

ELIE PARISH

PAROCHIAL REGISTERS:.-What can be said perhaps of very few other parishes in Scotland, registers have been regularly kept in Elie since 1639, the date of its erection into a parish. There is, however, one small chasm in them, the volume which began with 1682, and ended at 1700, having been lost. They still continue to be kept with great regularity. On his succeeding to the cure, the present incumbent found occasionally an indisposition to register the births of children, arising probably from the fees paid on the occasion. But he laid it down as a rule not to baptise, till a certificate of registration from the session-clerk was produced ; and now this is so well understood that almost no one thinks of speaking to him on the subject, till this preliminary point has been settled. If any are too poor to bear the expense, the session-clerk either gives his labour gratis, or is remunerated by the session. At the same time as during the last five years, perhaps for many before that, only one child of a dissenter has been born and baptized in the parish, and its name is also inserted in the book, the lists are as nearly complete as can be supposed. The minutes of session also exist for the same period, and with the same exceptions. During the early period, they bear evidence of an inquisition into the manners of the people which, it may be doubted, whether it ever was for edification. The spirit at least of our days would not bear it; and comparingly the state of morality then, with that which exists now, we do not seem to be far behind what is commonly considered the high and palmy days of the church.

POPULATION.

In 1811, - 883

1821, - 990

1830, - 1073

Number of families in the parish about 250

chiefly employed in agriculture, 90

in trade, &c. - 110

in other ways, 110

Average number of births for last 4 years, 25 1/4

of marriages, 8

of deaths, according to an account kept by the grave-digger, 16

By which number, if we should divide the gross amount of the population, it will give the length of a generation sixty-five years. This speaks much for the healthiness of the place.

Number of unmarried men (bachelors) above 45, 4

of unmarried women above. 45

Widows and widowers are not included

About fifty years ago, when the population was only 620,

the average number of births was, $22 \frac{4}{7}$

of deaths, $17 \frac{3}{7}$

of marriages, $7 \frac{5}{7}$

Much about the same that it is now when there is an increase of about 400 in the population. I cannot attempt to say how this fact is to be explained.

Within the last three years there has been one illegitimate birth.

For two years and upwards there have been none.

CHARACTER AND MANNERS OF THE PEOPLE:.-The inhabitants are in general industrious and sober, regular in their observance of the ordinances of religion, and there are few places where the Sabbath is more becomingly and devoutly observed. It is no doubt true, that here, as in other parts of the country, some are neither so strict in their attendance in public worship, nor so correct in their habits as might be wished ; and what appears strange is, that the exceptions to the prevailing decorum are chiefly to be found among the female part of the population. The number, however, is small ; and while the old are dying out, we are not aware that any of the young are addicting themselves to the same disorderly practices. It has often been remarked by strangers that on Sundays the church, from the cleanliness of the people, and in many instances the handsomeness of their dresses, presents much of the appearance of a city congregation.

PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

MARKET-TOWN.-Elie is a burgh of barony. No market, however, is held in it, although, if the projected improvements on the harbour should take place, the probability is, that one both for grain and cattle would be immediately established: nor would any place be more central for a large district of country. The nearest market-town is Colinsburgh, at the distance of two miles

and a half; Cupar, the county town, is fifteen miles from us; St Andrews, the seat of a university, thirteen ; and Anstruther five.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION-There is a post-office in the village. It is a sub-office to that at Colinsburgh. The post arrives at eight every morning, and departs betwixt six and seven in the evening. Much might be done for equalizing the rates of postage-great anomalies existing in that respect. A turnpike road runs through the whole extent of the parish. Toll-bars in abundance. If I go to Pittenween, a distance of four miles, I have two to pay. If I travel in the opposite direction to Kirkaldy, I have three ; whereas the neighbouring parish to the east, though at a greater distance, has only two. There is a coach that Passes and repasses daily in connection with the steam-boat betwixt Largo and Newhaven. But the great channel of communication is the sea. We have two regular packets that sail weekly to Leith exporting the produce of the land, and importing those articles of merchandise which are required for the consumption of the Neighbourhood. Steam, however, is the chief agent, and nothing has done more for opening up the coast of Fife than the application of it to sailing vessels. Besides the boat already mentioned, which in summer sails twice a day from the Chain Pier at Trinity to Largo, the Aberdeen and Dundee steam-vessels daily visit us twice, and occasionally three times, both going and returning. And were the harbour repaired, it is supposed that a direct steam communication would be established betwixt this place and London.

