

UNITED PARISHES OF STRACHUR AND STRALACHLAN.

PRESBYTERY OF DUNOON, SYNOD OF ARGYLE.

THE REV. JAMES FERGUSON, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

PRIOR to the year 1650, the parishes, now named as above, were annexed to the neighbouring parishes of Lochgoilhead and Inverchaolain,—Strachur to the former and Stralachlan to the latter.

Name.—The ancient name of Strachur was Kilmaglass, signifying the burying ground of Maglass, (*Macghlais*), or Grey's son, who was the saint honoured with the religious devotions of the inhabitants of this locality. Stralachlan means the Strath of Lachlan, and derived its name, as is said, from that of the principal heritor of that district,—Maclachlan, or Lachlan's son. The remains of a castle of some antiquity still exist. Stralachlan was formerly called Kilmorrie, from *Kil* and *Muire*, the Virgin Mary.

Extent, &c.—The parish as such lies longitudinally from north-east and south-west. Its length is 19 miles: its breadth varies from 6 miles to about 3. Its boundaries on the east and north-east are the united parishes of Lochgoilhead and Kilmun; on the south, those of Kilmun and Dunoon, and the parish of Kilmodan; on the west and north-west, Lochfue.

Topographical Appearances.—The general aspect of the parish is highly interesting. The hills are numerous, fantastically meeting and intersecting each other. The elevation of some of them above the level of the sea may be from 2000 to 3000 feet. With the exception of the Strath of Strachur and that of Stralachlan, the arable land is inconsiderable; the former is the more extensive, and under pretty fair tillage. The Strachur hills are considered first-rate pasture for sheep and black-cattle, and present a soft and rich verdure.

Hydrography.—Lochfine bounds the parish on the north and west, embracing its whole length of nineteen miles, from north-east to south-west. Its depth is unequal, varying from thirty to eighty fathoms.

Locheck is the only lake in the parish. It lies to the south by east from Lochfine, is six miles in length, and half a-mile in breadth; it extends three miles within the limits of the parish. Its depth is very considerable, in some places equal to sixty and seventy fathoms. The river Eachaig, being the channel of communication between it and the Clyde at Kilmun, introduces into it some salmon and salmon-trout of good quality. The fresh water herring in it (an insipid kind of fish) are not found in any other lake on the west coast, except in Lochlomond. The Cur is the only river deserving notice. It originates in the mountains bordering on Lochgoilhead, and extends miles in an irregular course. For a few miles, it flows with rapidity, in a south-western direction, until it arrives at the Strachur plains, when it flows smoothly on in a south by east direction.

Soil.—The general character of the soils, is loamy, sandy, thin, and clayey. The Strachur Strath contains some hundred acres of good level land. It is supposed that some mines of coal and ore might be discovered, which would prove of great advantage to this district.

Zoology.—The eagle pays occasional visits, and some years ago one of that species carried off, killed, and devoured a child about three years old.

Salmon and salmon-trout are found in Lochèck, and some trout in the rivers. But the most important species, in an economical point of view, are the herrings found in Lochfine, generally acknowledged to be of superior quality.

Botany.—The forests and plantations consist of oak, larch,

beech, ash, hazel, alder, birch, fir, elm, and mountain ash. The oak, fir, beech, ash, and hazel appear most congenial to the soil.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Land-owners.—The chief land-owners are, John Campbell, Esq. of Strachur; and Robert M'Lachlan, Esq. of Stralachlan.

Parochial Registers.—There are no parochial registers in existence bearing date prior to the year 1753. During the succeeding twenty-eight years, they were not punctually attended to. Since then, however, they have been regularly kept.

Antiquities.—Within the bounds of the parish, and towards that of Glendaruel, there is a stone remarkable for its locality, the eminence on which it is situated, commanding an extensive prospect. It is called Caillich-Vearor Vera, or the Old Wife of Thunder. Beir, being the Celtic word for thunder, and which, from custom or convenience, was transformed to Vera or Vear. Marvelous properties were ascribed by the superstitious inhabitants to this thundering lady; it was said that she could, with ease and incredible agility, transfer herself from one hill to another, command terrific thunder and desolating deluges at pleasure; and hence the dreadful apprehensions of incurring her ire that generally prevailed.

A hill in Stralachlan, rising in a curious conical shape, is seen at some distance, towering above the neighbouring ones. It is called *Siene Sluagh*, the residence of the fairy people.

Mansion Houses.—Several of these have been erected since last Statistical Account was published, viz. Glenshellis, Ballimore, Glenbrantir, Strachurmore houses, all built and finished with stone and lime, with slate and the best of timber. A good mill has also been built with the same materials. Strachur Park is presently occupied by Lord Murray, whose benevolence and exemplary conduct, and that of Lady Murray, exert a beneficial influence around them. Their temporary residence here is no ordinary acquisition to the parish.

