

PARISH OF STAIR.

PRESBYTERY AND SYNOD OF AYR.

THE REV. WILLIAM RORISON, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

STAIR was first erected into a parish in 1673 for the accommodation of the noble family of Dalrymple of Stair, whose residence was a great distance from Ochiltree, their parish church. With a view to this accommodation, that family agreed to pay three chalders of victual, one-half of the stipend then allotted to the minister. The other half was to be paid by the parish of Barnweil, then suppressed and united to the adjoining parishes of Craigie and Tarbolton. On account of some differences between the parties concerned in the transaction, and a wrong locality of the stipend, the errors of the first erection were rectified by a new process in 1709, when several lands were disjoined from, and others united to, the parish.

Extent, &c.—This district lies between the rivers Ayr and Kill, and is about 6 miles in length by 2 in breadth, though at one place it is completely intersected by the parish of Ochiltree. It is bounded on the north by Tarbolton; on the east by Mauchline; on the south by Ochiltree; and on the west by Coylton. The river Ayr separates it from Tarbolton and Mauchline, and the Kill from Coylton, throughout the greater part of its boundary in that direction. The surface partakes of the undulating character of the adjoining district, and the soil, that of some small valleys along the sides of the rivers excepted, is a stiff clay, with a very retentive bottom.

Hydrography.—There is only one loch in the parish, and that but of small extent. Springs are not numerous, but a sufficient supply of water is found generally at no great depth.

Geology and Mineralogy.—The banks of the river Ayr consist, nearly throughout their whole extent, of red sandstone. Freestone of a yellowish colour is found near the centre of the parish;

and about two miles to the westward, on the banks of the Kill, there is an extensive quarry of the same description of stone, but of a greyish colour; this is what principally is used for building all over the neighbourhood. About two miles up the same river, and in immediate connection with the coal-field of Drongan, there is a bluish-white freestone, which is fine-grained, and takes a beautiful polish.

In the lands of Dalmore, upon the banks of the river Ayr, is a species of whetstone, well known in the country by the name of the Water-of-Ayr stone. For several years, both the raising and dressing of the stone have been conducted with much greater care and neatness than formerly. There are two men almost constantly employed; the one in stripping and polishing, (both of which operations are performed by machinery), the other in the quarry, or in performing whatever else may be necessary. Besides what is disposed of in the home-market, there is a very considerable quantity exported. The stone is 40 feet under cover. The *dip and rise* is of an east and west direction.

About a quarter of a mile above the quarry, there is a trap rock which, in the bed of the river, is horizontal, but rises on the south side into a considerable eminence. Close to this, up the bed of Glenstang burn, occur beds of clay-slate, such as those found underlying the stone. These and other indications led to the attempt, a few years ago, to find it (the whetstone) in this direction, and not without success; but the quantity discovered was so small, and the quality so indifferent, that further search was given up. The stone extends up the river so as to be in immediate contact with the bed of trap, but is there very coarse. It has not been found in this situation, and the remark is to be understood as applicable to what lies on the surface.

Near the stone quarry, is a deposit of black lead, ascertained to be of excellent quality, and understood to be of considerable extent. The late proprietor, upon proposing to resume working it, was recommended to pulverize it, as being the most advantageous form for the market. He accordingly erected a milln for that purpose, but did not proceed; for what reason, the writer does not recollect. He enlarged and adapted the premises to the carding of wool, which he carried on for several years; which branch, however, was given up after his decease, and all the machinery disposed of, except what was required for dressing the whetstone.

The strata of copper and antimony, mentioned in the former Account, found on the same property (also near to the whetstone), have not yet been wrought.

The writer of the former Account mentions that he thought it very probable that limestone would be found in the parish; but unfortunately, an object so interesting to the agriculturist has not yet been realized. It occurs about two feet in thickness in the coal shaft on the estate of Drongan, but lies too deep, and is so situated as to be nearly, or rather altogether, unavailable for agricultural purposes.

Coal abounds in the parish. The colliery mentioned in the former Account, as having been wrought on the estate of Drongan, for above a century, is still in full operation.

