

PARISH OF KILDONAN.*

PRESBYTERY OF DORNOCH, SYNOD OF SUTHERLAND AND
CAITHNESS.

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I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, &c.—THE name Kildonan was spelt *Keldurunach*, in a charter by Gilbert Murray, who was Bishop of Caithness between the years 1222 and 1245; and in the seventeenth century, it was written *Kildonnand*. This name was originally confined to, as it still is the distinctive name of, the township where the church and manse were, at a very remote period, erected, and where they still stand; and upon the division of the country into parishes, the name of the ancient church was used as that of the extensive tract of the county of Sutherland, now forming the parish of Kildonan. Many of the early monks and other ecclesiastics, who were scattered throughout Scotland after Dioclesian's persecution, appear to have penetrated into Sutherland, and hence, those places in which their cells and residences were fixed, have been distinguished by the prefix of *Kil* from *Cella*,† a cell or chapel, which is found in

* Drawn up by George Sutherland Taylor, Esq. Golspie.

† Almost all the words now used in the Gaelic language connected with religious establishments, have been borrowed from the old monkish Latin used by the first Christian missionaries in the Highlands, to denote new offices and terms not previously known. Thus the Gaelic of church is *Eaglais*, from the Latin *Ecclesia*; the Gaelic of Bishop is *Easbulg*, from *Episcopus*; the Gaelic of abbot is *Abd*, from

many of the names of places in Sutherland, as well as in other parts of Scotland. Thus *Kildonan* is derived from *Kil*, a cell, and *Durun* or *Donan*, the proper name of its original inhabitant, whose memory has been handed down by tradition, with great veneration, and who is distinguished as *Saint Donan*. The leading valley, and most important part of the parish, is, however, as frequently called *Strath Helmsdale*, (disregarding the tautology of *Strath* and *Dale*,) as it is called the *Strath of Kildonan*; but in Gaelic it is alone known by the name of *Stra' Ilich*, while the river is called *Aven-Ilich*,—and the village of Helmsdale, at the mouth of the river, *Bun-Ilich*,—the root or lower end of the *Ilich*. All this strengthens the belief that the river Helmsdale is the "*Ilius flumen*," or river *Ilie* of Ptolemy, who places that river on the present east coast of Sutherland, and close to "*Verubium promontorium*," which is unquestionably the Ord of Caithness. The name *Ilie* is therefore older than that of Helmsdale, which must have been introduced, long subsequent to the time of Agricola, by the northmen, whose inroads and adventures on the coasts of Sutherland and Caithness, during the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, are so often narrated in the northern Sagas, and historically arranged by Torfæus. *Kildonan*, again, is believed to have originated after the settlement of Christian missionaries in the north of Scotland, and is, therefore, in all probability, of more recent origin than the name Helmsdale.

Extent, Boundaries, and Topographical Appearances.—This parish is altogether inland. It may be said to be divided by a great leading strath, into which other less important straths or mountain passes open; and, accordingly, the former account of the parish states, that "it resembles the form of a tree, stretching out at the top or height of the parish into branches." This is so far applicable, that the great and leading strath of Kildonan or Helmsdale, below the church, being in the centre of the narrowest and lowest corner of the parish, may be compared to the trunk of the tree, and the smaller straths or glens, called Tilny, Free, and Achnahow, opening into it at obtuse angles on the west side, and those of Suisgill and Kinbrace on the east side, may not inaptly be considered as the side-branches. Kildonan is bounded on the east by part of the county of Caithness, having the picturesque and towering

Abbas; the Gaelic of priest is *Sagart*, from *Sacerdos*; and the Gaelic of a chapel, or the primitive resting place of a Christian missionary, was *Cill*, pronounced *Kil*, from *Cella*, a chapel or cellar.

