to the Dumfries Museum, and may be seen in the Observatory at Maxwelltown.

Upon the estate of Duchrae, in the northern part of the parish, there are the marks of a small military station, which was probably occupied by a detachment of the Roman army.\*

*Land-owners.*—The landed property in the parish is divided among sixteen proprietors. Of these, several possess only a single farm, but in every instance the yearly rental is considerably above L. 50.

Balmaghie House, the residence of Captain James Murray Gordon, R. N., patron of the parish, is situated on the southern part of the parish, and not far from the Dee. Part of a more ancient building is incorporated with the present mansion, but no part of it is of modern erection. The grounds possess in a remarkable degree the undulating character so peculiar to Galloway, and, advantage having been taken of this in laying out the plantations, the effect is very pleasing.

Upon the estate of Duchrae, and near the junction of the Dee

\* The following interesting communication has been received from Mr Joseph Train of Castle-Douglas:—

“The only relic of the family of Douglas in Galloway that has reached our times, so far as my information extends, is part of an oaken bedstead, well authenticated to have been the principal one in the Castle of Threave, and said to have been that of Black Douglas himself. “It is one of the old closet kind of beds to be seen yet in some remote farm-houses in Galloway. The back and ends are of wood, and it seems to have had sliding doors in front, but they are gone. The parts that remain are entirely covered with carved figures of men and beasts, so rudely executed as to bespeak its high antiquity. Busts of the various Earls of the family in their robes and coronets are placed in the foreground, and surmounted by troopers caparisoned agreeable to the Act of James I., Parliament 9, Cap. 122. ‘Ilk laik landed man havand ten poundies in gudes and gear, shall have for his bodie and for y defence of y realme and ane sufficient action, (a leathern jacket strongly stuffed, anciently worn under a cot of mail,) ane barnet and ane glove of plate, with ane speare and sworde, ane harberihon, (habergeon) and gude iron jack for his bodie, with ane knapishag, (a head piece) and twa gude Hawkerties, (armour) for the legs.’ The infantry are evidently equipped in strict accordance with the Act James IV., Parliament 6, Cap. 87. ‘Mairover the king commands that ilk man havand the value of ane kow, in gudes and gear, shall have ane bow with ane schaife of arrows and ane speare.’ The dragoons are mounted on weasel-like chargers, each man in full panoply, and all performing different evolutions,—one is in the act of shouldering his spear, an other drawing his claymore, and a third cutting down the enemy. The first foot soldier bears the *handsengie* (standard), to which is attached a forked streamer with a lattier, or St Andrew’s cross. The national banner is supported by a sturdy bilman,—next comes an archer with his bow bent, and carrying in his belt his schaife of arrows, and their various *Rantmen* and *Gillies*. The piper is a conspicuous person in this motley group, by the size of his cheeks, which appear extended to an extraordinary size by pressing wind into his instrument. He is accompanied by a Paganini-like personage playing on a one-stringed fiddle. The drummer, too, is a person of distinction—he is represented as on a march, his drum being unbraced and slung over his shoulder by a belt; but a variety of sword and Morris dancers seem more actively employed, being represented in all the zany buffoon attitudes of such performers. Although this an-

and Ken, the proprietor, John Cuninghame, Esq., built, about twenty years ago, a very handsome house, in the old English style. The stone used is granite, and was obtained partly in this parish and partly in Kells. The situation has considerable natural advantages, of which the proprietor has judiciously availed himself, and the place possesses much beauty.

These two gentlemen usually reside upon their estates in the parish. There are three other resident heritors, who farm their own lands.