On the lands of Drumdow, about the centre of the parish, there is also understood to be a very considerable deposit of coal, which, after being wrought for about 15 years, has been discontinued within these few months, and it is not yet arranged among the parties whether it shall be resumed.

Section of a coal-pit on Drumdow.

	Fath.	Feet.	Inches.
Surface,—clay, with a good deal of sand,	6	0	0
Calimestone,	5	0	0
Coal, about	0	0	10
Freestone plies,	4	0	0
Thin do. of a yellowish colour,	0	2	0
Very hard freestone,	1	1	0
Freestone plies, soft,	0	4	0
Very hard freestone,	1	0	0
Blue till, of various thickness,	0	3	0
Coal,	0	5	10
Pavement, of whitish clay, about	0	0	4
A tough stone, about	0	3	0
About eight fathoms below this is found the next bed of coal,	8	0	0
The intervening space mostly freestone,			
About two feet of very hard freestone immediately above the lowest bed of coal,			
Coal, the lowest stratum, about	1	0	0
Depth,	29	3	0

Section of a coal-pit on the estate of Drongan.

Strong red clay, generally running from 24 to 54 feet, according as the ground rises or falls.

	Fath.	Feet.	Inches.
Strong gray freestone,	0	1	6
Soft whitish till, which, on exposure to the air, falls into a sort of marl,	0	3	0
Freestone, very hard, and contains a good deal of fire,	0	3	9
Light blue till,—becomes a sort of marl on exposure to the air,	0	8	0
Crow coal,	0	0	8

	Fath.	Feet.	Inches
Fine white freestone,	0	7	0
Light blue till, also marly on exposure,	0	5	0
Soft black stone,	0	1	4
Very fine coal, almost unequalled,	0	8	4
Freestone of a blackish colour,	0	4	0
Sandy till, of a grayish colour,	0	20	0
Hard gray limestone, mixed with mussel-shells,	0	2	0
Strong gray freestone, with blue strains,	0	30	0
Fine white freestone, very hard,	0	4	0
Black till,	0	6	0
Very black till, very hard, and burns when put into the fire,	0	6	0
Very fine coal, called the top coal,	0	6	10
Soft black marl, which falls when exposed to the air,	0	0	10
Coal called the bottom coal,	0	1	10
Coal left for a pavement, making in all 12 feet,	0	1	2
Very fine white till,	0	6	0
Strong gray freestone, mixed with blue strains,	0	24	0
Coal,	0	5	0
Soft white till,	0	30	0
Coal,	0	2	0
Total depth,	30	0	7

Botany.—**FLOWERING PLANTS.**

Campanula latifolia
 Drosera rotundifolia
 Parnassia palustris
 Daucus Carota
 Pyrola rotundifolia
 Agrimonia eupatoria
 Comarum palustre
 Anemone nemorosa
 Galeopsis versicolor
 Origanum vulgare
 Cichorium Intybus
 Arum maculatum
 Lysimachia nemorosum
 Hypericum humifusum

FERNS.

Asplenium Trichomanes
 Blechnum boreale
 Botrychium lunaria
 Scolopendrium vulgare

MOSSES.

Gymnostomum tenue
 Polytrichum urnigerum
 nanum
 Dicranum bryoides
 adiantoides
 glaucum
 flavescens
 pellucidum

Hookeria lucens

Hypnum trichomanoides
 undulatum
 Bryum palustre
 trichodes

FUNGI.

Phallus foetidus
 Amanita muscaria
 Agaricus violaceus
 Boletus luteus
 Hydnum repandum
 auriscalpium*

Plantations.—The plantations on the estates of Barskimming cover at least 450 acres;—that growing on the banks of the river consists chiefly of hard-wood, the remainder of Scotch fir. Larches are disposed in belts and clumps. A great proportion of the timber, both hard and soft, is of such age and dimensions, as to admit of a constant and extensive succession of cutting.