III.—POPULATION.

Amount of population in 1801,	1097
1811,	1129
1821,	1204
1831,	1063
1841,	1066

Gaelic is the language generally spoken; but almost the whole of the rising generation speak English.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—The cultivated land amounts to from 1000 to

1500 acres imperial : constantly waste or pasture lands, which have never been in cultivation, to about 36,000. There may be from 1600 to 2000 acres under wood of all descriptions.

The black-faced sheep and Highland cattle are the common breeds, and to their improvement much attention has of late been paid by the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, and by an Association of proprietors and farmers connected with the Cowal district.

There are several excellent farm-buildings occupied by the large tenants, such as pay from L. 100 to L. 300 of rent ; yet all of that class are not comfortably lodged ; but such as pay from L. 50 to L. 100 are suitably accommodated. The houses of the crofters and cottars are, in many cases, very indifferent. David Napier, Esq. of Glenshellis, some years ago, built a house and offices, and planted and enclosed, to the extent of L. 4000 at least.

Considerable improvements have been made by Patrick Forbes, Esq. of St Cathrine's, where there is a comfortable inn, and many other conveniences for travellers.

There is limestone in the parish, which is quarried, prepared, and sold at the rate of 1s. 2d. per boll.

The only fishing systematically carried on is that of herring.

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

Grain of all kinds appropriated to domestic economy,	L. 1788	0	0
Potatoes,	854	10	0
Turnips,	150	0	0
Hay, both meadow and cultivated,	395	0	0
Lands in pasture, rating the grazing of a full grown ox at L. 2, and that of a ewe or full grown sheep at 4s. for the year ; young cattle at L. 1, 10s. each for the year—amounting in whole to	4677	0	0
Periodical felling and annual thinning of woods, &c. average about	200	0	0
Fisherries on Lochfine, rating each boat's success at L. 25 yearly, taking the average of three years,	1050	0	0
Total yearly value of raw produce raised,	L. 9114	10	0

Navigation.—There is only one sloop belonging to Strachur. The vessels which occasionally come to Strachur Bay with boats, and to take away wool and potatoes, belong to other ports. The number of fishing boats belonging to the parish may amount to about 42.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—The Glasgow steamers to Inverary convey passengers to and from the low country in a safe, cheap, and expeditious manner. The Government road to Ardentenny affords daily intercourse, through the Lochgoil steamer, with the

towns upon the Clyde; and the coach establishment between St Cathrine's and Lochgoilhead affords the opportunity of comfortable and speedy conveyance.

Strachur Bay, although upon a small scale, affords good and safe anchorage to vessels when the wind is from the north-east and south-east.

Ecclesiastical State.—The churches are situated as favourably as possible to the greater proportion of the population, the distance between them being six miles, and from each extremity of the parish about the same. The church of Strachur was built in the year 1789, and is in need of repair. It accommodates about 400 sitters. The late Miss Janet Campbell of Strachur left a legacy of L.20 Sterling to the poor of the parish of Strachur, about four years ago. The manse was built in the year 1779, and repaired different times since that period. Number of families attending, 107. Average amount of church collections during the year, L.12, 10s.

The parish church in Stralachlan was built in the year 1792, and is undergoing repairs, which are not yet finished.

The parish church accommodates about 150. The number of families attending church is 190. Average amount of church collections during the year, L.5, 10s. 6d.

The sittings in both churches are all free.

The extent of the glebe is about fifteen acres of very bad ground, and was never valued. The stipend is the minimum, and a small sum is paid by the Exchequer to advance it to L.150 per annum. All the parishioners, with the exception of one Roman Catholic family, belong to the Established Church. Divine service is generally well attended, and the communicants average about 260.

Education.—The number of schools in the parish is 3; parochial school, 1. The other two are side schools, and receive a part of the salary of the parochial one. The salary of the parochial teacher is L.26, 10s., and the school-fees amount to L.14. The parochial teacher has the legal accommodation.

Number of schools in Stralachlan parish, three; parochial schools, one. The other two are side schools, and are upheld by subscription. Salary of parochial teacher, L.10. School fees yearly, L.8. The teacher pays rent for his house and croft. General expense of education for each scholar yearly, 8s. There are three schools, and in these the children can all attend.

Library.—There is one circulating library at Strachur, under the charge of the kirk-session.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—Paupers receiving parochial relief in Strachur, 14. Average sum allotted to each yearly, L.1, 5s. Annual amount of church collections, L.12, 10s., and L.10 from the heritors of the parish.

Number of poor receiving parochial aid in Stralochlan parish, 5; average sum allotted to each yearly, L.1; annual amount of church collections, L.5, 10s. 6d.

Fairs.—There are two held at Strachur, in the months of May and October, for selling and purchasing black-cattle, and they are attended with much advantage to the district.

Inns.—Three inns are upheld in the parish; two of them very comfortable.

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