The ecclesiastical history of this parish is interesting in one particular, from its connection with the origin of the Reformed Synod. Mr John M'Millan, the founder of that body, was minister of Balmaghie for more than two years. This gentleman appears not to have been satisfied with the Revolution settlement; and, accordingly, in May 1703, as the presbytery record bears, he protested verbally against all the courts of the Established Church, and declared, that "he would withdraw from the presbytery for three or four presbytery days, and perhaps longer;" but refused, in the first instance, to assign his reasons for adopting such a course. On being dealt with, however, he declared, that "the oath of allegiance, as cumulative to other defections, was the ground of his withdrawing, and that he knew not whether this church was Pres-

ident *bustle* (bed) cannot be, with any degree of certainty, traced back for a longer period than 886 years, its rude workmanship is indicative of higher antiquity. The figures are as rudely executed as the effigies on the coin of Alexander III., but the framework carving by which they are surrounded, and the ornamental panels below, are done in better taste and with more regularity.

"Since this relic came into my possession the greater part of the figures have been transplac'd and strengthened, with a view to make them resist for a few centuries more the work or ravages of time."

During the persecution in the seventeenth century, many persons, it is well known, suffered in Galloway in the cause of religion. In the churchyard of Balmaghie there are two grave-stones commemorative of the death of martyrs, one of which bears the following inscription:

"Here lyes David Halliday, portioner of Meiseld, who was shot upon the 21st of Feb. 1685; and David Halliday, once in Glengape, who was likewise shot upon the 11th July 1685, for their adherence to the principles of Scotland's Covenanted Reformation.

Beneath this stone two David Hallidays  
Doe lie, whose souls now sing their Master's praise.  
To know, if curious passengers desire,  
For what, by whom, and how they did expire:  
They did oppose this nation's perjury;  
Nor could they join with lordly prelacy.  
Indulging favours from Christ's enemies  
Quenched not their souls: This monument then cries,  
These were the names, not to be forgot,  
Why they by Leg so wickedly were shot.  
One name, one stone, one grave, one heaven do tie  
Their souls to that one God eternally."

byterian or Episcopal, in regard the General Assembly had not declared the same by their explicit act." At a later stage, he gave in a written statement of grievances, as affecting, in his judgment, the purity and Scriptural character of the Church. In taking this step, he had the avowed concurrence of two other members of the presbytery, but who afterwards withdrew their support, so that he was left alone. After a variety of proceedings in the case, the narrative of which occupies a large portion of the presbytery records of the time, and Mr M'Millan still preserving, upon the whole, the attitude he had assumed, the presbytery at length proceeded to his deposition, in December 1703. This sentence they pronounced mainly upon the ground that the course pursued by Mr M'Millan, in withdrawing himself from the presbytery, and in other respects, was, in their judgment, essentially divisive and schismatic. Such, however, was the regard in which he was held by the parishioners, that they resisted every attempt to eject him from the manse and church. Mr William M'Kie, though legally inducted to the charge, was obliged to hire a house for himself, and to officiate in a barn to those who were willing to acknowledge and attend his ministry.\* At length, after the struggle had continued in the parish for twelve years, Mr M'Millan retired voluntarily, and connected himself with the United Societies which existed in various parts of the country, and adhered to Mr Cameron's views of ecclesiastical polity. In 1743, he was joined by Mr Thomas Nairne, a minister of the Associate Presbytery, but who had separated from that body. These two ministers, together with some ruling elders, concurred in constituting a presbytery at Braehead, in the parish of Carnwath, on the 1st of August 1743, under the appellation of the Reformed Presbytery.

On the first December 1753, Mr M'Millan died at Broomhill, in Lanarkshire, and was buried in the churchyard of Dalsersf, where a monument has lately been erected to his memory. He attained the venerable age of eighty-four years.

*Parochial Registers.*—In regard to parochial registers, it may be mentioned, that, prior to 1804, but little attention appears to

\* When some of Mr M'Kie's adherents went to plough the glebe for his behoof, those of his competitor rose up against them, cut the reins in pieces, turned the horses loose, and threw the ploughshare into the adjoining lake. Some threatened violence to the minister's person. An infuriated female actually attempted the execution of it, and would probably have effected her purpose, had he not interposed his hand between his throat and a reaping sickle, with which she was armed. His fingers were cut to the bone. The glove which he wore was carefully preserved, as a memorial of the providential escape he had made.—*Note to the Old Statistical Account.*

have been bestowed on this particular. Since that date a register of marriages, births, and baptisms has been regularly kept.