On the estate of Drongan, there are 150 acres under plantation. The greater proportion is comparatively young, but very thriving, and in a few years will no doubt greatly adorn, as well as shelter, a district otherwise a good deal exposed.

There are 38 acres of wood on the property of Stair. A good many clumps, arranged, it is said, after the manner in which the British troops were drawn up at the battle of Dettingen, have been

* A scientific friend tells me, that he has no doubt many more could easily be furnished.

cut down and rooted out lately. A solitary tree, known in the neighbourhood as the General, stands on an adjoining eminence.

Remarkable Trees.—In the lawn at Barskimming, there are a great many fine trees, particularly some Scotch firs (eighteen in number) immediately to the east of the house, all of them remarkable for their height and cleanness of stem. The largest is 10 feet, 8 inches in circumference about a foot from the ground. The small holm (a little farther up the river) in which Burns composed the poem "Man is made to Mourn," is surrounded with a row of beeches, almost all of them of great size and beauty.

Close by Stair House, is a willow tree which measures 22 feet 10 inches, about six feet from the ground, but is fast decaying. On the same holm is a Lombardy poplar betwixt 80 and 90 feet in height. Two beeches (forming part of a row growing on the banks of the river) measure 13 feet to 13 feet six inches respectively, about two feet above the ground. These, with some others, are the remnants of the fine wood which abounded here at a comparatively recent period.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Eminent Characters.—The Stair family is so well known to history, as to render superfluous here any account of their eminence,—civil, military, and literary,—or of the influence (almost unparalleled in the history of any other family in Scotland), which they possessed during a long and most interesting period.

Another eminent character belonging to the parish was Sir Thomas Miller, Baronet, Lord President of the Court of Session. The late Baron Hume, in a memoir read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, states, "that at his death (which took place at Barskimming in September 1788, after an illness of two days,) he left no good man his enemy, and that his decease was attended with that sincere and extensive regret which only those can hope for, who have occupied the like important stations, and acquitted themselves as well."

In the general description of Kirkcudbrightshire, as given by Chalmers in his *Caledonia*, it is mentioned that he (Sir Thomas) was the first Sheriff after the suppression of heritable jurisdictions and its erection into a Stewartry, and that he transmitted to his posterity a name of which any family might be proud.

"To the activity, exertion, and public spirit of the four principal heritors," (Sir William Miller, Bart. of Barskimming, son and heir

of the above, General Stuart of Stair, Mungo Smith of Drongan, and the incumbent, who died in 1804, in his ninety-fifth year, and sixty-ninth of his ministry,) is chiefly to be ascribed the rapid improvement of agriculture in this place, and the great increase of the value of their own estates."* Sir William has, all along, taken a lively interest in these objects, though he has not bestowed that degree of personal superintendence for which his father was so remarkable. A very high and just encomium was passed on him lately from the Bench, by the Lord Justice-Clerk (Boyle), upon the occasion of his retiring from office in the College of Justice, which he (under the title of Lord Glenlee) had held for forty-five years, and which encomium was entered on the journals of the Court.

Land-owners.—The heritors, according to their valuation, are as follows:—Sir William Miller, Bart. of Barskimming; Smith, Esq. of Drongan; John Hamilton, Esq.; the Earl of Stair; Messrs Morison of Tribboch Mains, and Meadowbank; John Hamilton, Esq. of Wright Hill and Drumdow; Claud Alexander, Esq. of Burn and Lawhill; Mrs Reid of Keyshill; James Heron, Esq. of Dalmore.

There is no property in the parish whose annual value does not exceed L. 50.

Parochial Registers.—The earliest parochial register is of date 1736; the early part not very correctly kept. A register of births and marriages has been kept since 1805, and one of deaths since 1815.

Antiquities.—On the property of Tribboch Mains, there are the remains of a tower, which was in all probability the residence of the proprietor of the adjoining barony of Tribboch, lying chiefly in the parish of Ochiltree. The walls are of great thickness, and slits are the only openings. On removing a cairn which stood on an adjoining knoll, a grave cut out of the solid rock was found covered with flag, and containing blackish dust and some beads.—There is a similar structure, but of larger dimensions, on the farm of Drongan Mains, the walls of which were till lately almost entire. It was the residence of a family of the name of Crawford, from at least 1404 till 1623, when it passed into the hands of the Crawfords of Lochmorris.