peaks of the Morven Hills, not far distant from the boundary in that direction. The north boundary of the parish of Loth, running from the top of the ridge terminating in the Ord of Caithness, to the westward, and along the elevated summits of Ben-vallich, and the high range of hills to Craigaboddich, intervenes between Kildonan as its southern line of march, and the German Ocean, to which the nearest point of the parish is distant about two miles. On the west, the line of mountain tops from Craigaboddich, along the centre of the high table-land at the head of Skinsdale, to the great mountain Ben-Ormin, and thence to Cromolt, near the head of Strathnaver, separate Kildonan from the parishes of Clyne and Farr; and on the north, an irregular march crossing the great Ballach between the valleys of Strathnaver and Kildonan, and thence going over the top of Ben Griam-beg, and the highest part of Knockfin, to the county of Caithness, divides the parish from part of Farr, and the southern part of the parish of Reay. The extreme length of the parish, either from Cromolt or the Balloch near Ben Griam, to the top of the Ord of Caithness, is fully 24 miles, in a direct line. The breadth varies considerably, being towards the south end of the parish from 5 to 10 miles, and towards the north end from 12 to 17 miles, in straight lines. The northern division of the parish is all elevated ground, and exposed to the unbroken sweep of every blast and storm that rage amidst the highest mountains of Sutherland and Caithness. The general aspect of this part of the parish is characterized by several high and massy mountains; some elevated table-land, of considerable extent, thickly covered with heather and alpine plants; and several lakes, of which four are of a large size; but their shores and the country immediately surrounding them being in general tame, the expanse of their waters cannot be said to afford those enchanting and remarkable views for which other lakes in the Highlands, encircled by a wild variety of precipitous crags, towering pinnacles, and verdant glades, are so justly celebrated. The southern part of the parish may be said to consist of two parallel ranges of mountains, between which lies the very beautiful valley of Helmsdale or Kildonan. This valley, which extends throughout the whole length of the parish, varies in breadth from one and-a-half to three miles, between the bases of the steep sides of the strath. The river Helmsdale, a large and very handsome stream, which may be classed among the second rate rivers of Scotland, occupies the centre of the valley, and rolls down, with many graceful

curves in its course, amidst holms and haughs of the brightest verdure, and occasionally through birch-covered flats that partially conceal some of the bends and reaches of the stream, until it enters the German Ocean, at the thriving fishing village of Helmsdale, which is situate in the adjoining parish of Loth. The highest mountains are at the boundaries of the adjoining parishes, and Ben Griam-more, one of these mountains, is nearly 2000 feet high. All the other lofty hills are deeply indented by headlong torrents, which often transversely cut the highest ranges of the hills almost down to their bases, and thus form many wild chasms, and great and abrupt inequalities of the surface. A great proportion, however, of the uplands is superior and safe pasture ground, with occasional large tracts of moss; and the soil of the haughs, along the lower parts of the river Helmsdale, is formed of deposits of mossy earth, mixed with particles of decomposed conglomerate rock and sand.

Meteorology.—Notwithstanding the inland situation and mountainous character of this parish, the climate in the valley of Kildonan does not vary much from that of the coast-lying parishes of Sutherland; but the extremes of cold and heat are perhaps greater than along the sea coast. In winter, the high parts of Kildonan are often visited with snow, when rain alone falls in the less inland districts; and when there is a general and great fall of snow, it is heavier, and lies longer in the interior than on the coast. The winter storms are also of greater violence on the exposed high grounds, and are there generally most tempestuous and severe. Frost appears early in autumn, even in the sheltered strath, and frequently, at that period of the year, the dawn of day, which is accompanied by, and discloses a slight hoar frost, formed during the night-time, is followed by a brilliant meridian sun, which is oppressive by its heat. The east wind is the coldest, and with it the heaviest falls of rain occur. Of late years, the aurora borealis, or “the merry dancers,” as the meteor is called here, has been unusually frequent, chiefly from the month of July to January. It is often seen moving in upright luminous lines from west to east, which, when they attain their-greatest brilliancy, suddenly become dim, and, as if formed of revolving columns, with alternate bright and dark sides, these shining lines again suddenly appear with an irregular glimmer, which increases in silvery brightness, until it becomes a light of great splendour. This alternate fading and reappearing of these coruscations continues until what

appear to be the revolving columns, disappear in the eastern horizon, under the earth's shade.

This parish is particularly healthy, and there are no distempers which can be said to be prevalent among the inhabitants. Rheumatic pains sometimes affect aged people; but these probably arise from sudden changes from heat to cold, and from inattention to the due regulation of their clothing in the winter season. Fevers have been of late years unknown; and in 1832, when malignant cholera raged at Helmsdale, at the foot of the strath, and within nine miles of the church of Kildonan, no case of that mysterious and fatal disease occurred in the parish. Consumption, ague, and cutaneous eruptions are all unknown. Apothecaries' drugs are almost never called for; and the inhabitants generally, having a sufficiency of substantial food, comfortable dwelling-houses, and being of temperate and active habits, enjoy uninterrupted health, and a buoyancy of spirits which gives promise of long life.

