

PARISH OF COLMONELL.

PRESBYTERY OF STRANRAER, SYNOD OF GALLOWAY.

THE REV. THOMAS BLAIR, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name—Boundaries.—It cannot be ascertained how this parish received its present name. Some derive it from St Columba, others from the Latin word *Columba*, a pigeon, because the woods abound with wood-pigeons. Craigneil, a place nearly opposite the village, signifies in Gaelic the lime-rock, and from this it has been conjectured by some that Colmonell or Colmoneil may have reference to the natural appearance of the district—the parish abounding in limestone. Its greatest length is about $19\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and its greatest breadth 7. The superficial contents may be estimated at 56,800 acres. It is bounded on the west, by the parish of Ballantrae; on the east, by Girvan and Bar; on the south, by Minnigaff, Penningham, and Kirkcowan; and on the north, by the Frith of Clyde.

Topographical Appearances.—The holms on the banks of the Stinchar, Dhuisik, and Lendal are of a rich alluvial soil, and bear excellent crops of wheat, barley, oats, &c. The declivities on the banks of these streams are beautifully clothed with a mixture of oak, ash, elm, larch, alder, and birch; and in many places are sufficiently gentle to admit of cultivation. The higher grounds in some places are of a cold stiff clayey nature, with gravelly bottom, but for the most part moorland, and where the attempt has been made, they are brought with great difficulty into cultivation. They are fitter for sheep-farming than pasture. The hills which frame the valleys are of no great elevation. Their greatest height is about 700 feet above the level of the sea; and on each side of the Stinchar, they are generally composed of mountain limestone.

Hydrography.—Stinchar is the most considerable and beautiful river in the parish. It has its source in the parish of Bar, and on entering this, winds its clear waters in a westerly direction through it for nearly nine miles. In its course, it is joined by the

Dhuisk, or Black-water, another large stream, and crossed by three stone and the same number of wooden bridges. The oldest stone bridge, and at that time the only one between this district and Galloway, was built in 1731. It fell at first, and the contractors were assisted in the second erection by collections made in the parish churches throughout Ayrshire and Galloway. There are also several fresh water lochs in the parish. The largest, and most beautiful and romantic, are Loch Dornal and Loch Mabeiry. The latter discharges itself by the river Bladenoch into the sea at Wigton.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Heritors.—There are twenty land-owners. The property of the Duchess de Coigny is of the highest valuation.

Parochial Registers.—The register of births commences in 1759, and there are no sessional records of older date than 1786.

Antiquities.—There are still remaining the ruins of Knockdaw, Carleton, Craigneil, Kirkhill, Penwherry, and Knockdolian Castles. Craigneil in particular is a fine ruin. It is said to have been built in the thirteenth century, and to have been one of the hiding-places of King Robert the Bruce, during his wanderings in Ayrshire and Galloway. Elevated on a rock of mountain limestone, it commands a view of the whole valley of Stinchar from Penmore to Knockdolian. It belongs to the Most Noble the Marquis of Ailsa, and in feudal times was a prison and place of execution. Not less interesting are the graves of three martyrs who, in the times of persecution, resisted unto blood. The following inscription on the head-stone of one of them, and recorded in the Cloud of Witnesses, may have suggested the name of Mucklewrath, the raving enthusiast in old Mortality.

“ I, Mathew M'Ilraith, in parish of Colmonell,
By bloody Claverhouse I fell,
Who did command that I should die,
For owning Covenanted presbytry,
My blood a witness still doth stand
Gainst all defections in this land.”

Modern Buildings.—The mansion houses of Penmore, Dalger+rock and Knockdolian, though built more than a hundred years ago, are still inhabited.—Ballochmorie, the seat of W. Macadam, Esq. grandson of the celebrated road-improver, was built in 1833. The grounds surrounding it are laid out with great taste, and when the plantations shall have grown up, the mansion itself will be as comfortable as it is elegant. R. Waron, Esq. of Mayfield, a spirited proprietor, is just now erecting a spacious dwelling on

his property at Drumlamford. This building when completed will greatly enliven that hitherto dreary and desolate tract of country.

III.—POPULATION.

| | | |
|---------------------|---|------|
| Population in 1801, | - | 1806 |
| 1821, | - | 1981 |
| 1831. | - | 2218 |

There have been 12 illegitimate births during the last three years. The number is on the decline; and there has been a considerable improvement of morals in this respect. Instances of this kind have of late years been generally followed by marriage.

