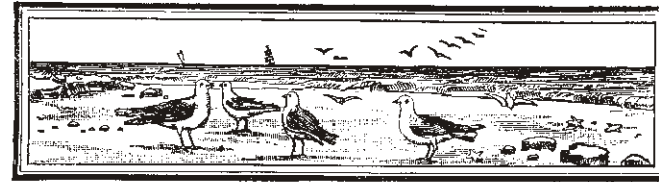


OLDMELDRUM FROM THE PERCOCK TREE.



THE STORY OF A PARISH.

CHAPTER I.

PRE-HISTORIC.

"The hallowed quiets of the Past."—*Lowell.*



THE first figure which we bring upon the little stage of this Parish history is a traditional one, but none the less one of interest and significance. This year (1897) brings us to the 1300th Anniversary of the founding of the Christian religion in Scotland by St. Columba, and it is one of his priests or Culdees around whom the earliest traditions of this Parish centre. A pestilence of some kind had invaded this part of the land, and in heroic devotion to the country in which he lived, and the people amongst whom he laboured, Nachlan (afterwards St. Nachlan) made the circuit of its boundaries on his knees, beseeching the Almighty that the pestilence might be averted and the people of his charge saved from its scourge. The effort cost him his own life, and his pious soul left the exhausted body at the place where now an ash tree (called the Percock tree) and a clear spring of water form Nature's memorial of his heroic self-sacrifice. "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and it is recorded that the intercession of St. Nachlan was so effectual that the country within the circuit of his praying march was saved from the pestilence, and it is confidently believed that there was cast around the Parish, whose history we are about to sketch, a cordon which renders it still, to a great extent, proof against "the pestilence that walketh at darkness and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day." We shall

have occasion to trace the labour of men less traditional ; but we cannot surely find a more noble type and example of ministry than this which is set before us in the beautiful tradition of the Patron Saint. The memory of the Saint was for long preserved in the Parish by the setting apart of a day—the 7th January—in his honour, the which day was observed, according to an ancient writer, as “a great holyday with much rejoicing, the people abstaining from all manner of work, and giving themselves up entirely to mirth and jollity.” This day has no longer public recognition, but it is the present writer’s hope that it may still bring with it the remembrance of a Saint so holy and a deed so heroic.¹

¹ It is in the recollection of some still living that on that day a procession, principally of children, left the town of Old Meldrum and proceeded to the grounds of Meldrum House, where hospitality was afforded by the then respected laird.

CHAPTER II.

THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES.

“History hath triumphed over time, which, besides it, nothing but eternity hath triumphed over.”—*Raleigh*.

BESIDES the memorial of the tree and spring, however, there is another memorial to the saint in the name first given to this parish and to the church thereof. We can have little doubt Bethelnie (for such was the name) in its origin means “the House of St. Nachlan,” the word Bethelnie being most probably a contraction for Beth-nathelan—the dwelling of Nachlan or Nathelan, as the name of the Saint may then have been. On the slope of the hill that forms almost the first rising ground to the north of Bennachie, and about 12 miles therefrom, rose the first parish church of Bethelnie. Many a story could the ruined stones of that little church tell if they had the voice ; but, alas ! much of the story and history is buried in the ruins. Something of what is known I will now attempt to tell, but the sketch must be meagre, and it may be as well to state here, that, from the nature of the evidence the story must proceed, as it were, by “leaps and bounds.”

At the outset we must make a bound from the days of the Culdee Saint to the time of the Protestant Reformation, when our history proper commences—a period of many centuries about which there is no authentic information. In 1560 Old Meldrum, old though it be, was probably unknown, the name being applicable only to a small farm “township.” Perhaps the first mention of Old Meldrum is in connection with the battle of Inverurie, fought between King Robert Bruce and the Earl of Comyn in the early years of 1300. The army of the King encamped the night before Christmas in “Ald Meldrom,” and were there discovered by the forces of the Earl of Comyn coming from Buchan. At first the battle went against the king, who, however, was not able to be

with his army owing to sickness. But the reverse so stung him that he caused himself to be set on horseback, and, supported by a man on either side, led his soldiers against the enemy, whom he routed and pursued to the borders of Buchan. We are indebted for this information to Barbour, the first Poet of History, who was the Parson of Rayne in the end of the 14th century. More than once in his poem "Bruce," (written about 1375), he mentions Ald Meldrom, which it is supposed was only a "farm town," the village not being then in existence. The name Aldmeldrom or Old-meldrum is probably of Celtic origin—the Gaelic words "Alt Mealldrum" meaning "the burn of the ridge of the hill"—a derivation which the existence of such a burn separating Bourtie and Meldrum parishes seems to justify.

The population at that time would likely be greatest in the neighbourhood of the church at Bethelnie and also in the vicinity of the chapel—about two miles off—called "the Chapel of Our Lady," the site of which is the present farm of Chapelhouses, or, to be more accurate, the well, then and still known as "the Lady's Well." Bethelnie and the Chapel of Our Lady had for centuries been the places of worship in this Parish during the dominion of the Roman Church. Much evidence goes to show that Romanism "died hard" in the County of Aberdeen. Besides the fact that the Aberdonian, like all great bodies, moves slowly, this was doubtless due to the strong personal influence of the Vicar, who then watched over the spiritual interests of the community. This Vicar was a certain Alexander Seton, a scion of the House of Meldrum. He was the first Seton of Mounie—the family is still represented—and was the second son of the fourth Seton or Setoun of Meldrum. Besides being himself a man of strong character, Alexander Seton, by virtue of his office, was also Chancellor of the Diocese of Aberdeen, and thus commanded the support of all the nobles of the country round about, without whose opposition he was safe, for, as we know, whilst John Knox did much to effect the Reformation, his work was only effectual when he had the support of the Nobles and Gentry. The Lord Huntly of that day was a special obstruction to the spread of the new movement in the north, boasting as he did after the Protestant Settlement, that, by his influence alone he could restore "the mass" in three counties. The people, who were then grossly ignorant, there being

no system of public education at that date, followed their superiors, whether ecclesiastical or temporal, as a flock of sheep; and so, despite the fulminations of John Knox, and despite the Act of Parliament which declared, in 1560, that the profession and practice of the Roman religion was nothing less than a crime, Rome held sway in the Parish of Bethelnie for fully six years after it had been supplanted in the south of Scotland. Priest Seton ministered in the two churches above mentioned until 1567. Unlike the Parish Minister of to-day he was not alone in the ministry although alone in his supremacy. The country at that time was full of illiterate, and worse still, of questionably moral, lesser priests, and preaching friars, who were always at the call of the Vicar. In 1567 the old order was at last changed. Romanism had to give way before the reformed religion, and in that year we find that a certain Thomas Myll, a reader, introduced Protestant services into the Church of Bethelnie. The old Vicar died at Mounie, without issue or succession, in the following year. 1584