Hydrography.—The river Helmsdale or *Ilie* is the leading stream in the parish, through which it runs a course of upwards of twenty miles. It receives its waters from some lakes in the upper parts of the parish, and from many mountain-streams and torrents which swell its stream in all parts of its course. After leaving this parish, the river has a run of more than two miles in the parish of Loth, until it enters the sea at Helmsdale, where its mouth forms the harbour of that village. The upper district of Kildonan is remarkable for the number and size of its lakes. *Loch-na-cuen* is one of the largest of them, and is ornamented with two or three small islands, and several winding bays. It has char and other varieties of trout, but is considered rather an indifferent angling lake. *Loch-lean-na-clavan* lies between the two mountains, Ben Griam-more and Ben Griam-beg, and has trout of different varieties, of the largest size of any lake in the district. There are also a great many char in its waters, but they are of a small size. This is an excellent angling lake, particularly with a south wind. *Loch Badanloch* and *Lochinruar* are also large lakes, and abound in trout and char. *Loch-ari-cliny*, *Loch-ascaig*, *Lochan-ganuh*, *Loch-altan-fearn*, *Loch-cor-na-maugh*, *Loch-na-moin*, *Loch-na-clar*, *Loch Truderscaig*, *Loch Cuillie*, and *Loch Leiven*, are all likewise in the upper parts of the parish, and all abound with trout, and many of them with char; but it is somewhat remarkable that pike have never been found in any of these lakes, nor, indeed, in any of the numerous waters in the county of Sutherland.

SUTHERLAND.

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Mineral springs rise in many parts of the parish; but it is believed that they are all chalybeate. There is one of superior quality at Achnamoin; another near the manse; one at Caen; and one at the foot of Ben Uary.

Geology.—The geology of this extensive parish has not been minutely examined or described. The mountain ranges are, it is believed, all primitive rocks, among which gneiss and mica-slate predominate, while rocks of syenite, porphyry, and large-granular granite, occur in many parts. Several years ago, a rounded piece of native gold, weighing rather more than half an ounce, was found in the bed of the *Burn* of Kildonan, a rapid mountain stream; but although this discovery induced many other searches to be made among the loose gravel and pebbles in the bed of that and other adjoining streams, no additional particle of the precious metal has been found.

Zoology.—The most elegant of all our native wild animals, the red-deer (*Cervus Elaphus*), “destined to embellish the forest, and enliven the solitudes of nature,” still ranges in many parts of this parish, which anciently formed part of the great deer forest of *Dirrie Chatt*. This admired animal is now scarce in most parts of the Highlands; but amidst the solitary recesses of the great mountains, along the boundary lines of this parish, the red-deer, in considerable herds, still find protection, and during the storms of winter, they traverse the lower parts of the parish, in search of food and shelter. Deer stalking has, of late years, been revived with great ardour in this district, and in the few other remote parts of the Highlands where the stag is now to be met with; and the red-deer of Sutherland are the stateliest and fattest of their kind.* Since the extirpation of the wolf from this neighbourhood, which only occurred about 150 years ago, the fox has been the most obnoxious wild animal in the parish. His wiles, however, have been of little avail to him since the introduction of sheep-farming; for the united hostility of fox-hunters and shepherds has almost cleared the whole parish of foxes. The wild cat is occasionally met with, and is a particularly fierce and desperate animal; so much so that it has been known to spring at an unarmed assailant, who could not instantly kill it, when excluded from other means of escape. The otter also frequents the numerous waters in the

* “From the accounts that have been sent me from the various forests in Scotland, I am inclined to think that the average weight of the best deer in Sutherland is superior to that of the other forests. It reaches about fifteen stone Dutch, sinking the offal; and stags are occasionally killed of seventeen stone; and in the forest of Ben Hope, of a somewhat larger size.” *Scrope's Art of Deer Stalking*, page 10.