The greater part of the population is engaged in agriculture. The rest are fishers, day-labourers, and country artisans.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—

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|-------------------------------|---|---|------------|
| Under the plough, | - | - | 3000 acres |
| Moor and pasture land, | - | - | 51000 |
| Natural wood and plantations, | - | - | 800 |
| Meadows, | - | - | 2000 |

Husbandry.—It is difficult to estimate the amount and value of the raw produce of the parish, from the unwillingness of some to give the necessary information. As far as it could be ascertained, it is as follows:

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|------------|------------------------------|---------|
| Oats, | 6000 bolls at 17s. per boll, | L. 5100 |
| Wheat, | 2000 do. 24s. do. | 2400 |
| Barley, | 700 do. 20s. do. | 700 |
| Potatoes, | 9000 do. 8s. do. | 3600 |
| Turnips, | 200 acres at L. 8 per acre, | 2400 |
| Rye-grass, | 400 do 200 stones do. | 2000 |

L. 16200

Agriculture is as well understood, and practised with as much success here, as in the other districts of the country. The lower lands on Dhuisk, Lendal, and Stinchar are in general well enclosed and subdivided. The usual rotation adopted is a five-shift, consisting of green crop, barley or wheat, sown down with grass, the grass cut the first, and pastured the second year, and oats. The abundance of sea weed, and lime, and of late, the introduction of bone manure, have contributed greatly to the improvement of the soil; and the towns of Girvan, Ayr, Kilmarnock, Glasgow, and Liverpool, afford a ready and excellent market for every article of produce.

Live Stock.

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| Cunningham breed of cattle of all ages, | - | 500 |
| Galloway do. | - | 1500 |
| Black-faced sheep, | - | 9000 |
| Leicester and Cheviot do. | - | 200 |
| Horses, | - | 250 |
| Swine, | - | 300 |
| Goats, | - | 60 |

Of late years, the produce of the dairy has been an object of considerable importance. The Cunningham breed of cattle have in consequence greatly increased, and much attention has been paid to their improvement. The average quantity of cheese made in the parish may be about 3600 stones per annum, which at last year's price of 8s. per stone, amounts to L. 1400. On the higher lands, the care of black-faced sheep and Galloways is still the principal object of the farmer. About 200 stones white, and 1000 laid wool are disposed of annually. Last year, the white sold at 15s. and the laid at 9s. per stone. The farmers, for the most part, rear the Galloways, and after feeding them for two or three years, sell them to cattle-dealers from the south.

Fisheries.—The coast abounds in fish of various kinds, such as cod, whittings, haddock, turbot, skate, herrings. The fishing of lobsters has of late become a lucrative employment to many families. They carry them or forward them by steam-boats to Dublin, where they find a ready market, and sometimes sell them so high as two guineas a dozen. The Stinchar also abounds with salmon at certain seasons of the year. There are eight or nine salmon-pools, the rental of which may be L. 30 per annum.

Rate of Wages.—Females get from L. 5 to L. 6, and men from L. 12 to L. 14 per annum. Day-labourers, without victuals, have 1s. 4d. and 1s. 6d. per day; women, 9d.; masons and carpenters, 2s. and 2s. 6d.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Villages.—The village of Colmonell, merely a row of thatched houses a few years ago, has been almost rebuilt. The houses now, with a few exceptions, are slated, clean-looking, and harmonize well with the surrounding scenery. It has a post-office, and, since the passing of the Reform Bill, it has been appointed one of the polling stations of the county. Four fairs are held annually in it, on the first Mondays O. S. of February, May, August, and November. It contains 300 inhabitants. Barhill, on Dhuisk, has lately sprung into existence. It is the only resting-place for the traveller between Newton-Stewart and Girvan. Three cattle-markets are held there every year, on the fourth Fridays of April, September, and October.

Roads.—There are two roads between Girvan and Ballantrae. One, the great road to Ireland, sweeps along the coast, having on one side the rocky shore and majestic ocean, and on the other the verdant hills of Carleton and Bannan. The Irish mail passes this

way. The second, inland, keeps along the banks of the Stinchar, where its windings amid the most picturesque scenery, and the beautiful hill of Knockdolian, present a variety of enchanting pictures to the eye. A third, traversed by the mail from the south, has opened up the whole of that wild district which lies between Barhill and Newton-Stewart, and contributed greatly to its improvement.

Ecclesiastical State.—The present church was built in 1772, and seated anew in 1832. It contains 500 sittings, and is very inconveniently placed at one extremity of the parish. Several families are sixteen miles distant from it. It cannot nearly accommodate the people. There are 30 free sittings in it, and 460 communicants; 350 families belong to the Establishment.