Another reader succeeded Thomas Myll, in 1570, called Alexander Garioch, and he continued in office until 1784, when at last a minister was found for the charge. The delay in the appointment of a minister was due simply to the fact that, though the religion of Rome had been disestablished by Act of Parliament, there was scarcely a Protestant minister to be found in Aberdeenshire to take the place of the old priests. In 1570 the Garioch could only boast of one, the minister of Oyne—John Abercrombie. The minister appointed to Bethelnie in 1574 was Mr. Stephen Masoun, and he being the first Protestant minister of the Parish we feel inclined to reach our hands over the intervening centuries and offer him our hearty congratulations. The style of worship at that time was of course very different from that which prevails in the Church of Meldrum to-day. Three bells were tolled at different hours on the Sunday morning to intimate to the people that it was a day of worship. The first bell was simply to awaken the drowsy—a relic of which is perhaps found in the 8 o'clock bell often heard still in our parishes on Sunday morning. Then there was the second bell sometime after—which probably survives in our 10 o'clock bell—to announce that the reader—one so called because he *could* read—unlike the generality of the people or even priests of that time—had begun his part of the service, which

consisted in reading prayers from Edward the Sixth's Prayer Book. After the prayers the Ten Commandments and the Creed were read, as also set portions of the Psalter or Prose Psalms—the doxology concluding his part of the service. Whilst the reader thus conducted devotional exercises within, a very different kind of exercise was being conducted without. At the church gate—some in iron wrist-bands—others with iron bands called “jongs” round their necks—were the evil doers placed there by the priests in order to shame and be shamed—and we are led to believe that this spectacle was more the rule than the exception. When the last bell had ceased to ring, those as yet outside the church were made aware that the preacher had begun his sermon and that therefore they could not enter now. A prayer of thanksgiving, a hymn of praise, and the benediction concluded the service, which must have demanded greater patience than the people of to-day are inclined to give.

As to the church building we are not to imagine, as is sometimes done, that it was in any way more elaborate or attractive than the churches of to-day.

Bethelnie Church was, however, above the average country church of that time in architectural beauty, a fact which is evidenced by several stones of no small artistic value taken from the old Kirk of Bethelnie, and built into the new church on the langley of Old Meldrum. But, as a rule, the Parish Churches of those times were quite unpretentious, built often of wood and roofed with heather or straw. Under this rustic roof the people were not provided with the luxurious seats that often, not always, invite the modern worshipper—in fact there were often no seats at all except what they provided for themselves. A pulpit, a reading-desk, and a table would frequently form the scanty furniture, and, as to the musical instrument, such a thing would not have been dreamt of in the smaller churches. The minister conducted the service without gown or cassock or surplice, or any such thing; but the Assembly nevertheless prescribed the every-day dress of ministers as well as that of their wives. Red, blue and yellow colours were condemned, also rings, bracelets, buttons of silver, gold, or other metal; “all using of plaids in church of minister or reader; all silken hats, and hats of divers colours.” Grave colours were

recommended, as black, russet, grey, and materials of serge, worsted, or suchlike,—silks, satins, or velvets being discountenanced.

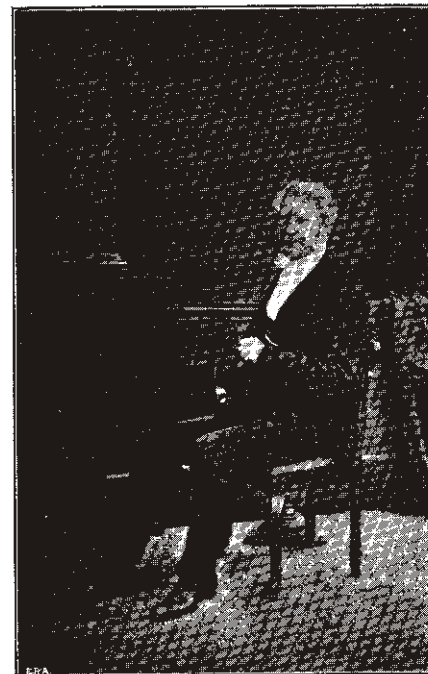
The ministry of Mr. Masoun must have been most disheartening. He had laboured for seven years in the parish of Inch before coming to Bethelnie, with what encouragement we do not know; but we know that the flock of his new charge must have been a mere handful, since the people, and especially the upper classes, obstinately clung to the old beliefs and refused to conform to the new order. The life of a protestant minister, too, at that time, and during the time of several of his successors, must have been a hard struggle. Two-thirds of the available stipend had been assigned by the Privy Council to the displaced Roman Priests as long as they lived, and when they died even that two-thirds, which ought to have made the position of a protestant minister considerably more comfortable, was confiscated by the nobles and popish dignitaries. Even of the remaining third the protestant minister received but a pittance, as the larger part of it went to the Crown, through which it also reached the nobles. We learn that the stipend of Stephen Masoun was in modern reckoning £8. 10. 9½, which, allowing for the higher value of money at that time, was hardly a stipend on which “to grow fat.” Forced to live by some method very many of the early Reformed ministers took to selling ale, either privately or at a tavern, and in this ignominious fashion between “beer and the Bible” they managed to eke out a livelihood. The State of Society, too, at that time, was little else than barbarian. The dirk was the common arbiter of disputes, and as these were not infrequent, a state of lawlessness prevailed. The first Reformed ministers did not always live in their parishes, but often in the neighbouring town, and only visited their districts for the performance of duty. Mr. Stephen Masoun's ministry came to a close in 1612, during which time he was probably minister at one and the same period to most of the neighbouring parishes along with his own—Bourtie, Fyvie, Tarves, Rayne—which were still unable to find a minister of the new religion. In 1612 he was transferred to the Parish of Slains, and as we know that that Parish, having had no less than six ministers since the Reformation, was in search of one whose wisdom and industry would secure a longer residence, we are led to imagine that, despite his hard conditions, the minister of Bethelnie had proved himself such

a man. We are glad to think that Protestantism in this Parish had for its first advocate such a worthy and estimable man.

The next minister of Bethelnie, John Logie, like his predecessor came from Inch, where he had laboured for six years. Mr Logie the son of an advocate, was a man of "parts." As a student he had won the esteem of the then reigning monarch, James VI., who, attracted by his exceptional scholarship, provided for "his sustenance at the scuills during all the days of his lyfetye." He ministered faithfully to the Parish from 1613 to 1629, but his influence was also felt outside the Parish, and especially in the Supreme Court of the Church,—the General Assembly,—where, when a member, he was always a prominent figure. After his death, whilst minister at Rathven, Banffshire, Parliament ordered a sum of £50 to be given to Mr. Logie's children on account of their father's sufferings.

A period of four years elapsed from the translation of Mr. Logie to Rathven and the appointment of his successor, of which we are told nothing. In 1633, Mr. William Wedderburne was appointed to the vacant charge by Charles I. He had been Regent of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and in that capacity had won a name for himself as a man of exceptional intellectual ability. It would have been better if he had remained in the office and added to his reputation, for the qualities of head which fitted him for such an office, were not allied to those qualities of heart which are requisites for the proper discharge of ministerial duties.

So seriously did he misconduct himself, that in 1644 he was deposed by the General Assembly, which Court however afterwards repented, and on the ground of his great ability recommended him to the Presbyteries as a suitable candidate for a vacant charge. Bethelnie ventured to receive him back again, but the interval had worked no improvement, and he was again removed from his charge in 1646. He lived, however, to fill yet another charge, that of Strathdon—to which he went in 1651—but how he conducted himself there history does not record—we hope in a manner befitting one who had had so many chances of reform. The period of his ministry was an important one in the history of the Church. In 1633, Charles I., out of a true regard for the welfare of the Church, caused the Law of Stipend to be passed through Parliament, which law regulates the minister's stipend to the present day. By



REV. GEORGE GARIOCH.

that law, the teind, or the portion of land value due to the minister of a parish, was fixed at one-fifth of the victual in every parish. In this Act, Charles I. proved himself a genuine benefactor, but, by another Act of some years later the question of benefaction was doubtful. He ordered the Church to use the service of the book prepared by Archbishop Laud, which practically meant the confirmation of Episcopacy in the land. On the 28th February, 1638, the Solemn League and Covenant was signed in the Greyfriars Churchyard, Edinburgh, with a fervour and enthusiasm seldom, if ever equalled in the annals of the Church. The Covenant was a protest against the exorbitant demands of Charles I., but was evidently too solemn for the people of Garioch, and of Aberdeenshire generally. Stout resistance was made to it throughout the country, and many a sad story could be told of ensuing cruelty and bloodshed. About the only member of the Garioch Presbytery who submitted to the terms of the Covenant was the successor of William Wedderburne, George Leith, who was ordained to the charge in 1647, being translated from Culsalmond where he had ministered for twelve years.