parish, but he is by no means a stationary animal, and wanders over wide tracts of country, from one stream to another. The polecat, the weasel, the mountain hare, and the mole are likewise met with. Sheep of the Cheviot kind, which equal in the quality and weight of the fleece, and the value of the carcass, the Cheviot stocks from which they were originally obtained, occupy the whole pasture grounds of the parish; and the shepherd's dog must not be omitted, for without this faithful and tractable animal, it would be impossible to conduct sheep-farming in the successful manner now done. The first of these dogs were obtained from the borders; but there is now a cross between them and the country colley dog, which is more valuable than the pure breed, and excels the southern dog in sagacity and hardiness. Birds of prey are numerous. The common eagle (*Falco albicilla*), the raven (*Corvus corax*), the hooded-crow (*Corvus cornix*), and some species of the hawk abound. The hills of Kildonan have ever been celebrated as among the best grouse ranges in the north. The strath is well stocked with black-cock, and the tops of the highest mountains with ptarmigan. The river Helmsdale has a valuable salmon-fishery, which is fished under the direct control of the landlord, in a manner the best calculated, in all respects, to protect the spawning fish and the smolts, and which it is expected will elicit, beyond doubt, the success of the liberal system had recourse to, over the former close and severe mode of fishing. The lakes, already referred to, abound in trout and char; and lamprey eels are said to ascend the river Helmsdale about the month of June. The fresh water muscle (*Mytilus anatinus*) is also found in the bed of the river Helmsdale.

Botany.—The diversity of soil, and the different degrees of altitude and shelter which this parish affords, cover its surface with a great variety of plants; but these are all, with few exceptions, common to similar localities throughout the Highlands. The haughs and low parts of the strath are verdant with succulent herbs and the finer varieties of grasses; and here the birch, the mountain-ash, the hazel, aspen, and white willow, ornament the banks of the river, and some of the sloping sides of the hills. The mosses have their peculiar plants, of which the cotton grass (*Eriophorum*) is the most conspicuous and most valuable. The extensive mountain sides are chiefly covered with heather and ling; and the few rare plants which have been observed are among the Alpine tribe on the highest hills, of which *Arbutus alpina*, and the cloudberry, (*Rubus chumæmorus*,) are the most abundant. A

great part of the parish was at a remote period covered with forests of stately pines, which have all perished without any contemporary account existing of the cause or manner of their destruction. Consequently, conflicting causes have been assigned for the total absence of the native fir in this part of the Highlands; but the generally received belief is, that the old trees died from natural decay when at maturity, their trunks being still dug out of the bogs in great numbers; and that from the decomposition of their leaves and branches originated the growth of moss, which has now completely altered the surface soil, and rendered it unfit for the growth of the pine tribe.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Some of the events and localities mentioned in the northern Sagas and in the Orcades of Torfæus are supposed, from an attentive examination of the narratives, to apply to this parish. There exists ample evidence, that after the final departure of the northern invaders, the whole of this parish was part of the ancient earldom of Sutherland; and consequently, the annals of that potent family embrace the subsequent historical events in the parish, several of which are described in Sir Robert Gordon's History of the Earls of Sutherland. The charter-room of Dunrobin Castle, —which is believed to have the most complete series of title-deeds and other invaluable muniments, from the thirteenth century to the present time, of any private charter-chest in Scotland,—contains written evidences, the most authentic, of the general correctness of that remarkable local history, in regard to the state of possession of the lands in the parish at different periods, and similar facts. In the sixteenth century, the chiefs and a great body of the clan Gun settled in this parish, which, since then, until a late period, has been their chief place of residence; and, as no connected account of them has ever been written, the following original notice of the clan Gun, prepared with great care from the only authentic sources relating to them that now exist, is here given in as condensed a form as the matter would admit of,—in order to suit the prescribed limits of this parish report.

The Clan Gun.—The clan Gun have at all times been considered throughout the North Highlands as descended from the Norwegian Kings of Man; and *Lochlin*, the Gaelic name for ancient Scandinavia, or, perhaps, in a more limited acceptation, for Denmark, is still named by the few natives of the Highlands who now recollect the traditions of their fathers,—as the parent country of the Guns, the Macleods and the Gillanders. According