There is also a chapel in which the parish minister officiates every fourth Sabbath during ten months of the year. It is eight miles distant from the parish church. Religious instruction has been gratuitously afforded the inhabitants there, more than eighty years. The Dissenters in the parish, about thirty years ago, assisted in repairing the chapel, and since that time have had the use of it in the absence of the parish minister. An addition was built to it in 1833; it now accommodates 300 sitters.

The manse was built in 1822, and the offices thirty years ago. There are 7 acres of glebe, 5 arable and 2 meadow, valued at L. 15 per annum. The stipend is 16 chalders of victual, half meal, half barley, and L. 10 for communion elements.

Dissenters.—There are two Dissenting congregations in the parish,—one of Reformed Presbyterians, and another of Original Seceders. A few belong to the United Secession church, and we have about forty Roman Catholics. But four-fifths of the whole population are members of the Establishment.

Schools.—There are six schools, the parochial, and five supported by voluntary contribution or school fees. The parochial schoolmaster has the maximum salary and legal accommodation. The school fees amount to L. 20 per annum. He also receives a half year's rent of L. 21, 15s. from the farm of Little Dangart, for teaching six poor boys to read English. The other half year's rent goes to the maintenance and better clothing of the boys. This mortification was left about seventy years ago by Dr Kennedy, a native of the parish. Two of the private schools are taught summer and winter, and the master of one of them, in addition to the wages, gets bed, board, and washing, and resides with the parents of the

children in turn. Dr Hamilton of Kildonan, and the Trustees of the late Sir W. Fettes, have given L. 15 per annum to the other; and, as many poor children receive their education gratis on this account, it is hoped they will continue the contribution. The other three private schools are on the teachers' own adventure. The number of scholars attending the six schools averages during summer 110, during winter 250; and the expense of education is as follows:—reading per quarter, 3s.; reading, writing, arithmetic, do. 4s. 6d.; Latin and Greek, 6s.

The people generally can read and write, and are by no means averse to the education of their children. On the contrary, all seem anxious to have them taught to read the Bible, and give them the blessings of sacred and useful knowledge.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—Twenty-four persons receive parochial aid. The funds for their support and expenses of management are derived from the following sources. Mortcloth per annum, L. 3; donations from heritors do. L. 20; fines do. L. 1; collections at church door do. L. 30; proclamations, L. 5.

Inns.—There are two inns, and seven public-houses; yet intemperance is not the besetting sin of the people. This disproportion may be ascribed in a great measure to the number of fairs held annually in the parish, and the public roads that intersect it.

Fuel.—Many attempts have been made to discover coal, but without effect. Coals are generally used in the lower, and peats in the higher districts. The coals brought from Bargany and Dulquharran cost the villagers 10s. a cart. The cart contains 12 cwt. Peats are sold at 3s. a cart.

Lime-kilns.—Five are kept going during the summer months, and afford employment to many labourers. They burn about 20,000 bolls of lime per annum.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The population has been nearly doubled within the last thirty years. This rapid increase is mainly attributable to the excellent roads that divide the parish in every direction. The estate of Kildonan that, about twenty-five years ago, was almost wholly covered with heath, is now thickly inhabited, and the soil has been rendered fit to bear the most luxurious crops. Many small farmers are located on it, who rent from forty to fifty acres. Great attention has been paid to the sheep-stock. On the more sheltered farms, it has been much improved by a cross with the Leicester and Cheviot-ram, thus producing a larger animal, and shorter and finer

wool. Care in the selection of stock, and a more skilful method of management, have been displayed. Among other things which distinguish the present from the past, the pheasant is occasionally seen in the woods that skirt the Stinchar. Numerous covies of black game are also met with on the moor-edges, while grouse, the favourite of the sportsman, is rapidly disappearing.

The newly built farm-houses are of a much better description than those of earlier date. They are almost all slated, and not a few have an inclosure in front, ornamented with rose-bushes and other shrubs and flowers. The farmer himself has shared in the general improvement. The epithet "slovenly" is less applicable to him, and at "kirk and market" the outer man, at least, shows a decided improvement. The voice of praise, indeed, is not so often heard in their dwellings, and family-worship is greatly neglected; but still the church is well attended, and the people are moral and industrious. Intemperance appears to be on the decline. The long and deep carousings, so common some years ago, at buying and selling, are seldom heard of. A greater degree of decency is observed at funerals, and the service which, in some instances in olden times, amounted to fourteen rounds of spirits and wine, has been reduced to three. Religious animosities have ceased. On the whole, were it not for the heart-burnings, and levelling spirit produced by the political discussions of the day, the inhabitants of this parish would be contented and happy.

October 1838.