Modern Buildings.—Barskimming is a large and elegant man-

* Old Account.

sion. The two wings and other considerable additions were built, as also decorations and other improvements made in the interior, about twenty-five years ago, on a plan furnished by Mr Hamilton of Glasgow. In the east wing is the library, containing about 18,000 volumes; amongst which are the finest editions of the Greek and Roman Classics, as also the most valuable works in every department of modern literature and science, collected chiefly by the present proprietor. The room, upwards of sixty feet in length, and of proportionate width, is divided into three compartments; that in the centre having a bow window, and its ceiling beautifully decorated. The general effect is highly imposing, and it is universally considered as doing great credit to the taste and skill of the distinguished architect. The house stands close on the banks of the river Ayr, and the lawn is of very considerable extent, forming, as the writer of the former Account of the parish justly remarks, a landscape such as is rarely to be met with in an inland situation.

In a holm, about three miles down the river, stands Stair House. The original portion is very much decayed, but the comparatively modern part is in rather better order, and inhabited by the tenant who farms the property. The property contains 168 acres. It is well known that Field-Marshal Stair had the misfortune, when a boy, to kill his elder brother, by the accidental discharge of a pistol; and that his parents found it necessary, for their own comfort, to banish him from their sight, as his presence awakened the most painful associations. The tradition in the neighbourhood is, that this melancholy event took place in a room on the ground-floor, (which, it is said, was, long after, kept locked by the succeeding proprietors,) and was the reason for the property being disposed of. After passing through many hands, it was repurchased by the present Earl, about fifteen years ago, and is understood to be now entailed.

Drongan House is, at present, in a very dilapidated state. It is known that the late proprietor contemplated either the rebuilding or making great repairs and additions—all of which, as well as many other designs for the improvement of his estate generally, were frustrated by his much lamented death, which took place some years ago at Calcutta, where he had for many years resided as a merchant and banker, and when he was on the eve of returning home.

On four of the smaller properties, there are commodious dwelling-houses, with suitable offices.

We have two grain mills, the one in the eastern, the other in the western division of the parish, each of which has a saw-mill attached; another saw-mill has been erected lately on the lands of Dalmore, about the centre of the parish. One of the grain mills has also a thrashing-mill attached to it and driven by water-power. There are twelve other machines of the same kind, belonging to a like number of farms, but driven by horse power.

Manufactures.—At Coalha', on the estate of Drongan, there has been, for a long period, a pottery of earthenware, black and brown, adapted to domestic and dairy purposes, flower-pots, chimney-cans. The ware, besides being used all over this county, is in great demand throughout Dumfries-shire, and the two counties of Galloway, though coming into competition in that quarter with English manufacture, and under the disadvantage of a much more expensive carriage. Very considerable quantities are sent to America, the Highlands, and even to Glasgow. Mr Boyle, the tacksman, is also an extensive tile-burner—has been the successful competitor in this quarter, and gained the first prize at the last Highland Society meeting at Perth. He does not carry on this branch here, but has a work in the neighbouring parish of Coylton, very conveniently situated for the western and middle quarter of the parish.

III.—POPULATION.

In 1755 the population was	-	-	369
At the date of the former Account,	-	-	518
Census, 1821,	-	-	746
Do 1831,	-	-	787 males, 363; females, 374:
The yearly average of births for the last seven years is	-	-	24½
of deaths,	-	-	9
of marriages,	-	-	8

By the minister's visiting list, as taken in course of last summer and autumn, the population is

Males.		Females.		Total.
Between 15 and 30,	- 146	Under 15,	- 153	299
15 and 30,	- 109	Between 15 and 30,	- 126	235
30 and 50,	- 55	30 and 50,	- 54	109
50 and 70	- 34	50 and 70,	- 34	68
Upwards of 70,	- 11	Upwards of 70,	- 17	28
	<u>355</u>		<u>364</u>	<u>739</u>

Sir William Miller, Bart., and the Messrs Morison, are the only heritors at present resident.