to the Chronicle of Man, published with Camden's *Britannia* in 1586, Godred or Godfred, surnamed *Crovan*, and son of Harold the Black, of the royal family of Norway, was the first King of Man, and his sovereignty appears to have extended over a large portion, if not the whole, of the Western Isles. His reign is supposed to have commenced about the year 1077. The fifth King of Man, from Godfred the first King, and descended from him, was Olave, who, succeeding his father when very young, was deprived of his kingdom by a natural brother named Reginald, and had the Island of Lewis assigned to him. After severe and protracted struggles, Olave succeeded in recovering his kingdom, and died King of Man in Peel Castle, 18th June 1237. He had been thrice married, and by his third wife, Christina, daughter of Farquhar Earl of Ross, King Olave had three sons: 1. Guin or Gun, the ancestor of the clan Gun; 2. Leoid, Loyd, or Leod, from whom are descended the Macleods; and 3. Leandrish, from whom were the clan Landers, or Gillanders of Ross-shire,—but many of this last clan afterwards assumed the name of Ross. At this period, the Earls of Ross were very powerful in the north of Scotland; and, besides being masters of the present district of Ross, they held extensive tracts of country in several parts of the west coast, and along the Caithness shores. The three grandchildren above-named, of Farquhar Earl of Ross, appear to have been provided for by that potent earl about the middle of the thirteenth century;—Guin or Gun having been settled in Caithness, where the Earl's authority at that period was considerable. Leod obtained Glenelg from him, and by marriage with the daughter of a Danish knight, Macrauld Armine, also obtained Miginish, Bracadale, Durinish, Dunvegan, Lindell, Vaterness, and part of Troterness, in the Isle of Sky; while Leander settled in the midst of his grandfather's territories in Ross.

The particular lands in Caithness which were originally acquired by the clan Gun cannot, at this distant period of time, be satisfactorily traced; but the earliest castle or stronghold of their chief in that quarter, was the Castle of Halbury, at Easter Clythe, or as it is often called *Crowner Gun's Castle*, which, like almost all the other old castles in Caithness, was situate on a precipitous and nearly detached rock, overhanging the sea, and, except at one side, surrounded by it.

The clan Gun continued to extend and occupy their possessions in Caithness, until about the middle of the fifteenth century, when, in consequence of their deadly feuds with the Keiths of Caithness,

(who had obtained a settlement in that county, by the marriage of one of the Keiths with Marion Cheyne, a Caithness heiress, in the fourteenth century) and other neighbouring clans, the Guns found it necessary to establish their chief, and a strong detachment of the clan, in the adjoining county of Sutherland, where they obtained the protection of the Earls of Sutherland, and from them got possession of several lands in the parish of Kildonan and elsewhere. The history of the clan during these early centuries, as collected from tradition, and partly borne out by detached narratives in Sir Robert Gordon's history, is replete with incidents, which, in the present age, have more of the character of wild romance than of reality, and exhibits, in many startling details, the ferocity and implacable fury which distinguished the feuds of the clans in the remote Highlands,* even down to near the close of the seventeenth century. This report does not admit of lengthened narratives of these ancient feuds; but one instance may be given of the desperate manner in which they were conducted, by very briefly narrating the best traditional account that has been obtained of the following bloody and treacherous rencounter between the Keiths and the Guns. The meeting of the parties, and the slaughter of the Guns, are, by Sir Robert Gordon, stated to have taken place in St Tyr's Chapel,—an old religious edifice on the sea coast of Caithness, and on the walls of which he says the blood of the slain might be seen in his time;—but the tradition of the Highlands says that this perfidious affair occurred in the interior of the country, and in the open air, in Strathmore of Caithness.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the chief of the Clan-Gun was George Gun, who lived in feudal dignity in his then impregnable castle of Halbury; but he was better known as the *Crowner Gun*, or, as he was called by the Highlanders,—“*N^m Braistach-more*,” from a great broach which he wore as the badge or cognizance of his office of crowner. He had a deadly feud with the chief of the Keiths, and having met in St Tyre's chapel for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation, but without success, they there solemnly agreed to decide their quarrel, if they could not do so amicably on a future day, by equal combat between twelve sons

* Sir Robert Gordon, whose history was written in 1690, thus alludes to “the inveterat deldlie feud betuein the clan Gun and the Slaight-san-Aberigh,” (a branch of the Mackays). He remarks: “The long, the many, the horrible encounters which happened between these two trybes, with the bloodshed and infinit spoils committed in every part of the dicy of Catteynes by them and their associates, are of so disordered and troublesome memorie,” that he passes them over.—P. 174.