Curiously enough, in the neighbouring parishes of Kinkell and Kenmay there ministered in the one parish a certain William Leith, and in the other a Dr. David Leith. Of like name, these men were not of like nature with George Leith, for they so withstood the Covenant and adhered to the King that one of them, David Leith, had to resign his charge and go to London, being deposed in 1653 for desertion of his parish, whilst the other was deposed from his parish in 1649, the minister of Bethelnie declaring the pulpit vacant. Unfortunately the suspicion of time-serving is attached to the attitude of George Leith. He foresaw events, it is supposed, and planned his action in the light of the future, rather than in the light of his own conscience. Charles I. met his fate as we know in 1649, and immediately the scale turned. The Covenanters for the time became supreme, and the Royalists were vigorously suppressed. We know little or nothing of the life of George Leith during those troublous times, save the fact that he ministered in the Parish until 1664, presumably upholding the tenets of the Covenant and resisting all efforts to assimilate the Church of Scotland with the Church of England.

We come now to the last minister of Bethelnie, William

Urquhart, A.M. He was inducted to the Parish in 1665, and remained its minister till 1697. When he entered the Parish it was under the Episcopal regime, when he left it Presbyterianism was the established religion of the land. Charles II., violating his solemn promise to the Church of Scotland, given through the Presbytery of Edinburgh, had in 1661 declared the Church, established by law, to be Episcopal, but on the accession of William and Mary to the throne, Presbyterianism was re-established by what is known as the Revolution Settlement in 1688, and was fixed upon a foundation from which it has never been removed. William Urquhart, however, retained his allegiance to Episcopacy despite the Settlement. For his obstinacy he was deprived of his stipend, whilst allowed to retain his church, and manse, and glebe, and thus we are not surprised to learn that when he died he owed the Session by bond a sum of £8 6s 8d,—“having no visible stock at his death belonging to him.” Conscience when a real guide was often a very hard guide in those days, and as William Urquhart suffered, so must many others in the country have done, for we know that not until twenty years after the Revolution Settlement were all the pulpits in Aberdeen Synod occupied by Presbyterian ministers.

But we have another and in some respects a better reason to look back with interest upon William Urquhart. He was the last parish minister of Bethelnie and the first parish minister of Meldrum. He began as it were a new ministerial pedigree, at the tail end of which the author of this book proudly occupies a place. For some considerable time before William Urquhart came to Bethelnie, the village of Oldmeldrum had been assuming proportions that entitled it to special consideration, and in 1672 it received a Charter of Burgh of Barony. Twelve years later, in 1684, the doors of Bethelnie Church were closed, its stones were carried to the langley of Oldmeldrum, and there the new church was reared and set upon an hill that commands one of the finest prospects in the country. Being built four years before the Revolution Settlement established Presbyterianism, it was built after the prevailing Episcopal pattern—needless to say a very different pattern from that after which the present edifice is modelled. If we had entered the Church in these days we would have seen simply a long unseated hall with a roof but little removed

from the heads of worshippers, and allowing of no gallery or elevated pulpit. At the east end of the aisle stood the altar where the first incumbent of the Church conducted the service after the ritual of his Cathedral Church of St. Machar. Probably the Church was not altogether without ornament and decorative design, as we know the minister took a practical interest in Architecture being one of the leaders in the movement to restore King's College, Aberdeen, which had then fallen into disrepair. With the death of William Urquhart, in 1697, our second chapter comes to a close, and we pass from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER III.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

"The seasons bring the flower again,
 "And bring the firstling to the flock ;
 "And on the dusk of thee (Time), the clock
 "Beats out the little lives of men."

—*Tennyson.*

THE last minister of Bethelnie and the first minister of Meldrum was also the last minister of the Parish Church who adhered to Episcopacy. We hailed Stephen Masoun, in 1574, as the first Protestant minister of the Parish. We hail John Mulligen, in 1698, as the first distinctively Presbyterian minister. Mulligen was not elected immediately after Urquhart. The congregation were so dilatory in taking the necessary steps for supplying the vacancy that the Presbytery interposed and appointed Mr. Arthur Shepherd to the charge. With him, however, the people were displeased, and on the Presbytery appealing to the laird of Meldrum, John Urquhart, Mr. John Mulligen was elected minister. Mr. Mulligen had difficulty in accepting, for he had already received a call to Old Aberdeen, and it required a Committee of the General Assembly and a subscribed declaration of the people of Meldrum to ease his conscience and induce him to accept.

We are not to imagine that Presbyterianism became the rule at the time of Mulligan's appointment, it was rather the exception. The old order remained for some time, since there was yet no overruling zeal for the new order, and since William III. had in wisdom as well as in policy advocated tolerance of the adherents of Episcopacy. In the records of Ellon Presbytery at this period we have clear indication of the slow way in which Presbyterianism took hold. Ministers of Episcopacy continued to hold their ground and the confidence of the people, and it is more than likely that it was at this period that the name of incumbent was bestowed upon them by Presbyteries, since in their eyes they were cumberers of the ground. Christians were first so called in Antioch by their enemies as an epithet of derision,

and the name of incumbent—an honoured title at the present day—would seem to have had a similar origin. But when we read, as we do, in the records of Ellon Presbytery, that the Episcopal ministers were in the habit of shutting the Presbyterian ministers out of their natural place of meeting in Ellon Church, requiring the intervention of the Lord Advocate on their behalf, we are so far justified in thinking that the name as then applied was not altogether without reason. Even as late as 1709 we find that, despite the advice of the Lord Advocate, the Episcopal minister of Ellon refused to open his Church for a meeting of Presbytery, and so stoutly did he maintain his position that the Presbytery had to adjourn to Tarves. In 1696 there were only two ministers in the Presbytery who adopted the new order:—the minister of Tarves and the minister of Slains. That being the case, these two Parishes were given over respectively to the Presbytery of Garioch and the Presbytery of Deer, the Presbytery of Ellon becoming temporarily defunct, or rather being still-born as a Presbyterian Presbytery. In 1701, however, it was again set up by an Act of Synod, and no less than six ministers constituted the Court, one of these being John Mulligen of Meldrum. In order to make a quorum, the ministers of Oldmeldrum and Kinkell were taken from the Garioch Presbytery into the Presbytery of Ellon, and so for some considerable time Meldrum was under the supervision of the Ellon Presbyters.

Mr. Mulligen must have been a man of considerable zeal, for we have good reason to believe that he quite turned the tide in favour of Presbyterian Government in his Parish. Unfortunately his success caused the neighbouring Parish of Methlick to covet his services, and thither he was called in 1704, thus bringing his ministry in Meldrum to an all too speedy termination. Presbyterianism did not assume the shape in Mr. Mulligen's time which it afterwards took. The Church service was a simple one, consisting of prayer, reading of Scriptures (minister and people reading the Psalms verse about), praise, prayer, Sermon, prayer, praise, benediction. But the order of Service was not fixed by an Act of Assembly, each Church being left to itself "to worship with a liturgy or without a liturgy, the minister with a surplice or without a surplice." Marriage and Baptism, however, were ordained to be administrated in Church, private Baptism being

forbidden. Adhesion of faith, moreover, was required by Act of Parliament (1690) to the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Directory and Catechism *not* being included or even mentioned. So much can we glean concerning early Presbyterianism and the conditions which would influence the first Presbyterian minister of the Parish.