ECCLESIASTICAL STATE:-The church is most conveniently situated, being built in the middle of the village where the great body of the people nearly 1000 reside. Of the remaining fifty or sixty, none are above two miles distant, and the roads are good in all directions. The writer does not know when it was originally built, probably when the parish was first erected but it underwent a complete repair in 1831, and is now surpassed by none in the neighbourhood. Although simple, it has an air of elegance which strikes the stranger; and it could scarcely have been made more comfortable either for the speaker or the hearer. Being seated for nearly 600, it can easily accommodate more than the half of the gross population. The consequence is, that, there being room enough, the people, with very few exceptions, are attached to the Establishment. Perhaps it would have been as well, in repairing the church, to have added to its size ; for although there is sufficient accommodation at present, no allowance is made for any increase of numbers. As the seats are divided among the heritors, they have allotted part of them to their tenants and families, and the rest are let to the inhabitants of the village. The rent may be considered as merely nominal 1s. yearly for each sitting and the sum thus raised is spent in purchasing coals for the poor at the beginning of winter. Even here, however, we are met with disadvantages, for the price being so low, families are anxious to have a whole pew to themselves, and would often pay willingly for more room than they can occupy. The only remedy hitherto found for this evil is, to insist that those who rent a pew should show how it is to be filled. In the galleries, a good many of the seats are free.

The manse was built in 1824. What is of it is in very good repair. Unfortunately, however, it was built for a bachelor, who could not get it made small enough ; and the consequence is that it is

not "competent" for the accommodation of the present incumbent and his family. He has, therefore, been obliged to apply for an addition, in which he has had to contend with the agents of the principal heritor, who, although aware of the existing necessity, and at one time offering of their own accord a much more splendid one than he desired, have now, for some cause or other, given the proposal a decided opposition. Still, as the manse was originally built without the sanction, and even without the knowledge, of the Presbytery being consequently, in the proper sense of the word, no manse at all, and as the necessary steps have been taken to obtain what is wanted, without any protest or interdict on their part, he doubts not that he will succeed in attaining the object.

The stipend is one of those which receive aid from Government. It consists of 9 chalders 6 bolls of grain-of which there are 3 chalders of wheat, and 4 and 2 bolls of oats, the remainder being pretty equally divided betwixt barley and peas and beans. The Government allowance is L. 12, 14s. 8d. But even when all is added together, the stipend of the present incumbent, since he succeeded to the living, has, on an average, been L. 21 below the minimum. He believes that last year, owing to the fiars of wheat, in Fife being so low, he may boast of having had the smallest stipend in Scotland.

There is no dissenting place of worship in the parish. The number of individuals who are members of any dissenting congregation does not, it is believed, exceed 12. Certainly there are not more than 15 ; and these are divided among perhaps half a dozen different sects. There may also be a few who attend the ministrations of dissenters, without being joined in communion with them. Both members, however, and occasional hearers, taken together, cannot be more than from 20 to 25. We find also two or three who boast of attending no place of religious worship : but all the rest either are, or profess to be, attached to the Established Church. Divine service is always well attended. The number of communicants varies from 330 to 380. The collections at the church door average L. 30 per annum. We have no Societies for religious purposes : but an annual collection is made for one or other of the objects which the General Assembly has taken under its patronage. The average amount may be about L 10. Sir W. C. Anstruther is patron of the parish.

