

PARISH OF BALMACLELLAN.

PRESBYTERY OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT, SYNOD OF GALLOWAY.

THE REV. GAVIN CULLEN, A.M., *Minister.*

THE REV. GEORGE MURRAY, *Assistant and Successor.**

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—BALMACLELLAN is one of the four parishes in the northern district of the stewartry of Kirkcudbright, commonly known by the name of Glenkens. The compound word Bal-Maclellan is understood to signify the township or manor of the Maclellans, once extensive proprietors in Galloway. The power of this ancient family, however, is now gone; the title of Baron Kirkcudbright, by which a branch of it was ennobled in 1633, is now dor-

* By whom the following account is drawn up.

mant, and no individual of the name has possessed land in the parish for more than a hundred years.

Extent, Figure, &c.—The parish is of an oblong figure, and bounded almost entirely by streams and rivers. From the Ken, on the west, it stretches to the river Urr, which, flowing from a loch of the same name, forms its eastern boundary for several miles. The Craig and Crogo rivulets, rising from the same range of hills, run in opposite directions, and separate it from the parish of Parton, on the south; while on the north, the Garple and another smaller stream separate it from Dalry and Glencairn. The whole superficies is estimated in the county map at 37 square miles. It is the smallest parish in the district.

Topographical Appearances, &c.—Along the banks of the Ken a series of *drums* stretches towards the interior for two or three miles. The country then assumes a wilder and more rugged aspect. Moors, morasses, and hills of considerable height appear, interspersed with a few cultivated fields. Eastward, the land has been rapidly emerging from its originally barren and uninteresting condition. There still, however, remain extensive plains of moss, possessing all the sterility of the desert, and apparently incapable of the least improvement.

Meteorology.—The climate is upon the whole damp and the heights swampy. As drainage is scarcely known or imperfectly practised, water continues long on the hills. No epidemic prevails: rheumatism is common; and perhaps more people die of pulmonary complaints than of any other.

Hydrography.—The lakes or lochs in Balmaclellan are numerous. They are principally situated among the upland heights, but are far inferior in beauty to Loch Ken. This noble sheet of water sweeps the western boundary of the parish, and presents to the eye an agreeable variety of bay, promontory, and wooded isle. The river that supplies this splendid loch frequently overflows its banks till the whole valley assumes the appearance of an inland sea. The most destructive of these periodical inundations occurs in the beginning of August or end of July, and is known in the country by the name of the Lammas Speat. Of the innumerable tributaries that tend to this immense increase of waters, the Garple is deserving of notice. In some parts, it flows through a narrow and rugged channel, while on either side rise lofty precipices wooded to their summit. Its progress is marked by a few waterfalls. The most picturesque of these is the Holy Linn, a

cascade, worthy of its present celebrity, both on account of its natural beauty, and from having been the spot where the ejected minister of the parish, in persecuting times, occasionally baptized the children of his flock. In alluding to the scenery of Balmaclellan, the extensive and varied prospect in the neighbourhood of the village is well entitled to notice. Tourists, painters, and poets have all endeavoured to do it justice, but we have seen no effort either of the pencil or pen at all worthy of it. It will stand a comparison with the fairest scenes in the Highlands, and presents a fine combination of all the features mentioned by Scott in his description of national landscape :

“ Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood.”

Geology.—The principal rocks are whinstone and slate. There are two quarries of the latter within the parish. The metal is excellent, but they have not been wrought to any extent for several years.

Zoology.—The lakes of Balmaclellan are frequented by a great variety of water-fowl. Here wild geese and swans are occasional visitants. The coot is rarely found, yet we have seen its rude and singular nest among the reeds on the rushy margin of Loch Ken. It is so constructed as to float on the surface, and to rise or fall with the water. A still rarer bird is the kingfisher. It has been seen hovering over the Garple, and watching its prey as it rose to the surface of the stream. The small grebe is seldom noticed. Herons are by no means uncommon. Allured by an abundant supply of fish, these birds wander at certain seasons by the loneliest streams and most secluded lakes. The rapacious birds are not numerous. The eagle confines his range to the wilder scenery west of the Ken, and rarely crosses the parish. Hawks, however, reared in other quarters, take long flights, and sweep the cultivated fields for partridge and smaller birds. A pair of ravens still maintain their residence. Rooks, on the other hand, are abundant. Swarms of them, proceeding from two colonies in the parish, and reinforced by those of Kenmure, annoy the farmer in seed-time and harvest. On the whole, however, from their destruction of noxious insects, they may be looked upon not so much as a nuisance as a benefit. A few years ago, a sort of grub settled on the summit of the hills, and, spreading its ravages downwards, reduced the green heights to absolute sterility. Thither the rooks were gathered together, and, after waging war with the destroyer,