One or two side-lights can be thrown upon this period of the Parish history. One of these comes from the Ellon Presbytery records. On September 22, 1702, we find that Mr. Mulligen was found fault with in that "he had admitted the Laird of Meldrum (who had formerly apostatised to popery), to the Lord's Table without acquainting the Presbytery therewith." In the following April, however, on the occasion of a Visitation, the Presbytery took the opportunity of conferring with Mr. Urquhart, and "the said John declared his abhorrence and detestation of all popish errors, superstitions, and idolatry, with which he affirmed he had been disgusted for several years bygone; and that he did own the Westminster Confession of Faith." The Presbytery were abundantly satisfied, and at the same meeting the Laird of Meldrum testified to the valuable and amiable qualities of the minister. Congratulations were given all round to elders, to schoolmaster, and to people, but to the poor "Beddell" no congratulations were offered but rebuke, "as some did complain of his drinking and tippling." Another side-light comes from the Session records. In 1700, John Mulligen was appointed a member of General Assembly. At the present time that involves an absence of perhaps three weeks, to Mr. Mulligen it meant an absence of three months (from January 28 to March 29), "there being *whiles* preaching supplied by members of Presbytery." That he occupied his time well while away we have no reason to doubt. One good thing he did was to bring back from Edinburgh a basin and laval, the price of which was £5 12s., the which he presented to the Church. His long absence too is easily accounted for. Roads being bad, and means of conveyance being extremely rude, the journey itself would occupy a fortnight. Not until 1800 was the turnpike from Inverurie to Aberdeen opened, and it was three years later before the turnpike to Oldmeldrum was ready for use. Before the turnpikes there were roads of a sort, but they were often little better than ditches. As late as

1720 Sir Archibald Grant writes: "I could not in chariote get my wife from Aberdeen to Monymusk." In that same year an effort was made by Aberdeen County gentlemen to remedy matters, and a year later a Road Surveyor was appointed for the County. But even after that, the roads to many towns remained almost impassable for wheeled vehicles, so that at the time (1745), when the Duke of Cumberland passed from Aberdeen through Oldmeldrum to Culloden, it is recorded—"there was no road in the County of Aberdeen on which wheels of any kind could be dragged. Weighty burdens of every kind were carried on horseback." The law of Statute Labour afterwards came into force, by which the people were made responsible for the mending of their own roads, and it was no uncommon occurrence for a congregation "scailing" from the Church to hear the bellman intimate that their services were needed in such a place, and at such a day "to mend the ways." But the people were slow to take up this good work. Ministers had to entreat them from the pulpit, County officers constantly imposing fines upon defaulters, and little speed was made. Not until 1798 did the turnpike system come into operation, when by an Act of Parliament a money payment was substituted for Statute Labour.

I have entered into this digression upon roads to justify the prolonged absence of the minister at Assembly time, and to show that it was no small act of sacrifice for a minister at that time to leave his comfortable manse in the north, and to start upon a journey which involved so much discomfort, not to mention danger.

Besides side-lights on the Church, we have also side-lights from the Church on the condition of the people at that time. Pulpit intimations concerning trade, which would seem odd now-a-days, were then quite common. On June 1st, 1701, an Act was read from the pulpit for the light manufacturing of linen and cloth, leading us to infer that there was some dishonesty in the trade which required to be checked, and, further, that that trade may then have been a considerable industry in Oldmeldrum. Another proclamation was made on the following Sunday, "discharging all ale-sellers to entertain any persons in their houses during divine service." Another Act was read in August of the same year for a general collection to be made throughout the nation for "the

harbourage of Ymouth"—presumably Eyemouth—an exposed part of the Berwickshire coast. The people of the country are asked to provide shortly for the same, for what reason we are not told, but we know that the harbour was not completed until 1768. In July, 1702, a like proclamation was made for a collection on behalf of "Ye bridge of Lossiemouth, at Elgin." These were certainly Home Mission Collections, though of a different sort from what are asked to-day.

In those days the school was under the supervision of the Church, and a kindly as well as wise and strict supervision it must have been. On June 18, 1702, the minister "admonished the people that he was to begin examination as also to put yr (their) children to school, and those who were not able that the Session would pay yr college fees out of the box"—the receptacle of Session money.

In March of that same year we have one of the last records of the old church at Bethelnie, when we are told that William Alexander gave to the Session a certain sum of money (£01 4s.), "which he had gotten from the grass of the old church, which was given to Simpson for mending the bell and stile"—thus curiously was the old continued in the new.

Mr. Mulligen seems to have been an active parish minister, visiting his whole parish once a year, preaching and lecturing throughout the year with but little assistance, having on Communion season but two ministers to help him—the later practice being to have five or possibly six. He exercised a wise and rigid discipline over defaulters and evil-doers—the stool and sheet of repentance being unfortunately conspicuous in the Records. When on May 21, 1704, the Rev. George Skene intimated from the pulpit that the Presbytery of Ellon had allowed the parish of Methlick to moderate a call to the Rev. Mr. Mulligen, and chose for his text Rev. ii. 17, "To him that overcometh," he would perhaps refer to the successful ministry of the first Presbyterian minister of Meldrum, who had overcome so many difficulties and had so well established the new form of Church government in his parish. It only remains to add, that after a period of 36 years ministry, during which he had twice married—his second wife being a daughter of the Laird of Udney—John Mulligen entered into his rest in 1733.



REV. J. W. LEITH, B.D.



REV. J. G. EASTON.

There is an unfortunate hiatus in the Session Records after Mr. Mulligen's translation to Methlick (1704), the story not being taken up again until 1724, when his successor had been in office for 18 years. This was Henry Likly who, oddly enough, came from the parish to which Mr. Mulligen went, where he had been schoolmaster. He had, however, been previously licensed by the Presbytery of Dunbar, and he was nominated to the parish of Meldrum in 1706 by John Urquhart of Meldrum and the elders of the church, at that time ten in number. Passing to the eighteenth year of his ministry we find there is matter of much interest to record, and for the sake of order I purpose to divide that material under four heads—considering first that which refers to the church and minister; secondly, that which refers to the state; thirdly, that which refers to the people; and lastly, that which has a general interest.