or relatives of each chieftain. This compact was concluded by mutual vows, accompanied with religious rites within the chapel, that the meeting would take place in a solitary part of the country, where no interruption could occur, and the escort of each leader was fixed at twelve armed horsemen. The crowner had been twice married, and had a numerous family of sons; but some of them resided in Sutherland, and it was also agreed that he should form his party there, and proceed into Caithness with them by the Strathmore route, while the Keiths would move, on the appointed day, towards the confines of Sutherland, and in the same direction; so that the two parties would meet in a retired district, remote from any chance of being disturbed. The chiefs, each followed by twelve horses and their riders, came within sight of each other on the appointed route, and soon thereafter met at a burn called Alt-na-gawn, below the glut of Strathmore. The crowner and the leader of the Keiths approached each other in full armour; but it was soon discovered by the Guns, that there were two riders on every horse in the party of the Keiths, and consequently the latter party had twenty-four men opposed to the twelve followers of the crowner. This vile stratagem instantly revealed to the Guns that their destruction, by unfair means, was determined upon. They scorned, notwithstanding the great odds against them, to retreat before their enemies the Keiths; and both parties dismounting, the huge double-handed sword, and other formidable weapons of the period used in close combat, were furiously and destructively wielded, amidst horrid imprecations, and remorseless vows of each clan's never-dying vengeance, which raised to madness the rage of the combatants.

The Guns fought most desperately, but could not withstand the great odds that opposed them; and after a long continued struggle, the survivors on both sides were so much exhausted, that the combat was mutually dropt,—the Keiths being so far the victors as to leave the field with their banner displayed, and to be able to carry with them their slain companions; while in the ranks of the Guns, the crowner and seven of his party were killed, and the remaining five were all severely wounded. The Keiths proceeded to Dilred Castle, in Strathmore, then occupied by Sutherland of Dilred, where they were hospitably entertained. The five surviving Guns, who were all sons of the crowner, also retired, but tarried at another stream, since then called Alt-Torquil, after Torquil Gun, one of the survivors, who there dressed the wounds of his brothers. Towards evening, Henry-

beg, the youngest of the surviving brothers of the Guns, proposed that they should follow the Keiths, and endeavour to obtain revenge, even by stratagem such as the Keiths had recourse to; but his brothers considered such a step as leading to their certain destruction. Henry, however, could not be restrained from his purpose, and swore that he never would rest until he should kill a Keith, and recover possession of his father's sword, helmet, shirt of mail, and broach of office, which the Keiths had taken off the dead body of the crowner. Two of the brothers were so severely wounded that they could not move to any great distance, but the other two accompanied Henry, who arrived at Dilred Castle soon after nightfall. On approaching the castle, its wooden windows or shutters were found open, and around a large fire in the lowest apartment, the survivors of the Keiths were quaffing bumpers of ale, and Henry, who went close to one of the windows, heard them narrate, with boisterous delight, the losses sustained by the Guns. The chief of the Keiths, not apprehensive of any danger, accidentally approached the window where Henry stood, and the latter then bent his bow, and in another instant his arrow pierced the chieftain's heart; Henry at the same time boldly accompanying the deadly flight of his arrow with the exclamation (afterwards used in the North Highlands as a proverb) of "The Gun's compliments to Keith."* The old chief dropped down dead; a panic seized the other Keiths; and the three Guns, having darted forward to the door of the castle, slew some of the first persons who ventured out by it; but finding that they could not retain their position long, Henry and his two brothers retired silently under cover of the darkness of the night, and hurried back to the assistance of the other brothers, who had been unable to accompany them.

The crowner, † thus killed by the Keith, was, according to Sir Robert Gordon, "a great commander in Catteynes in his tyme, and was one of the greatest men in that countrey; because when he flourished there was no Earle off Catteynes; that earldom being yit in the King's hands, and was thereafter given to William Sinck-

* This tradition was obtained in Gaelic, and Henry's exclamation of "Iomachgar n'Guinach gu Kaigh," is more emphatic in that language than in any translation of the words.

† *Crowner, Crownare, Crounai*, according to Dr Jamieson, was first an officer to whom it belonged to attach all persons, against whom there was an accusation in matters pertaining to the *Crown*; and the distinction between the office of crowner and that of sheriff was anciently thus explained: "All attachments perteines to the *Crowner*, quher the accuser makes mention, in his accusation, of the breaking of the King's peace. Otherwaies, gif he makes na mention thereof, the attachment pertenes to the shiref." 2dly, the crowner was he who had the charge of the troops raised in one county. The first certain proof of the existence of the office of crowner occurs in the reign of David II.

ler, the second son of William, Earl of Orkney, by his second wife: which William, Earl of Catteynes, was slain at Flowden."* The Earldom of Caithness, at the period here referred to, may be said to have been, in one respect, in the King's hands; for although, after the termination of the Norwegian line of Earls of Orkney and Caithness in 1331, the Earl of Strathern was also Earl of Caithness for a short time; the succeeding Earls of the Sinclair family claimed the Caithness title, while they also held the Earldom of Orkney under the kings of Denmark, and their allegiance to a foreign power divested them of their privileges as Earls of Caithness under the Crown of Scotland. This state of matters, no doubt, occasioned the establishment of a crownship in Caithness, which office was vested in the person of the chief of the Guns, who was afterwards killed by the Keiths.