EDUCATION.-There are what may be called three schools in the parish. Of these the parochial is the chief. In it reading, writing, arithmetic, and Latin are required to be taught. One of the other schools is taught by a female. Besides reading, sewing forms one of the branches of education. The third is very trifling, and little known of it. But about fifty boys and girls from the parish attend a school at Earlsferry, where the wages may be a half-penny per week cheaper. All appear to be sensible of the advantages of knowledge ; and there is nothing which parents labour so hard to procure as a good education for their children. In cases where, from poverty, nothing can be spared for this object, the session is ready to give assistance, always insisting, however, that the parents, if possible, shall give something be it ever so little. There are none above fifteen years of age who cannot read. Perhaps a very few old people may be unable to write but all betwixt five and fifteen can either read and write, or are learning to do so.

POOR AND PAROCHIAL FUNDS;.-The average number of persons on the poor's roll is 20 ; of these some receive 8s. per month ; some 6s. ; some 4s. ; and some as low as 2s. 6d. according to circumstances. The general average may be about 6s.; but, besides this, there is an insane person to be maintained in the Dundee asylum. This individual does not belong to the parish, but was forced upon us by a very rigorous application of the law of settlement. We have also the family of a man who died of cholera to support. To meet these expenses, there are the weekly collections, averaging L. 30 per annum, L. 58 arising from land vested in the minister and elders, and L. 15, 12s., being the interest of money accumulated by the session, and lent at 4 per cent. to the road trustees-the whole amounting to upwards of L. 100. From this sum, however, there fall to be paid half of the session-clerk's salary, together with that of the precentor ; what is necessary for keeping up the school and school-house, and the fees of the synod and presbytery clerk. All of these may amount to L. 25, leaving something short of L. 80 for the use of the poor. Occasional help is also given to those who are verging towards poverty, in order to keep them as long as possible from becoming actual paupers. Some houses belonging to the session are also given to the poor rent free. The collections at the church door are not so liberal as they might be, owing, principally, we believe, to a foolish notion, that any deficiency must come upon the heritors. By them, however, not a single farthing has been furnished during the present incumbency for that object. All of them are non resident. This state of matters will, in all probability, bring on, ere long, the necessity of at least a voluntary assessment. There are some instances of a refusal to be put on the poor's roll. But we have met with little of that Scottish spirit spurning at all assistance, which history or tradition records as having once existed.

INNS;.-On coming to the parish, the writer found no less than 11 houses where spirituous liquors were retailed. The number is now greatly diminished. At present, there is only one inn. But there are four grocers, each of whom has a spirit license; and, what is to be regretted, they all retail spirituous liquors, more or less, in their back shops or parlours. Some of them, we know, disliking this part of the business, are endeavouring to curtail it as much as possible ; and we hope that all will come in time to see the propriety of dropping, what we should imagine could not be very pleasant to themselves. They are all, however, very respectable. We never hear of any outrages taking place; and it is seldom that a drunk person is to be seen on the street. The writer having been at some pains to get the number of tippling-houses reduced, he must do the licensing magistrates the justice to say, that they were at all times ready to second his wishes. Whether an old license was to be withdrawn, or a new one to be withheld, they at once gave effect to his request; and he doubts not that, in other places, those who have an interest in putting down such houses, will find them equally willing to forward their desires by their authority and power. Nor is there any thing that would tend more to the improvement of the manners and morals of the people-drinking being the cause of by far the greater part of the mischief which we have to witness and lament.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

All accounts agree in stating that a great improvement has taken place in the parish, since the period of the last Statistical Account. By the new system of agriculture, and especially by the liberal employment of draining the land has been brought into the highest state of cultivation ;

and grounds which, forty years ago would have been thought good for nothing, are now seen waving with the richest harvests. The houses of the cottars, we believe, are equal to what those of the farmers were then; and the mansions of the latter surpass, both in appearance and comfort, such as the smaller proprietors formerly possessed. So much has already been done for the progress of agriculture, that little further remains to be accomplished. The comfort and happiness of the labouring classes might no doubt be promoted by a better education than they used to receive, by parents accustoming their children, from infancy, to habits of industry, and by abstinence from the use of ardent spirit, There is, however, an evident improvement going on both in their religious feelings, and in their moral conduct.

December 1836 (Rev George Milligan)