(1.) The first half of the eighteenth century was a period of no small importance in the history of our country, and that is reflected in the annals of our own Parish. To gather up something about the minister himself—the pulpit was then, as perhaps it is now, the place where the minister appears to greatest or least advantage. Mr. John Likly must have appeared to good advantage in his pulpit. We can infer that he was not a strong man, quaint entries such as the following occurring again and again:—“No sermon—the minister being in a fever.” On April 1, 1733, after an interval of eight Sundays, the entry is—“the minister being but weak as yet only preached.” If conditions were favourable the minister lectured as well as preached, there being afternoon service as well as morning from April to October; but if the weather was bad or if the minister was “tender”—a word frequently used—the lecture was abandoned. The winter of 1735-36 was so stormy that there was only “sermon” from October 19 to January 25, and we frequently come upon intervals nearly as long during which the lecture lapsed. Sometimes, too, there was service without sermon, that occurring when the minister had to preach elsewhere in the neighbourhood. On January 12, 1752, there was no service by reason of the extraordinary storm of snow, an experience that has occurred frequently since that month, if not on that day. The texts chosen by Mr. Likly go to show that he must have had considerable aptitude as a preacher. Thus on June 11,

1726, the time at which George II. ascended the throne, his text was Eccles. vii. 20, "There is not a just man upon earth," and on October 25, 1760, the time when George II. died and George III. succeeded, his text was 1 Cor. xv. 20, "He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet," when we can imagine that he drew the contrast between an earthly monarch and the Heavenly King. Not being strong, Mr. Likly appealed, in 1740, for an Assistant and Successor. Before this appeal John Likly had more than once occupied his father's pulpit, preaching his first sermon on August 31, 1740, upon the text Romans ii. 7, "Through patient continuance in well-doing," preaching upon the same text on September 28, and again in November—a fact and a text which might make us "wicked" enough to think that he was making a very considerable bid for the charge. He was ordained on April 1, 1741. At the beginning of 1743 we find that John Likly was much more in possession of the pulpit than his father. Mr. Henry Likly preached, or rather lectured, upon Psalm liii. on the day after Culloden, April 28, 1745. After that there is an interval of nine years, and then occurs the pathetic record—"Mr. Henry Likly because of his old age and valetudinary state of health, having given up preaching altogether, devolved the whole charge upon his Assistant and Successor, Mr. John Likly." He died in 1760, nineteen years after his son had been appointed Successor. John Likly died in June 3, 1783.

That Henry and his son John were well-beloved cannot be doubted, and one record alone would give us reason to see why this was so. In December, 1728, the Session had before them the case of three orphan boys, for whom provision had to be made. It was resolved to board one of them at Balcairn for 4d. a week and clothes, whilst the minister himself took the other two to his own manse, clothes only to be provided.

To turn now to the Church—in those days there was evidently no fixed season for Communion, the day being arranged according to convenience, and if it be not an omission in the records, which we can hardly imagine, the year sometimes passed without a celebration. When there was Communion it must have been a busy time at the Manse, where sometimes no less than six ministers had to be entertained between the Thursday and the Monday. In July, 1753 we find Mr. James Cook of Keith-hall, and Mr.

James Chalmers of Daviot conducted Service on the Thursday; Mr. Robert Innes of Udny on Saturday; Mr. Alex. Knowles of Methlick along with the minister on Sunday; and Mr. John Main from Rayne on Monday. How strange the contrast between this "General Assembly" and the solitary assistant of to-day.

The duties of elders at the Communion Table were called "public works," and these "public works" were arranged on the Saturday before the Sunday. It may be interesting here to record what I have on good authority as the order of Communion Service in Aberdeenshire at that time:—

Psalm 65—Tune, various.

*Action Sermon—no prescribed text.

Psalm 24—Tune, various.

Fencing the Tables, in set form.

Scripture Lesson—Gal. v.

Paraphrase 35—Tune, Wyndham (during the singing of which the elders bring forward the elements.)

Communicants retire from each Table singing part of Psalm 103—Tune, London New.

Services conclude by congregation singing Paraphrase 2—Tune, St. Pauls.

The elders had other "works" than those, however. Every quarter there was a meeting in the Manse for distribution of money to the poor, and every quarter the minister called for a report of the moral condition of the people under their care. The Session Clerk in those days had a three-fold office—he was at once School Master, Session Clerk, and Precentor. Another important personage in the Church was the Session Officer. In an entry of 1761 we find his duties detailed. He was engaged "to attend to the Kirk windows and Kirk doors, to sweeping the Kirk floor, keeping the seats clean, Kirk-yard stiles, Kirk-yard dikes—that none of all these may suffer damage through his neglect or the foolishness of idle persons,—that he shall always be careful to attend the minister on Sabbath days, and at baptisms, marriages, visiting the sick, at diets of visitation of families, and for catechising, as he

* The word "action" is just the shortened and anglicised form of the Latin "actio gratiarum," the giving of thanks, although the original meaning of the word is not always borne out by the style of sermon preached.

shall be directed by the minister." His fee was £10 Scots, and the perquisites arising from baptisms, marriages, and burials. How the old order has changed—the "minister's man" is rapidly becoming extinct, and in his extinction one of the most interesting personages of church and social life vanishes from the scene.

(2.) So much then for the minister and his elders and officers. Let us look now at the relationship that existed in those days between the Church and State, or the representatives of law and order generally. The longest discipline case in the session records concerns a captain and his recruits. In a shortened form the story is this:—On Sunday, Oct. 29, 1738, a sergeant arrived in Oldmeldrum with six recruits on their way from Banffshire to Ireland. They entered the house—evidently an ale-house—of a certain Mr. Chalmers. Whilst there the Captain (Reid by name) was summoned from Barra in order to inspect certain young men who had been pressed into the service. On his appearing, he and another gentleman (Joss by name) went to a separate room with the sergeant. Whilst away, the evidence goes to show that a certain recruit, the worse of liquor, went out and visited the house of a piper, who by bayonet and pistol and "terrifying threats" he persuaded to return with him to the house of Mr. Chalmers. "Musick" and dancing and noise ensued until a certain Mr. Walker, "minister at the seceding house," was summoned by Mrs. Chalmers. The said Mr. Walker went to the apartment of the Captain, whom he found in profound sleep, being weary after a long day's march, and on awakening him informed him of the behaviour of the recruits. Immediately the captain ordered the sergeant to be dismissed and the recruits to go to bed. This was effected and the captain returned to Barra. For breach of the peace on the Sabbath day, however, he had to answer before the Kirk Session on the following Sunday, and only on his expressing hearty and sincere sorrow for the behaviour of his recruits, who by this time were well on their way to Ireland, was he acquitted with the admonition that he had better be more careful in the future regarding the conduct of his men.

The case is interesting as bringing before us a side picture of military life at that time, and as showing the authority which the Church in those days could and *did* exercise.

Another entry shows us that in these times the policeman was

practically an officer of the Church. Under date Nov. 19, 1752, we find the following record:—"Session met and constitute—took under consideration a proposal that had been made by the Baillies and others in Oldmeldrum anent having a parish Constable for restraining vagrants and randies from begging in the Parish, and that none, even of the parish poor, should be permitted to beg within the Parish. And judging the proposal highly expedient unanimously agreed to appoint Charles Benzie in Oldmeldrum, Parish Constable, appointing him to receive his instructions from the minister and to report his diligence to him and the Baillies weekly. And they appoint his making one survey of the Parish weekly, and two surveys of the town weekly, for which the Session agree, from this time forth, to pay him quarterly six shillings and sixpence sterling." Thus was the order of policemen introduced into our parish—it is both fortunate and unfortunate that the minister of to-day has no such close communication with them.

It may be interesting to record here some of the proclamations made at that time from the pulpit. On Feb. 11, 1725, a proclamation was read from his Majesty "against vice and immorality,"—a proclamation renewed by each successive sovereign on ascending the throne. On Aug. 10, 1740, the minister intimated to the congregation "that on account of the present threatening season, and several other tokens of the Divine displeasure, a day of solemn fasting and humiliation should be observed." On the day appointed, Mr. Likly preached upon the appropriate text, "Who knoweth if he will return and repent and leave a blessing behind him." Joel ii. 14.

Another fast was declared on Nov. 25, 1741, on account of the war proclaimed against Spain. On July 29, 1744, Mr. John Likly read the Act of Assembly "against smuggling unentered goods and suitably exhorted the audience." There was distinct occasion for this act, as we know that smuggling had then risen to such a height that tea was surreptitiously introduced into the country as well as brandy, and at that time was even considered by many the worse evil of the two.