have roosted ever since, in considerable numbers, on some tall trees near the foot of Cairnsmoor. Of the smaller birds that enliven the grove, a great variety abounds. At the approach of winter large flocks of "lintwhites sing in chorus" on some tall poplars near the manse. They all pause together, and then after a short interval resume their warbling. A few years ago, the misel-thrush and starling were exceedingly rare. They are now abundant. The cross-bill forms another recent addition to the feathered race of the district. Plantations have increased in the neighbourhood, and there this interesting stranger may be seen, from time to time, extracting seeds, with his singular bill, from the cones of the Scotch fir.

There are no quadrupeds worthy of notice. The little, spirited, and serviceable species of horse once so famous in Galloway, is scarcely ever met with. Of the wilder animals the species are few. Foxes have no particular haunt or *yird* in the parish, and badgers are unknown. Otters abound, but remain the unmolested tenants of the stream. They are never harassed by the sportsman with spear or hound, and only one individual, with a trap of his own construction, has disturbed their peaceful possession of the deep. This invention, if skilfully applied, and with a due regard to the habits of these animals, might be successfully employed for their destruction.

The streams and lochs are well stored with fish, and afford ample opportunity to the angler to display his skill. In Loch Houie and Loch Urr pike are very plentiful; and the largest ever caught in Britain was taken from the waters of the Ken. Here also perch abound, though introduced scarce a century ago. In the time of harvest, a very large species of trout ascends the Shirmers and Garple to deposit its spawn. In spite, however, of prohibitory statutes, poachers and others manage with impunity to sweep the streams with nets, or, in the dark night, spear the fish upon the fords, by means of torch light. The trout of Loch Brack rival those of Lochinvar in quality, and are far superior in point of size. Two were caught this year, weighing five and seven pounds respectively. Barscobe, Loch Skae, and the Lows deserve also to be mentioned. On the whole, there is no parish in the south where the angler may more successfully pursue his solitary but pleasant pastime. The following is a well-known "saw" among the brothers of the rod and line in this district:—

“ When the mist creeps up the hill,
Fisher out and try your skill :—
When the mist begins to nod,
Fisher then put past your rod.”

Botany.— Few plants, in an economical point of view, are worthy of notice. Chair-bottoms and mats were once formed of the bull-rushes that fringe Loch Ken. Quantities of the *Vaccinium oxycoccos*, or cranberry, are still gathered from the bogs, and the fruit of the wild bullace tree (*Prunus insititia*) forms an excellent preserve. The brake or bracken, though not abundant, is occasionally employed as litter for cattle. Though the botanist traverse the whole parish, he will find no great variety of plants to reward his labour. A few of the more interesting flowers, however, may here be mentioned. The pale butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*), never found on the east coast of Scotland, is plentifully scattered over the moors. *Pyrola minor* (lesser wintergreen) is found on one spot alone on the Garple. The densely matted foliage of the water lobelia (*Lobelia Dortmanna*) often forms a green carpet at the bottom of the upland lakes. This singular aquatic, with its pale blue flowers, must yield in beauty to the white lily and water crowfoot, which, in the summer months, here expand their blossoms in great profusion. In addition to these, we may simply name the following: *Solanum Dulcamara*, woody nightshade or bitter-sweet; *Utricularia vulgaris*, greater bladder-wort; *Circæa Lutetiana*, common enchanter's nightshade; *Viburnum Opulus*, common guelder-rose; *Lythrum Salicaria*, spiked purple loosestrife; *Alisma ranunculoides*, lesser water plantain; *Meum athamanticum*, meum or bald-money; *Briza media*, common quaking grass; *Rumex alpinus*, alpine dock or monk's rhubarb. Roses, geraniums, and saxifrages also abound.

