

PARISH OF DURRIS.

Presbytery of Aberdeen, Synod of Aberdeen

THE REV. ROBERT COPLAND, MINISTER.

1.-TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name. - The ancient name of the parish, according to the generally-received accounts, was *Duired*; it is now written *Durris*, and sometimes pronounced *Dores*. The ancient name signifies, in Gaelic, a mouth or entrance, probably from the parish being a principal entrance into the Highlands.

Extent, &c. - The parish extends from east to west about 5 1/2 miles along the south bank of the river Dee, which is its northern boundary. On the south, it is bounded by the Grampian mountains.

Topographical Appearances, &c. - Its figure resembles an oblong; but the length on the south side is at least seven miles; the mean breadth about three and three-fourths miles. The appearance of the surface is very irregular. On the river side, there are considerable fields of haugh land, quite level; some of it being very productive, and some light and sandy. Several acclivities or small hills then intervene and intercept the prospect, so that the half of the parish is not visible from any one point in it. The highest hill in the parish is Cairnmonearn, one of the Grampians, elevated about 1200 feet above the level of the sea; but several others, as Mindernal, Mountgower, and Craigbeg, are nearly of the same height.

The temperature of the atmosphere is exceedingly various; the cold in some seasons, being much more intense, than in others; and the heat in summer, especially on the river side, very great, arising in some degree from the gravelly nature of the soil.

Hydrography. - There are several small rivulets in the parish, but none deserving notice except the Shiach Burn, which often sends down a great body of water from the Grampians, and after a course of the greatest rapidity for about twelve miles, falls into the Dee at the church of Durris. A number of chalybeate springs are found in different parts of the parish, of various degrees of strength; and near the top of one of the hills, there is a medicinal spring called Red-Beard's Well, from an old tradition, that a certain freebooter called Red-Beard, lived in a cave near this well, in the times of black mail. The water has never been analyzed; but it is said to contain neutral salts, and in many of its properties to resemble the Harrowgate water. It is difficult to obtain the water in a pure state, the spring being surrounded with reeds and decayed vegetable matter, and rills of water often falling into it.

Mineralogy. - Throughout the whole extent of the parish, there are immense masses of stone (gneiss) but Cairnmonearn and some of the other hills afford the finest granite and whinstone. The quantity of both appears to be inexhaustible. From the sides of these hills the naked rocks often show themselves; but they are generally covered with two or three feet of moss and heath; and in the hollows at the foot of the hills, the depth of moss is very considerable, affording peats and fuel of the best description. The soil in the lower ground is, in general, a loam, very fertile with good management; but clay and gravelly soils are like-wise found. In most of the varieties of soil under cultivation, the enormous masses of stone would attract the notice of a stranger; and would deter an agriculturist from settling here, who had been accustomed to the smooth fields of the southern counties. But custom has brought both men and horses to plough round these rocks, with the greatest ease; and it is generally observed that the soil is superior where those rocks abound most. There are here several large plantations of Scotch fir and larch in a thriving state, where the subsoil is not retentive of water; and hard-wood, such as beech, ash, and elm, grow well where the soil is congenial.

II. – CIVIL HISTORY

The estate of Durris comprehends this whole parish, and a considerable part of the adjoining parish of Banchory Ternan. This large property has passed from several owners in the course of a few years. It formerly belonged to Lord Peterborough; afterwards the whole estate was held in lease from him, by the late John Innes, Esq., of Leuchars, near Elgin. On the reduction of this lease by the Supreme Court, the estate came into possession of the late Duke of Gordon in 1824, as next heir of entail; and under authority of an act of Parliament, transferring the entail to other lands, the estate was purchased from the Duke of Gordon last year, by Anthony Mactier, Esq., late of Calcutta. The proprietor is patron of the parish church.

Parochial Register. – The parochial register of baptisms begins at the year 1717, as does also the register of discipline: and for upwards of forty years, the registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths appear to have been accurately kept. There is also a separate register kept for the annual distribution of a mortification to certain poor and to other purposes, left by a native of this parish of the name of Hog, in the year 1787, under the management of the kirk-session, which will be noticed more particularly under another head.

Antiquities. - The parish cannot boast of many antiquities of great interest. There are, however, several tumuli or cairns of stones, now partly overgrown with heath and whins. About six years ago, a farmer, in trenching out the foundations of some old houses and dikes on his farm, found a number of small copper and silver coins, but none of them in a state of good preservation. From their appearance they were supposed to be Danish.

It may here be mentioned, that after the great flood in 1829, the writer of this account, in taking away a large round cairn of stones for the purpose of preventing the encroachments of the River Dee, found, when the stones were removed, that they had merely covered a hillock of earth of exactly the same shape, and evidently artificial. His curiosity was excited to know the contents of this hillock; and on breaking it up, some bones, partly burnt, were found, and a number of sharp flint stones of different sizes. The hillock has very lately been more particularly examined; and at the depth of three feet under the surface of the adjoining field, a large trench or grave, upwards of seven feet long, built with stones on the sides, and covered above with three very large stones was discovered. It contained human bones mixed with charcoal; and it was observed, that part of a skull, contrary to the usual mode of interment, was placed at the east end of the grave.