On March 2, 1746, a proclamation from His Royal Highness, William Duke of Cumberland, was read regarding the delivering up of arms in the possession of rebels—a proclamation that would create no little excitement. As the month passed the excitement

would become greater. On the 8th day of April the Duke of Cumberland left Aberdeen on his march against Prince Charlie, the Pretender. History records that he marched first to Oldmeldrum and then to Banff, on his way to Inverness to meet the rebels. It is thus quite likely that on the 9th day of April, the army of the Duke encamped in the town and neighbourhood of Oldmeldrum—an army of between 7000 and 8000 men—probably the largest number of people ever in the parish. The curious thing is that no record of the smallest description is left to us of any such event in the parish records—unless we take such from the text chosen on the following Sunday by Mr. John Likly, “Behold an Israelite in whom is no pride.” John i. 47. On April 16th the bloody fight was fought—the last battle on British soil—and the Pretender and his 4000 brave men were overthrown. No honour certainly had been lost in their defeat, for they had done all that brave and true men could accomplish. The news reached Oldmeldrum before Sunday, and the minister preached upon Psalm xix. 2. “Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name.” Under date April 27, 1746, the announcement is made from the pulpit, “peace has been fully established in the country by the certain defeat of the rebels—the 16th current—upon Culloden Muir.” A public thanksgiving was appointed for June 26, when the text chosen was Luke i. 74-75 (strangely like 1745) “we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve Him without fear.” So much can we glean of the events of that thrilling time as they affected Oldmeldrum.

On June 21, 1752, an act of parliament was read against child-murder, the same being repeated in 1762, and being made on both occasions from the “larron,” presumably the baptismal font. On May 5, 1763, a thanksgiving service was held throughout the nation “for the General Peace.” “The Seven years’ War” was over, the war declared against France in 1756, and waged principally in North America, where the 42nd or Black Watch so signally distinguished themselves. In February, 1763, the Treaty of Paris was concluded, the terms of peace being admittedly unworthy of the unrivalled successes of the British arms. “The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad,” was Mr. Likly’s text on the day of thanksgiving.

On Nov. 4, 1770, a proclamation was read from the king “discharging all intercourse with persons, ships, or goods coming from Dantzick or any port of ducal Prussia, as the pestilence rages there at present.” Scotland, and especially the North of Scotland, has not suffered much from such visitations of pestilence. In the Seventh Century a terrible pestilence swept all Britain and Europe, but hardly touched Scotland. The same was true of a pestilence in 1349, in which one-third of the population of England was destroyed, and also of another visitation in 1401.

(3.) In the last proclamation we see the care of the Sovereign for his people. Let us now consider some of the ways in which the Church regarded the needs of the people in those days when there were no poor-houses or Parochial Boards. We have already had occasion to refer to the way in which the Session dealt with orphans. Frequently throughout the records we come across notices of what might be called “benefit collections.” For instance, on May 8, 1726, and for three succeeding Sundays, a collection was taken on behalf of a poor family whose house and corn had been burned. This the Kirk Session had decreed. On Oct. 17, 1731, we find that the Synod of Aberdeen appointed a collection throughout the Churches for the relief of two men at Monymusk who had lost all by fire. And again a collection is appointed on March, 1738, for a man, Alex. Tytler, who had lost his arm by an accident; and on April, 1739, we find the Session ordering a collection to be made for a poor man whose wife “had been brought to bed,” leaving him to take care of a numerous family and an infant “for whom he has not wherewith to put it to a nurse.” When Insurance provision was not so easily secured as at present, the Church must have exercised a most welcome charity in these and such like cases. An interesting entry of the state of the poor in Oldmeldrum in 1742 is found amongst a number of suggestions made by the Session for the proper relief of such. The following is the entry:

- I. Aged or infirm persons and old inhabitants, 32.
- II. Able to work but presently begging, 8.
- III. Children under 15 years of age begging, 39.
- IV. Poor families which will probably soon need the parish charity, 18.

The Session recommended that a constable be chosen “of the most knowing and honest men of the parish” to apprehend

strolling beggars as do not belong to the parish, and to dispose of them after apprehension, presumably to help them as far as they could. They also recommend that none be allowed to beg from door to door, but that a sum of money be collected whereby all who are compelled to beg may be maintained under roof in the parish. This report was forwarded through the presbytery to the Quarter Sessions, by whom the suggestions were considered, but as the sequel shows were but poorly acted upon, the main objection being the cost involved. The Kirk Session of Meldrum, at least, did its duty nobly by the poor of the parish, and on reading their report to the Quarter Session, we can hardly think there was a better one framed within the county.

The years 1782-83 were called "the ill years," because the harvest of 1782 was perhaps the worst on record in Aberdeenshire. A late winter prevented early growth and the ensuing summer was so cold and rainy that it was not until the end of August that the oat crop began even to shoot. The frost commenced in the middle of September, and on the night of October 5, "when growing oats and barley were still green, a frost, armed almost with the rigour of a Greenland climate, desolated in one night the hope of the husbandman." Snow followed at the end of October, lying a foot deep in many places. The consequence was that the fields did not yield one-third of an ordinary crop. Potatoes and turnips as well as garden produce fared no better. A subscription for relief was got up in Aberdeen, and the Town Council gave 300 guineas for the purchase of meal through British or foreign ports. But in December, 1782, the country people could get no meal in Aberdeen, as the citizens were afraid of a famine and would not part with what they had in store. The Aberdeen Bank and the Bank of Scotland then came forward offering each an advance of £3000 for twelve months for the purchase of provisions. But the demand was becoming always so much greater that it was feared all the offers would prove inadequate. To such a pass did matters come that at a county meeting held in December it was recommended that "every individual should observe the most frugal economy in regard to provisions, that the smallest article which can be employed as the food of man be not applied to other uses, or lost through neglect." It was even recommended that all dogs be killed unless those of great value, it being deemed a *heinous crime* that vile



CHURCH OF MELDRUM.



MELDRUM HOUSE.

animals should consume the food of man at such a crisis. Gentlemen were advised to give up drinking home-made spirits or malt liquors brewed from the grain of the country. To Kirk Sessions was given the distribution of meal, and the scene presented at that time must have been very similar to that presented so lately in the villages of famine-stricken India. Meldrum Kirk Session, "considering the dearth of provisions, especially meal," distributed as liberally as possible of the poor fund in their possession, and under August 17, 1785, we find the following entry, "By carriage from Aberdeen of four Bolls meal given by Government to be distributed amongst the poor, 3/6." After that date no more was given by Royal Bounty, and other resources being exhausted, it was not until November, when the next harvest was gathered in, that there was any relief from the pressure of want and famine. We speak of hard times to-day but surely they are not to be compared with the hardness of the times under review, during which many farmers were ruined, many fled to America, and the whole country received a shock from which, perhaps it may be said, it has never recovered.

(4.) We have now reviewed the relation of the Church to the people in 18th century, it remains to retail some matters of general interest. We find frequent mention in the Session Records of bad money being passed through the Box. As the full account of these monies is, I believe, peculiar to Meldrum Church records, I shall give the entry complete. Under July 26, 1742, we find:—"The Session this day observed that there was in the poor's box a considerable sum of bad money, and knowing of no better way to dispose of it, agreed to deliver the same to John Smith, Merchant in Oldmeldrum, one of their members, to be by him carried to Edinburgh, as he was in course of trade to be there soon, that he might there dispose of it by the advice of his acquaintances to the best account. The Session found the bad money to be as follow:—First in maggierobbs, Dutchess of Minsters, Harp, and severall other pieces of sandy stuff that can hardly be named, the sum of thirty-five pounds four shillings and six pennies Scots money. Secondly in Doits and other halfpennies that were not quite so bad as those mentioned in the former parcele, the sum of fortie-one pounds four shillings and six pennies Scots money. (That money was delivered to another member of session "to be disposed of by him at the oversyght of the minister and elders in the toun as soon as might be, with the

further instruction that if a merchant did not cast up for it soon it should be sent to Edinburgh along with the first parcell.")