The plantations seldom exceed ten or twelve acres in any one place, being mostly confined to small isolated spots. The soil is well calculated for the growth of trees, especially of oak and ash. A few noble specimens of the silver fir were overturned at Barscobe by the hurricane of January 1839. They were of great age, and had attained an uncommon size. A solitary ash tree of a peculiar shape has long flourished at Killochy. It is seen from every point of the compass at a distance of many miles, and is known by the name of the “Daffin-tree.” Probably it was so called from the natives in former days assembling there for amusement, and, like the inhabitants in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, “leading out their sports beneath the spreading tree.”

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Remarkable Characters, &c.—There is no event of importance connected with the civil history of this parish. In 1545, Ar. Scott, parson of Balmaclellan, along with the prior of Inchmahome, was appointed tutor to the infant Mary of Scots, and sent to France with her in 1548 when betrothed to the Dauphin.

The Rev. Thomas Verner, a man eminent for piety, was ordained minister of the parish, previous to the Restoration, outlived the persecution, and died so late as 1716, being the last of the old Presbyterian ministers that survived the Revolution, and father of the Church at the time of his death.

The Rev. Samuel Smith of Borgue, the talented and accomplished author of an Agricultural Survey of Galloway, was a native of Balmaclellan.

Land-owners.—The chief land-owners are Viscount Kenmure and John Eden Spalding, Esq. of Holm.

Parochial Registers.—The parochial registers have not been regularly kept, and are not voluminous. The earliest entry was made in 1747.

Antiquities.—On Dalarran Holm there is a standing stone of great size, but without any inscription, which is said to mark the spot where a Danish warrior fell in a bloody battle. Broken spears have been discovered at different periods in its vicinity.

There is a moot-hill near the village; and, not long ago, a ball and seven pins of large dimensions were found buried in a moss where peat had been cut from time immemorial. Mr Train, the antiquarian, and well-known friend of Sir Walter Scott, gives the following account of this interesting relic, now in his possession.

“A few years ago, as the servants of Mr Ball of Baryown were casting peats on Ironmacaunnie Moor, when cutting near the bottom of the moss, they laid open with their spades what appeared to be the instruments of an ancient game, consisting of an oaken ball, eighteen inches in circumference, and seven wooden pins, each thirteen inches in length, of a conical shape, with a circular top. These ancient “Reel-pins,” as they are termed by Strutt in his “Sports and Pastimes of the People,” were all standing erect on the hard till, equidistant from each other, with the exception of two, which pointed towards the ball, that lay about a yard in front, from which it may be inferred they were overthrown in the course of the game. The ball has been formed of solid oak, and, from its decayed state, must have remained undisturbed

for centuries, till discovered at a depth of not less than twelve feet from the original surface.

“ In the excavations making at Pompeii, utensils are often found, seemingly in the very position in which they were last used. This may be accounted for by the suddenness of the calamity that befel that devoted city; but what induced or impelled the ancient gamblers, in this remote corner of the Glenkens, to leave the instruments of their amusements in what might be considered the middle of the game, is more difficult to solve. These relics, which are in my possession, can now only be prized for their curiosity, the singular position in which they were found, and the relation they bear to ancient times.”

Buildings.—Two bridges, in the memory of man, had been successively swept away by the rapid inundations of the Ken; and it was only in 1822 that a structure of sufficient strength was reared. Three of the piers were built on dry land. A partly new channel was then made to give way to the water; and now the violence of the current is principally spent on that portion of the bridge which is founded on a rock. This elegant yet substantial edifice consists of five arches, is built of granite from Lowran, measures 400 feet, and can boast of an arch whose chord or span is nearly 100 feet.

III.—POPULATION.

According to the session record in	1755, the population was	534
By return of the Rev. J. Thomson in	1792,	495
By census in	1801,	534
	1811,	734
	1821,	912
	1831,	1013
	1841,	1134

The population in the village of Balmaclellan is 116; in Crogo, 60.

Yearly average of births for the last seven years,	25
deaths,	10
marriages,	4

The only family of independent fortune is that of Carruthers of Craig. Mr Scot of Craigmuir spends a portion of the year on his own estate, and, from his enterprise and liberality, is a great acquisition to the parish.