Immediately overhanging a pretty steep bank of the River Dee, and about a quarter of a mile below the Church, is a small hill called the Castle Hill. It has a ditch at the bottom, and is commonly supposed to have been a place of strength, or military position. A small rill of water runs close past its base, which could easily have been made to fill the ditch. And on the top, which is quite level, several small hollows or cuts are yet to be seen, which tradition reports were the places from which the artillery was fired. Perhaps the hill may have been converted into this purpose, from being originally a dun or *law*, that is, a place for administering justice in ancient times; many others of a similar description being found in different parts of the country. Several Druidical temples are also to be met with in the parish, but none in a perfect state.

Modern Buildings. – The only modern building deserving of notice, is the mansion-house of Durris, built by John Innes, Esq., lessee of the whole estate. This building is connected with the ancient mansion-house by an extensive colonnade; and both have now undergone extensive repairs and additions by the present proprietor. There is no place of worship in the parish except the parish church, built in 1822. The parish formerly was a chapelry belonging to the Knights Templars, or some other very ancient Popish order.

III. – POPULATION

Amount of population in 1801,	“	605
1811,	“	724

1821,	“	945
1831,	“	1035

Number of families in the parish	“	“	“	213
chiefly employed in agriculture	“	“	“	140
Trade, manufactures or handicraft	“	“	“	55
Illegitimate births in the course of the last three years	“	“	“	8

From the benevolence and liberality of the late Duke of Gordon, under whose leases the whole parish is at present occupied, the people are able to enjoy, in a moderate degree, the comforts and advantages of society; and are, in general, contented with their situation.

IV. – INDUSTRY

Agriculture. - The number of imperial acres under tillage is nearly 4000; 1000 and upwards are in plantations, and perhaps 10,000 in pasture, mosses, moors, and hills; but of this, more than 1000 acres are fit to be improved and could be brought under cultivation, at a moderate expense; and a great deal of it would be as productive as some now under the plough.

Rent. - The average rent of arable land per acre is somewhat under L.1. The average rent of grazing an ox or cow is about L. 1 for the summer or grass season, and about L1. 10s. for the winter; the keep of a sheep, about 2s. 6d. a year.

Live Stock. - The common breed of sheep is the black-faced; and of cattle, the hummel or doddled. The colour preferred is black, dun or branded. Some, however, have lately introduced the Ayrshire breed; but whether that will be more advantageous than the other kinds is not yet ascertained.

Husbandry. - The farms are partly under a fifth, and partly under a seventh shift rotation. In the case of the former, two-fifths of the arable land are under grain crop; one-fifth under green crop, viz. turnip and potatoes; one-fifth in hay, and one fifth in pasture grass. In the case of the latter, three-sevenths are in grain crop; one-seventh under green crop, one-seventh in hay, and two-sevenths are pastured.

During the currency of the present leases, which were all for nineteen years, a great deal of waste land has been reclaimed by the tenants, - generally by trenching; as the number of large stones renders plowing impossible. Drains are cut where necessary and filled up; the stones are turned up, blown with gun powder and carted off the field; and lime, from fifteen to twenty bolls per imperial acre, applied; but dung must also be used, before a new field is fully productive. The farm-buildings in the whole parish, are, in general, in good repair; and all belong to the proprietor. The want of capital is an obstacle to improving waste land, by the tenants; but even if they had the command of capital. A nineteen years lease is too short to repay a tenant for improving effectively. Some part of the expense, perhaps a half, should be borne by the proprietor. There is limestone in various parts of the parish, but no quarry has been regularly wrought; nor is the quality of the rock properly ascertained.

Fishings. - There are two or three salmon-fishings on the Dee, within the parish; but the produce has diminished yearly for some time, and is now insignificant. This decrease is attributed to the mode of fishing with bag-nets at the mouth of the river, which intercepts the fish; and it may also be owing, partly, to the extensive works carried on for several years, in improving the harbour, of Aberdeen, where the river emptied itself.

Produce. - The yearly produce of the parish may be estimated as follows:

Total imperial acres under cultivation, 4000, as far as the writer of this report has been able to ascertain	
Two-fifths of which in grain crop (oats and barley,) 4 quarters per acre, exclusive of seed, 1600 acres x 4 = 6400 quarters at L. 1, 1s.	L. 6720 0 0
800 acres turnips, potatoes and cabbages, L. 5 per acre	4000 0 0
Hay, 500 acres at 100 stone of 21 lb. Dutch, = 50,000 stones at 5d. per stone	104113 4
Pasture land and hay too poor to cut,	1000 0 0
Do. Hills for pasturing sheep, 2000 sheep at 2s. 6d. each	250 0 0

Butter and cheese	300 0 0
Honey	87 10 0
Salmon-fishings	13 0 0
Total gross produce of the parish	L. 18412 3 4

V. - PAROCHIAL ECONOMY

Means of communication. - There is no market-town or village within the parish; Aberdeen and Stonehaven are the places where farm produce is sold; each about thirteen miles from the centre of the parish. There is no post-office nearer than Banchory, five or six miles distant; but most letters for this parish come through the post-office of Aberdeen; as the farmers being frequently there, get their letters with less trouble and delay than when sent by Banchory. There is only one turnpike road, which passes through the parish for about four miles, called the Slug Road, leading from Stonehaven to Banchory. But a commutation road to Aberdeen on the south side of the river, is kept in good repair; and several cross roads leading to other lines of communication are now in the course of being finished.