Bachelors and widowers upwards of 50 years of age,	-	11
Unmarried women upwards of 45,	-	15
Number of families,	-	144
Average number of children in each family, about	-	8

Number of inhabited houses,	-	-	137
houses uninhabited,	-	-	none.

What the writer of the former Account says of the inhabitants of that period, is applicable to far the greater proportion of the present population,—that they are in their morals sober, honest, and industrious, and strongly attached to the Established Church.

There have been five illegitimate births within the last three years.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

The parish is wholly agricultural, and is divided into 36 farms, two of which are under the management of their proprietors. The others are possessed by 29 tenants; there are 8 small holdings.

There are 41 male farm-servants; 15 labourers; 2 master carpenters, and 2 others engaged in jobs; 2 mill-wrights, one of them usually employing from 2 to 3 hands, the other occasionally working as carpenter; 2 master blacksmiths, and another engaged by the tacksmen of Drongan colliery for purposes about the works; 4 master shoemakers, three of whom constantly employ several hands; 3 tailors; 2 gardeners; 1 nurseryman; 1 garden and orchard; about 32 colliers; 2 masons; 1 customer weaver, who usually employs a journeyman; 1 stocking-framer; 4 persons who sell groceries; number of servants, 89; males under 20 years of age, 16; above do. 25; females, 48.

The arable land amounts to about 3400 acres, and there are at least 640 acres covered with wood. By far the greater proportion is planted. Scotch fir and larch constitute by much the largest proportion, and seem well adapted to the soil.

The writer has not the means of ascertaining the average rent of arable land per acre; but considers himself warranted in stating that L. 1 is very nearly the rate actually paid in most years, though a considerably higher sum probably stands in many instances on the rent-roll. The grazing of a cow or ox is about L. 3.

Live-Stock.—There are 96 work-horses; 481 milk cows, all of the Ayrshire breed; 222 young cattle; and a few score of mountain sheep are fed on the lawn at Barskimming. Most of the farmers keep a few pets, chiefly for the sake of the wool for domestic purposes.

Agriculture.—The grain raised in the parish is oats, peas, and barley. Some years ago, wheat formed a regular part of the rotation on the estate of Barskimming, but, having been found to

be prejudicial to the pasture, was given up. A few farms, or rather portions of a few farms, produce potatoes and turnips in sufficient quantity to afford a fair remuneration; but, in general, the case is otherwise, and most of our farmers accordingly content themselves with raising no more potatoes than what will serve their families. The remainder of the dung is often spread on lea, and seldom or never fails to raise an excellent crop of beans. The following crop of oats is, in many cases, nearly double of what it would else have probably been, and thus, as has been remarked, they have the bean crop to the bargain. Comparatively little has yet been done in the way of draining, but, as it is known that both landlords and tenants are fast becoming convinced of the utility of the practice, there can be little doubt of its soon becoming general, and of green cropping being carried to a far greater extent than hitherto.

Nineteen years is the general duration of leases.

The state of farm-buildings is, with few exceptions, good. The enclosures, consisting almost entirely of thorn hedges, are generally kept with considerable care.

Not many years ago there were three quarries of freestone in the parish, but the working of one of them, though a valuable stone for several purposes, and in great abundance, has been given up, chiefly on account of the greatness of the dip and consequent expense of raising it. The other two are in full operation; that on the lands of Drumdow supplies the greater proportion of the building material required in the neighbourhood; that on Garrochburn (fine white freestone) is 14 feet in depth, very hard, and fit for every kind of mason-work, takes a fine polish, makes excellent pavement, and is well adapted for making grinding-stones for any kind of edge tools; the beds run from 27 to 8 inches in thickness. There is about 6 feet of fine white clay on the top of the bed, and about 13 feet of the same beneath it. About 40 tons of the stone are raised annually, and about 17 tons is the average amount sold.