Of fourteen proprietors one only is possessed of land under L.50 of yearly value.

Unmarried men, bachelors and widowers, upwards of 50 years of age,	25
women upwards of 45,	66

There are seven fatuous individuals in the parish, and one insane person. Six of these are supported by a legal assessment.

Character of the People.—The inhabitants generally live in a comfortable manner. They are sober, industrious, intelligent, and enterprising. They live on good terms with one another, and are given to hospitality. The benefits of education are duly appreciated, and they are regular in their attendance on the ordinances of religion. The only game to which they are devoted, is that of curling. All ranks join in this amusement with unbounded enthusiasm and spirit.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture, &c.—The parish contains 23,737 imperial acres. The land cultivated, or occasionally under tillage, amounts to about 4000 acres. After making a large allowance for land under water, roads, extensive plains of moss, and about 300 acres of plantation, the remainder is chiefly pasture.

Breeds of Live-Stock.—Till lately, sheep of the black-faced breed formed the only stock of this description. In one of the largest farms, they are now crossed with the white-faced breed. The Cheviot and finer kinds are also sometimes met with; but the cross, on the whole, is preferred, as better adapted to the soil and climate. Here, Galloway cattle are much esteemed. The cows are almost all of this sort, with the exception of a few of the Ayrshire breed. It is also worthy of notice, that whereas fifty years ago, scarce a dozen pigs were found in the parish, 350 on an average are now annually fattened for the Dumfries market. Estimating these at L.2, 5s. each, the sum of L.787, 10s., or about one-sixth of the rental of the parish, must be realized from this source alone.

Husbandry.—Of the general system of farming, there is little worthy of remark. Six of the best arable farms in the parish are entirely in pasture, and the tenants themselves are non-resident. Of those under tillage, it may be said in general, that they are over-cropped. This evil, however, is rather on the decline. A few of the farmers still hold the plough. Indeed the ploughmen of Balmaclellan hold a prominent place in the district competitions, and have uniformly carried off a fair proportion of the prizes annually awarded. On some estates the houses and fences are far from good. There, a system of subsetting has been carried on for years, and produced the most miserable results. In general, however, there is a progressive improvement. Landlords grant leases of fifteen and nineteen years' duration, and, on the whole, are indulgent, liberal, and enlightened.

parts of Balmaclellan, Parton, and Kirkpatrick-Durham. A neat church has already been erected with this view in the last-mentioned parish. There is little prospect, however, of its being anything beyond a preaching station. The people are poor, and the probationer employed is most inadequately supported.

Manse, Glebe, &c.—The manse was built about the beginning of this century. It is pleasantly situated, commands a fine view of the valley of the Ken, and is, on the whole, comfortable and commodious. The glebe extends to nearly fifty acres, and has been well fenced, subdivided, and improved, by the present incumbent. Its value, together with a few houses in the village, may be about L.80. The stipend is exactly L.226, 19s. 9d. Five or six families of Catholics are in the parish. The number of Dissenting families of all denominations is 22.

Education.—The parish is remarkably well supplied with schools. Three are parochial, and a fourth is undertaken at the teacher's own adventure. In the principal school, no fees are exacted. This arrangement was made in consequence of a bequest to that effect of L.500. This sum was laid out in the purchase of a small landed property, which now yields about L.70 per annum. The teacher has also the yearly allowance of one chalder, or L. 17, 2s. 2d., as well as a house and garden. The whole number of scholars in the parish at the last Presbyterial examination amounted to 218.

Poor.—At present there are twenty-four individuals on the roll receiving parochial relief. Seven of these are widows. The rest are orphans, or fatuous and infirm persons. A legal assessment has just been introduced, but its influence on the habits and feelings of the people cannot yet be determined.

Inns, &c.—There are four licensed retailers of ardent spirits in the parish. The sale, however, must be very limited. The inns are poor and little frequented.

Fuel.—Peat is the common fuel, and is both cheap and abundant. Coal is chiefly procured from Ayrshire, and very rarely from the ports on the Solway. The original cost at Dalmellington is only 2s. 1d. per cart.

Drawn up in 1840; revised January 1844.