Ecclesiastical State. - The parish church was built in the year 1822 by the late proprietor, and is in sufficient repair, affording accommodation for 550 sitters, and none of the seats are let. The manse was built about sixty years ago, but, having never been well finished nor commodious, it is now unfit for the minister, and a new one is about to be built. The glebe measures about fifteen imperial acres, besides a patch of pasture which is of little value, being frequently covered by sand from the river. By an ice speat in January 1831, a great part of the best of this glebe, together with the crop of turnips and soil, was entirely carried off, and nothing left but bare gravel; and in another place, about three acres of the best land entirely disappeared, and now make part of the bed of the river. The late proprietor, the Duke of Gordon, in the most handsome manner, made a compensation to the minister for this extensive loss, increasing the glebe to the extent above-mentioned. If let at the same rent as the land of the same quality in the neighbourhood, the glebe and garden, with the office-houses, would bring L. 18 or L. 20 a-year. The stipend payable by the proprietor for this valuable parish, including allowance for communion elements, L. 8, 6s. 8d., is only L. 76, 12s. 6d. The deficiency is made up from the Exchequer allowance, so as to make the stipend L. 150. I find a valuation of the teinds in the year 1773, a few months after the settlement of my predecessor, before he could possibly be aware whether the valuation was fairly made or otherwise.

There is no chapel or other place of public worship of any kind within the parish. The people are all Presbyterians, with the exception of part of one family of Independents, and about twenty individuals of the Popish faith, who attend worship at the Popish College of Blairs, in the neighbouring parish of Maryculter.

Education. - The schools in the parish are two, - the parochial school near the church, at which are taught, reading English, English grammar, writing, arithmetic, and Latin. The salary is L. 29, besides the emoluments which the teacher enjoys as clerk to the session, and fees paid by the scholars, the average amount of which is 3s. 6d. per quarter. The situation altogether may be worth L. 56 per annum. There is also another school under the patronage of the kirk-session. It is generally called Mr. Hog's Charity School, because it was first instituted by a Mr Hog, a native of this parish, who, in 1787, left L. 5 per annum for a salary to the teacher, but for which he is required to teach gratis ten poor children recommended by the kirk-session, if so many should claim that privilege. The late minister also left L. 100 under the session's management, the interest of which was to be yearly paid to this schoolmaster, to augment his salary. The above, with a small croft of land, which the late proprietor gave gratis, and which is still continued, is all the income of this teacher, except the fees, which are the same as at the parish school. The branches of education taught are also the same, with the exception of Latin. His income scarcely exceeds L. 30 per year. At both schools, the instruction of the pupils in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism and the principles of the Christian religion is duly attended to. From this statement, it does not appear that any more schools are necessary. The parents in general are inclined to educate their families as far as their circumstances permit; and a sewing-school for girls has been established for several years. There is scarcely any person in the parish above fifteen years of age, who cannot read and write more or less, nor is there any from six to fifteen years, who, if they cannot read and write, are not in the course of being instructed.

Poor. - The average number of persons receiving parochial aid is 25; the yearly sum allowed for each, at an average, is L. 1, 15s. The annual amount of collections at the church is L. 33, including a little for mortcloth money. Interest of money lent, L. 10; penalties and occasional donations, L. 6, 10s. No other mode has been adopted here, of providing for the poor. The reluctance to receive parochial benefit is now rarely to be met with. Besides the above persons receiving aid, there are nearly as many who receive a small sum yearly from Mr. Hog's mortification already mentioned. The sum left was L. 500 three per cents reduced, yielding L. 15 a-year. This was sold out, a few years ago, for L. 420, and placed at interest in this country. The particulars are these:- L. 5 to a schoolmaster; L. 1 to the kirk-session, for their trouble in managing the fund; 10 s. to the session-clerk for keeping the books; 10 s. to the herds round the hill of Cairnshea, to make a midsummer fire on that hill, where the donor himself had once kept cattle; and the remainder, about L. 9, to poor householders not on the poor's roll.

Fairs. - There are three fairs held in the parish annually, one in May, one in June, and one in September, all for selling cattle; none of them very numerously attended.

Inns. - There are four inns, whereas one, or at most two, should be sufficient.

Fuel. - The fuel mostly used is peats and turf from the hills. For a farmer's house, sixty or seventy loads are required in a year, one-half peats and the other half turf; expense per load, casting and drying, of peats 1s., of turf, 7d., besides driving them home, which is done with their own horse and servants. When driving is paid for, the cost is 1s. 6d. or 1s. 8d. per load, according to the distance. Most families, however, besides this species of fuel, use a few bolls of English coal.