### III.—POPULATION.

Population in 1755, according to Dr Webster's return,	697
1794,	962
Population in 1831,	males, 721 ; females, 695 ; total, 1416.
1841,	males, 592 ; females, 660 ; total, 1252.

Of these 275 reside in the village of Laurieston, and 243 in that of Bridge of Dee. The number of families is 268, giving an average of something more than  $4\frac{1}{2}$  persons to each family. The average number of children residing in each family is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ .

Number of population under 15 years is	459
between 15 and 30,	302
30 and 50,	270
50 and 70,	170
70 and upwards,	51
	<hr/> 1252

Bachelors above fifty years of age are 10 in number ; the unmarried women above forty-five are 13. There are 3 fatuous and 2 blind persons. There is one deaf and dumb boy, who is at present receiving his education in Edinburgh. The average number of births for the last seven years is  $24\frac{1}{2}$  ; the average number of marriages for the same period is 6. The inhabited houses are 226, and the uninhabited, 9.

The decrease of 164 in the population since 1831 is accounted for by the circumstance, that, at that period, operations were carrying on to deepen the bed of the Dee, at the lower end of the parish, with the view of facilitating the passage of the waters during floods. This of course led to the employment and temporary residence of a considerable number of workmen, who have since passed away. The same circumstance accounts for the fact, that, in the return for that period, the number of males was considerably above that of females.

*Character and Habits of the People.*—The people are in general comfortably clothed and lodged, and they appear to be contented. Most of the cottagers keep a pig or two, and, as the farmers are accustomed to allow potato land for the manure thus produced, they are in this way supplied with an important article of food.

### IV.—INDUSTRY.

*Agriculture.*—The staple employment is agriculture, and by far the greater number of families is engaged in its pursuits. Upon these, of course, the artisans and shop-keepers are dependent for their support.

The total number of acres in the parish may be estimated at 17,518 Scots. Of these, about 5472 are arable, and 12,046 remain constantly waste or in pasture. Cultivation, it is believed, has been extended over all the lands from which a profitable return could reasonably be expected.

*Rent of Land.*—The average rent of arable land is 15s. per Scots acre. The real rental of the parish is L.6200. When the Old Statistical Account was drawn up, the real rental was L.2640.

*Live-Stock.*—Galloway cattle are reared over the whole parish, and for them the farmers in general have a decided preference over all other breeds. There are, however, on some of the farms, a number of Ayrshire cows. In the higher districts, a number of Highlanders are grazed. In regard to sheep, the black-faced sort are of course the staple on the upland farms; but, on the richer soils, crosses between the Leicester and Mug, or between the Leicester and Cheviot, are also reared.

The general duration of leases is nineteen years. The farmsteadings are in general good; those on the estate of Balmaghie were all rebuilt near the beginning of this century, and are excellent specimens of that class of buildings. Stone dikes constitute the usual enclosure, and are, upon the whole, in a good state of repair. In tillage husbandry, the seven shift rotation is usually followed. Bone-dust is used to a considerable extent in the raising of turnips, which are eaten off by sheep, and thus the farmer is enabled to have an additional quantity of land under the plough. A good deal of draining is every year done, but, as stones are plentiful, tiles are not much used.