Produce.—The writer is unable to state with any thing like accuracy the average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish; but believes it to be nearly as follows:—

4500 bolls of white corn, beans, and pease.
1400 bolls of potatoes and turnips.
6000 stoncs of cheese.

The 222 young cattle reared in the parish may be fairly esti-

mated at L. 1 per head. There are very few young horses bred in the parish, probably not more than ten annually; 5 acres of orchard at L. 9 per acre. Hay cultivated may yield about L. 1000.

There are about 20 men employed at the coal works of Drongan, but they have not constant work throughout the year. The output of coal is not allowed to exceed 20 creels (which is something short of three tons) per day.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town.—Ayr is the nearest market-town, and is about eight miles from the centre of the parish. The post-office at Tarbolton is the nearest; but, upon the whole, the eastern and western quarters have readiest communication with Mauchline and Ayr. At the coal-works of Drongan, there is a collection of houses, affording accommodation for fifteen or sixteen families, and another in the mid-quarter inhabited by six or seven families; but no village, properly so called. The parish is intersected by two turnpike roads, which are about six miles in extent. On that leading from Cumnock to Ayr, a coach travels on Tuesdays and Fridays, the market days in Ayr. There are three bridges over the Water of Ayr. The upper one is very ancient, but in a complete state of repair; the lower, consisting of two arches, was built in 1745 at a very considerable expense; that in the middle was erected at the private cost of the late Sir Thomas Miller, near his house of Barskimming. It consists of one arch, which is more than 70 feet in the span, and about the same in height above the medium depth of the river, and has often tempted both the professional and amateur artist to exercise the pencil.

Ecclesiastical State.—The form of the parish is somewhat triangular. The church stands in the north corner near to Stair House, and is about three miles and a-half from the one extremity of the parish, and nearly five from the other. A site more convenient, upon the whole, for the population could hardly have been chosen. The church was roofed over many years ago, and re-seated. Still it is too small. It is known, however, that the heritors are convinced of the propriety of building a new one ere long. The manse was built in 1807, and is in good repair. The glebe extends to about 30 acres, and would let perhaps for a little more than L. 30. The stipend, by decret of the Court of Teinds in 1816, amounts to 14 chalders, half meal, half barley, together with an allowance of L. 8, 6s. 8d. Sterling, for communion elements.

The number of families in the parish is 144, ten of which belong

to the Associate Synod, two are Roman Catholics, the rest belong to the Established Church. The Dissenters (Presbyterians) attend public worship in the chapel at Tarbolton and Mauchline, the Roman Catholics at Ayr. The average number of communicants at the Established Church is about 300. An Association for religious and educational purposes was formed about a year ago.

Education.—There are two schools in the parish, the parochial, and one unendowed; the teacher has a school-house and dwelling-house, both provided at the private expense of Lord Glenlee, and he is entirely dependent on the fees, which are necessarily small. The salary of the parochial teacher is L. 30, and the fees may amount to between L. 20 and L. 30.

The people are very much alive to the benefits of education, and there are few, if any, who are not ready to make great sacrifices in order to have their children instructed in whatever branches are desirable in their station, and suited to their prospects in life.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of persons receiving parochial aid is about seven; and average allowance to each per week is 1s. The annual collections at the church door amount to about L. 20; about L. 40 more is required for the relief of the poor, and is raised by assessment of the heritors according to their respective valuations. The reluctance to apply for parochial aid is certainly not so great as it was at no distant period.

Ale-houses.—There are two houses in which ale and spirituous liquors are sold.

Coal is the fuel in universal use; and any cottager in the parish may have a cartful laid down at his door for 5s.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

This district has not lagged behind in the march of improvement. Since the date of the last Account, almost every farm stead- ing has been rebuilt and roofed with slate. The roads have been almost entirely relaid according to the modern principles of the art,—though there is still room for improvement in the means of communication. It is most gratifying to add, that the labouring classes have largely participated in the benefits resulting from the improvements in agriculture, and the arts generally.

December 1841.