At a meeting of Session in August, 1742, reports of how the money had been disposed of were given in. He who had the second kind entrusted to him reported that he had disposed of it to good account, viz. "at ten for every twelve shillings" so that the Session only lost six pounds seventeen shillings Scots money out of "fortie" one pounds five shillings Scots money. "As to the worst parcell of bad coin, John Smith reported that he had disposed of the same at Edinburgh, and having sold the same only by weight all he could draw for it was eight pounds fourteen shillings Scots, and as the sum delivered him was thirty-four pounds four shillings and sixpence the Session's loss must be twenty-six pounds ten shillings six pennies Scots. The Session having considered the whole reports, and knowing the badness of the coins disposed of, were of opinion that greater returns could not have been expected, therefore approved of the exchange that had been made."

By way of addition to these records I may add that so far as I can learn no mention is made of the "maggierobbs" in neighbouring parish church records, and from "Jameson's Vocabulary" I glean that it was a kind of bad halfpenny so called from a notorious character who lived in Aberdeenshire about that time. Such a remark might then have been heard, "he's a very guid man but I know he's got a maggierobb of a wife." Black harps were probably Irish halfpennies made of debased coin. Not very long ago there was a piece of bad money called the Inverness halfpenny which used to pass through the box. In a later record (May 1780), we read of an intimation made to the Kirk Session by the Synod, that "doits were to be run down" (presumably melted) and sold by weight, the loss when ascertained to be marked among disbursements.

In the records of 1752 there is a strange jump from August 30 to September 17. The explanation is given in an N.B. "By Act of Parliament new style is established in Britain, therefore the following Sabbath which conform to old style would have been the 6th of September is to be reckoned the 17th. "The new style of reckoning time was originally brought into use by Gregory XIII. in 1582. In 1752 the Calendar as employed in Britain was eleven

days behind the time according to Pope Gregory's reckoning, and therefore Parliament decreed that eleven days be dropped in the month of September so that from the third day a transition was made to the fourteenth day of the month. For two reasons this Act was received by the people with considerable dubiety. First because they thought that they had been robbed of eleven days life-and-wage, many letters being addressed to members of Parliament demanding their restoration. Secondly because the change was due to a Pope, in their eyes "the man of sin" whose council was only evil. So it was that the old style was adhered to by a large number of people despite the Act of Parliament, but in Oldmeldrum there seems to have been no such obstinacy. Perhaps to avoid that, the Minister of Daviot (Mr. Chalmers), preached on the Sunday upon which the change was made on the text, 2 Cor. vi., 1, "Now is the accepted time"!

About this same time other important changes were being introduced, which must have affected the Parish of Meldrum. There were changes in the agricultural world. The method of cultivating the land was beginning to receive greater attention. The cumbersome "twal owsen" plough was passing out of use, although it was used commonly in the Garioch until 1790. These old ploughs performed the work of drilling a field in a very clumsy fashion, making mounds rather than furrows, yet so conservative were the farmers and especially the farm servants, that when the Laird of Inch at that time sought to introduce the new style of plough for making regular furrows, his ploughmen declined to use it; calling forth the exclamation from the laird, "Augh, min! it's been some idiot like you that's cairn't up the hill of [Dunnydeer there." It was a woman, Elisabeth Mordaunt, who married the eldest son of the Duke of Gordon in 1706, who introduced the new plough and many other improvements. As she imported a number of agricultural implements from England that may have been another reason for the evident reluctance to adopt them. Sir Archibald Grant, second Baronet of Monymusk, also accomplished much in the nature of improvement. He was specially interested in the laying out of parks and in the planting of forests. But to come nearer home, it was Charles Hacket of Inver-Ramsay who introduced something that was to be of much use to Oldmeldrum. This was the cultivation of turnips. He first sowed turnips in 1750, sowing

them broadcast without first drilling the ground. The laird of Udny a little later invented a new kind of sower by which the cultivation of turnips was greatly facilitated. Instead of the cumbrous horse-machines he substituted a hand instrument, a perforated tin box with a wooden handle, whereby the work was more simply as well as more effectively accomplished. Oldmeldrum took up the new form of agriculture enthusiastically and has been famous ever since for the excellence of its turnip seed.

Our survey of the 18th century in the Parish of Meldrum would be very deficient if we did not recall the name of a great celebrity who lived in the parish at that time. This was "Doctor" Adam Donald, the so-called "Prophet" of Bethelnie. It is difficult to gather the facts about this "worthy" from the mass of strange and superstitious stories that has collected round his life, but whilst truth is good and great ("magna est veritas") fiction is often interesting and amusing and we will therefore take the two together. The said Adam Donald was born in 1703 and lived until 1780. The *story* is that the real Adam Donald was whipped away into Elfland on being born and a mere changeling, a very misshapen creature was left in his place. The *fact* is that the boy Adam Donald was what would be called "a puir cratur," unable to do anything to earn his livelihood so weak in body was he and to all appearances not much stronger in mind. However he had evidently a certain amount of that genius which is so closely allied to madness; and also of that genius which, as Carlyle says, is "the power of taking pains." The one form of genius helped him through life as much as the other. Books were not many in those days but whatever book the young Adam came across, in whatever language, that book he read, and not without profit, though we are told that he could scarcely read the English language. Dr. James Anderson, late of Inverurie, who wrote a short sketch of his life shortly after its conclusion, tells us that "he delighted chiefly in large books that contained plates of any sort, such as Gerard's large Herbal with wooden cuts. This latter book was indeed his "vade mecum" and was displayed with much parade on his table, on his shelf, and amongst other books of a like portly appearance." The truth is, the genius of Adam Donald thus early displayed was a genius of deception, deceiving people into the belief that he who was little short of imbecile was endowed with superior talent. Later in life

he developed this power of deception to an extraordinary extent. By nature, as we have seen, he was misshapen and uncouth but he actually made capital out of his deficiencies. In a wood-cut portrait of him taken from life we see a little man with long hair, capped by a Kilmarnock bonnet, goggle-eyed and short-necked, standing with his feet apart while his arms hung loosely at his side, his hands being placed back to back in front of him. A more uninviting creature it is hardly possible to imagine. Yet just from his extremely eccentric appearance and from his strange method of speech and conduct he began to command an interest throughout the country and when he proclaimed himself to be a physician and prophet, people flocked to him to be cured of their ailments and to hear from him about something they had lost or had never found. The old graveyard at Bethelnie was a favourite haunt of the prophet, and there he was believed to hold familiar converse with the departed. Sunday was his chief day of business. On that day his house was crowded with visitors, and the "Doctor" receiving from each patient the small sum of sixpence—once he took a shilling—turned over quite a large sum of money. His cures and his prophecies were alike simple in the double sense of the word. When consulted about things lost he worded his answer so that whether the article was found or not his answer stood good. His medicines were certain home-manufactured ointments to which, however, he gave high-sounding names in order that the people might reverence his wisdom. So lucrative did his profession become that he was actually able to tempt one of the fairest of the country-side to share his fortune and his fame. The issue of the marriage was a daughter, who unfortunately proved a traitor in the camp, for, whilst his wife easily discerned the deception in her husband's "art," nevertheless she told no tales,—the daughter on the other hand openly laughed at him and by the exercise of another "art" managed to acquire the sixpences for herself. This would doubtless shake the faith of the people and probably the latter end of the worthy "Doctor" was not so good as the beginning.*

* With the assistance of a friend I have managed to decipher the following inscription upon a tomb in Bethelnie Churchyard:—"Here lies . . . J. Donald who departed the 22 Dec. 1661, also His Spouse Christian Lindsay who departed the 20 Nov. 1650." The stone has the Lindsay armorial bearings and it is not unlikely that under it are the remains of the "Doctor's" ancestors, possibly of the "Prophet" himself.