Five of the crowner's sons survived him. The eldest, James, from whom the patronymic of *MacKeamish*, the son of James, is derived, which distinguished his son and all the subsequent chiefs of the clan, succeeded his father, and resided in Sutherland, as all his successors have done, their principal dwelling-house having been at Killernan, in the parish of Kildonan, until it was destroyed accidentally by fire, about the year 1690. From one of the sons of the crowner, named William, are descended the Wilsons of Caithness, and from Henry, the Hendersons. Another son, Robert, who was killed with his father, left issue, and from them were the Gun Robsons, who afterwards appear in the annals of Caithness, and from the issue of another son, John, also killed by the Keiths, were the Guns M'Eans of Caithness.

It was in the time of this crowner Gun that Hugh Macdonald of Sleat, third son of Alexander Earl of Ross, married a lady of the clan Gun, who is supposed to have been the crowner's daughter. By this lady, Macdonald of Sleat† "had a son, Donald, called Gallach, from being fostered ‡ by his mother's relations in

* Sir Robert Gordon's History, page 92.

† Gregory's Western Highlands and Isles, page 60.

‡ The *fostering* of the children of great families in remote but comparatively secure parts of the interior of the Highlands, was a very common practice in the north of Scotland, down to the beginning of the last century; and the alliance or affectionate tie thus formed often proved to be stronger than that flowing from blood-relationship. Sir R. Gordon refers to this result in another case of fostering among the clan Gunn. He says, "In the moneth of December, 1622 yeirs, Sir John Sinclair of Greinland and Ratter, (the Earle of Catteynes, his brother,) died in Catteynes. He was a great favourer of the Clan-Gun, with whom he had been fostered and bred in his infancie, which is accompted the strictest poynt of amitie and friendship among all the Hielanders of the kingdome of Scotland, preferring oftentimes their fosters and foster-brethren unto their parents, and neirest kiured; they will follow and de-

Caithness, who afterwards became the heir of the family, and from whom the present Lord Macdonald is descended."

James Gun was succeeded as chieftain by his son William, with whom originated the patronymic of *Mackeamish*, i. e. the son of James. William, the first Mackeamish, signalized himself in several conflicts in the north, and his fame as a successful and brave leader of his clan, has been celebrated in some Gaelic verses and songs still existing. Alexander Gun of Killernan was the second, and his son William Gun, the third Mackeamish. John Gun of Killernan and Navidale was the fourth, and Alexander Gun, also of the same designation, was the fifth Mackeamish. This last chief had two sons, Donald and George, and was succeeded by his eldest son Donald, who was the sixth Mackeamish. Alexander Gun, the son of Donald, was the seventh, and Alexander's son, William Gun, the eighth Mackeamish; but this last chief, who was an officer in the army, being killed in action in India, without leaving issue, and the other male descendants of Donald, the sixth Mackeamish, being extinct, the chieftainship devolved on the now deceased Hector Gunn,* the great-grandson of George, the second son of Alexander, the fifth Mackeamish, to whom he was served as nearest male heir on 31st May 1803; and George Gunn, Esq., Rhives, in Sutherland, the only son of the said Hector Gunn, is now the chief of the clan Gunn, and the tenth Mackeamish.

Land-Owner.—His Grace the Duke of Sutherland is proprietor of the whole parish, which has been part of the ancient Earldom of Sutherland from the earliest time to which the national records go back.

Antiquities.—There are the remains of several circular or Pictish towers in this parish, which have outlasted in their great antiquity, all traditionary accounts that may have once existed in regard to their erection, their uses, or history.† There are also

pend upon them befor their natural lords and masters." Several formal agreements for the fostering of children are still preserved in the north; and the foster-father, as well as the father of the child, makes a gift of cattle, which, with their whole increase, were to be kept as the property of the foster-child, until he arrived at man's estate.

* The name Gun had been, until the middle of last century, spelt with one *n*, but since then, a second *n* has been added, in order to distinguish the name from the word *gun*, a musket,—a comparatively modern word, which has slid into the English language, in a manner which puzzles all etymologists. The name Gun appears to have been the same as the Welsh *Gwynn*, and the name *Gawne*, still common in the Isle of Man.