*Raw Produce.*—The average gross amount of raw produce annually raised in the parish may be estimated as follows:

36,650 bushels of oats, at 2s. 5d.,	L.4428	10	10
1,000 Do. barley, at 3s. 5d.,	170	16	8
190 acres of potatoes, at L.8 per acre,	1520	0	0
123 Do. turnips, at L.4 per do.	492	0	0
56,500 stones of meadow hay, at 4d. per stone,	941	13	4
18,780 Do. rye-grass hay, at 8d. per do.	489	10	0
253 cows, producing L.6 per head annually,	1518	0	0
959 black-cattle, yielding an average return for keep by the year, of L.2, 10s.	2397	10	0
4,080 moorland sheep, at 4s. per head,	816	0	0
835 white-faced sheep, at 10s.	167	10	0
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	L.12,921	10	10

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

There are two considerable villages in the parish, Laurieston

and Bridge of Dee, the population of which has already been given.

*Market-Town.*—Castle Douglas, in the parish of Kelton, is the nearest market-town, and is situated at the distance of about six miles from the centre of Balmaghie. There are two branch post-offices in the parish. The length of turnpike road may be estimated at about sixteen miles. The fences along the way sides are in very good repair; and the same remark applies to the bridges. That across the Dee at Glenlochiar was built by subscription about the beginning of this century, and is substantial and commodious.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The church, which was built in 1794, and is in a good state of repair, is situated near the Dee, and consequently at one side of the parish. It is seated for nearly four hundred persons. No payment is exacted for sittings, but the whole of the church is allocated to the respective estates, with the exception of the communion seats, which are capable of accommodating thirty-six persons, and are free to all.

The manse was built near the beginning of the present century, and is in an excellent state of repair. The extent of the glebe is fourteen Scots acres, and may be worth about thirty shillings per acre. The stipend is sixteen chalders, half barley and half meal.

There are about 112 individuals professing to adhere to the Church of Rome, and 22 Episcopalians. There are 11 persons connected with the Reformed Synod, and three families with the United Associate Synod.

*Education.*—There are two parochial schools, one of which is situated in the village of Laurieston, and the other at Glenlochiar. The salary connected with the former is L.30 Sterling, and the school fees may yield an equal sum. That of the teacher at Glenlochiar is L.21, 6s. 6½d. Sterling, and the school fees may amount to L.14. A dwelling-house has lately been erected by the heritors for the teacher at Laurieston. There is a third school at Bridge of Dee, endowed by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to whom the lands in that neighbourhood belong. The salary paid to the teacher, including certain items allowed him, is nearly L.30, and the school fees may be estimated at L.25. He is accommodated with a house and offices.

Sunday schools have been established in three different localities, and are at present attended by upwards of 100 young people.

*Library.*—A subscription library was commenced many years ago, and is still in existence; but the members are not numerous.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—There are at present 30 paupers receiving stated aid from the poor's funds. The highest sum paid to a pauper, in ordinary circumstances, is L.5 annually, and the lowest L.1. There are two insane paupers supported from these funds at an annual charge of L.26. The sum annually expended upon the poor amounts to about L.80, and is raised partly by the collections in the church, and partly by donations from the heritors individually. Amongst many there is an evident reluctance to apply, in the first instance, for stated relief; but it is equally observable, that the feeling disappears when they have been in receipt of such aid for a time.

*Inns and Alehouses.*—There are five small inns and two alehouses in the parish. All of these, with one exception, are conducted with much propriety, and, it is believed, without ill consequences to the morals of the people.

*Fuel.*—In various parts of the parish peat is found in great abundance, and constitutes the fuel principally used by the inhabitants. Coal is imported from the shores of Cumberland, and landed at Kirkcudbright, Tongland, and Palnackie in the parish of Buittle; but as the nearest of these places is nine miles distant, the charge for overland carriage constitutes a heavy per centage upon the cost of the article. At the less busy seasons, many of the farmers are in the practice of sending for coals to Dalmellington in Ayrshire. The distance is not less than thirty-five miles; but, considering the small charge at the pit-mouth, the trifling expenses incurred on the road, and that the journeys are so timed as not materially to interfere with the work of the farm, this is found to be a rather economical method of procuring a supply of fuel.

*February 1844.*