† These Pictish towers seem to have been more numerous in the principal straths in Sutherland, than in any other district of Scotland; and the writer of this report has visited the ruins of 65 of them in that county. There are some others which he

many barrows or tumuli scattered over the parish; and in one not far from the manse, which was opened by workmen in search of gravel, a coffin formed of plain flags was discovered, in which were mouldering human bones. One of these tumuli, in the shape of a well-proportioned cone, and called *Knock'nreachy*, is situate close to the manse, and also an upright stone called *Clach-na-heudh*.

III.—POPULATION.

In the year 1801,	.	1440
1811,	.	1574
1821,	.	565
1831,	.	257

The decrease is accounted for by the change that occurred in the rural economy of the parish, by the substitution of Cheviot sheep for Highland cattle, between the years 1811 and 1821. The system of small holdings and subletting, previously common in the parish, was thereby altered; and no part of the parish being adapted for new settlements, the bulk of the population was settled in the coast-side parishes; and, in particular, they resorted to the village of Helmsdale and its neighbourhood, which is within two miles of the southern boundary of the parish, forming part of the same district of country, and where the increase of the population far exceeds the decrease in the interior.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Almost the whole of the parish is occupied as sheep farms. The number of sheep grazed, all of the Cheviot breed, is estimated at 18,000 head, and they are divided among six tenants of separate farms.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Helmsdale is the nearest town, distant two miles from the south boundary of the parish, and nine miles from the manse and church. There is a good road leading from Helmsdale, along the whole extent of the strath, to Bighouse and Melvich, on the north coast; and another road from within one mile of the manse, running southward across the Crask; a stormy and elevated hill dividing the strath from the head of Glen Loth, until it joins the parliamentary road on the east coast of the county at Loth-beg.

has not yet seen; and he is inclined to think, that a complete inspection of the whole of them, and accurate details of each tower, so far as their ruinous condition will admit of, including not only their size, and interior arrangements, and their situation in regard to marked localities, and their vicinity in some cases to each other; but also every deviation from any part of their peculiar, and generally uniform construction, would, in some degree, remove the obscurity that at present attends the contemplation of these interesting relics of the oldest stone buildings in our native land, and which, when complete, must have exhibited, in singular combination, the ingenuity of design, and laborious industry of a people somewhat advanced in the arts of civilisation, with the rudeness of workmanship peculiar to savage life.

Ecclesiastical State.—By Bishop Gilbert Murray's charter, *inter* 1222 and 1245, reconstituting the chapter of the bishopric of Caithness, which included the whole county of Sutherland, the chapter consisted of nine canons, of whom five were dignitaries. The Abbot of Scone was appointed one of the abbots, and had the church of "Keldurunach" assigned to him, under the provision, that when absent, he would have another to minister for him. The Abbots of Scone continued in charge of this church until the Reformation; and the foundation of "Tea'n Abb," or the Abbott's House is still seen to the west of the manse, while the figure of a human head, rudely carved in stone, and called *the Abbot's Head*, is preserved in the garden wall of the manse. The patronage of the parish has, since the Reformation, been vested in the Sutherland family. The extent of the glebe is between 13 and 14 acres, and the minister has besides the grazing of 60 sheep. The former stipend of 40 bolls of victual is now converted, and paid by the heritor with the former money stipend of L. 30, 10s. 1d.; and there is also an addition of L. 70 from Exchequer. The manse is in good repair, and the church is suitable for the congregation; the whole inhabitants of the parish being of the church of Scotland.

Education.—The parish school is situate near the manse, but, owing to the great extent of the parish, many families are prevented from sending their children to it. Several private teachers, however, are employed, and exclusively paid by the inhabitants; and the parental duty of providing for the education of youth appears, in this parish, to acquire strength in proportion to the difficulties to be overcome in exercising it. The amount of the parochial schoolmaster's salary is the minimum.

Poor.—The few indigent persons in this parish are treated with kindness by their more independent and fortunate neighbours; and the easy access they all have to fuel, and the non-exactment of rent for their small houses, make the moderate allowances from the poor funds which they receive of far more value to them, than the same sums would be in more densely inhabited parishes. These funds are derived from Sunday collections, and an annual donation from the Sutherland family. The average number of poor of all classes for the years 1835, 1836, and 1837, is 42; average amount of church collections during these years, L.9; average amount of mortifications, &c. during these years, L.4.

February 1840.