It may be interesting to note here that out of the names of 72 persons given in an Aberdeen journal at the end of last century in the obituary notices, the oldest of these lived and died in Oldmeldrum or its neighbourhood. In 1774 (November 2), Isobel Walker died in Daviot, aged 110. In 1799, James Dyce also died in Daviot, aged 107: his mother having lived to the age of 112. In January 3, 1791, Margaret Cormick died in Oldmeldrum, aged 108—facts that bear testimony to the wonderful salubrity of the climate.

To return to ecclesiastical events, we should here mention that on October 13, 1745, Meldrum Parish was once more transferred from the supervision of Ellon Presbytery to the supervision of Garioch Presbytery. When Mr. John Likly died in 1783 he was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Tait, who ministered until 1798. His ministry was apparently as uneventful as it was short, though doubtless none the less successful. On May 1, 1799, the Rev. James Rainy succeeded him, but he ministered only for the short period of one year, departing this life on May 1, 1800, aged 37. He had been licensed by Tain Presbytery and for sometime had acted as assistant at New Byth. He married a daughter of John Turner, Esquire, of Turner Hall. With the close of his ministry we are standing upon the threshold of the great nineteenth century, to a short review of which, so far as it has affected this Parish, we shall now turn our attention.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

THE extraordinary changes that this century has witnessed in every department of life and thought have their counterpart to a certain extent, in the changes effected within the bounds of a northern parish or presbytery. We will notice these changes as we proceed, but it is well here to say that our review of the present century cannot be so full as that of the last because, in the first place, it is hardly yet sufficiently in perspective to gauge the significance of events, and because, in the second place, much is still fresh to the memory of those who read this book and thus does not need so much to be recorded. Before, however, proceeding further it may be as well to notice one or two of the changes which distinctly marked the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. There was a distinct change for instance in the matter of reverence for things pertaining to religion. The life of the eighteenth century was essentially irreverent. This is to a certain extent shown by an Act of Assembly forbidding "bowing and other expressions of civil respect, and entertaining one another with discourses while public worship was performing." We know that the practice of the House of Parliament to-day, where members sit with their hats on, was the practice in the House of God at the close of the last century. As an ancient writer puts it—"the people sit close in time of prayer and clap on their bonnets in time of sermon." The minister even did not scruple to walk into the pulpit with his hat on. It may be said, however, in palliation of this offence that it was superstitiously believed that to remove the covering from the head whilst in church was to bow down to stone and lime.

Another curious practice at that time—where reverent or irreverent we cannot quite decide—was the singing of psalm tunes in choir practisings to secular songs—or rather rhymes made to suit the tunes. This custom was still in vogue in Aberdeenshire in the early part of this century. Thus in Turriff we learn that

the church choir when practising the tune of "French" sang the words :—

"Come, let us sing the tune of French
The second measure low,
The third ascendeth very high
The fourth doth downward go."

Another favourite practising verse in Aberdeenshire was :—

"The flower doth fair in garden grow,
The heather on the hill,
The river doth to ocean flow,
Then bide my time I will."

This was supposed to be a specially good verse owing to the total absence of s's—sibilants being the bane of vocalists. No exception can be taken to the words of these two verses, but to hear a sacred psalm-tune sung to such a refrain as :—

"There was a man in Kennawaytown
And he was wondrous wise,
He jumped into a bramble bush
And scratched out both his eyes,"

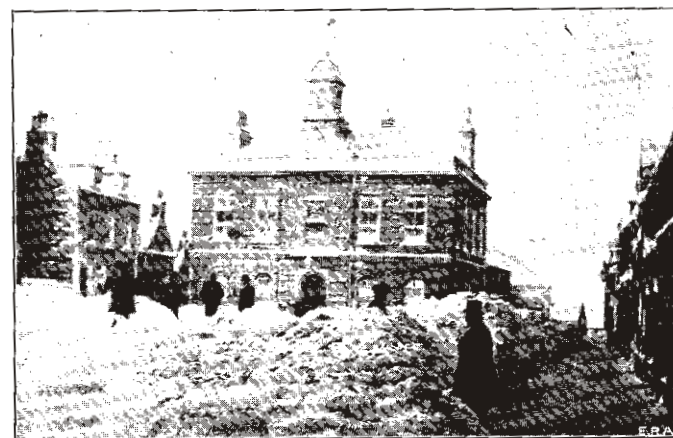
gives some ground for objections.

We have further to remember that in those days the reading of Scriptures in church was quite an occasional part of the service. As we have seen in an earlier part of this history a "reader" used to read portions of Scripture before the minister appeared to deliver his sermon. When that part of the service was discontinued, as it was on the introduction of Presbyterianism, so also was the reading of Scriptures for some considerable time—a fact we could hardly credit if we did not know it to be true.

The century opens in this parish with the ministry of Mr. James Likly—son of the late Rev. John Likly and grandson of the late Rev. Henry Likly. He came to Meldrum "out of much tribulation," having been compelled to fly from his first charge at Campvere in Holland, on the invasion of that country by the French. But tribulation of another kind came upon him at Meldrum, for we learn that on March 11, 1810, "there was no sermon, the minister being taken ill," and from that date until his death in 1816 Mr. Likly seldom returned to his pulpit. Certain other records show that his ministry whilst successful was variably so. If the number of communicants be a criterion of a church's success, we find the roll rose and fell from 800 to 600 during his



MANSE OF MELDRUM.



TOWN HALL OF OLD MELDRUM IN WINTER OF 1896-97.

ministry. It would be interesting to know what caused the fluctuations, but there is no record. In August 6th, 1802, the roll was 800. In August 5, 1804, it was down to 600, and in August 3, 1809, it was 700. There was but one celebration of Holy Communion at that time, and Mr. Likly seems invariably to have had the Rev. Professor Gerard from Aberdeen to help him on the occasion. At 4 a.m. on December 8, 1816, Mr. Likly died, aged 57, being the first minister since the Reformation who died unmarried. The grandfather, father, and son all rest in Meldrum Churchyard, and upon the tomb is the following inscription :—

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
THE REV. HENRY LIKLY,
THE REV. JOHN LIKLY, HIS SON, AND
THE REV. JAMES LIKLY, HIS GRANDSON.
THEY WERE ALL SUCCESSIVELY
MINISTERS OF THIS PARISH
(WITH THE INTERRUPTION OF ONLY 12 YEARS)
FROM 1706 TO 1817
AND ALIKE EMINENT FOR GENUINE PIETY,
EXTENSIVE CHARITY AND
CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE.

“AND THEY THAT BE WISE SHALL SHINE AS THE
BRIGHTNESS OF THE FIRMAMENT; AND THEY THAT
TURN MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE STARS FOR
EVER AND EVER.”

DAN. CHAP. XII. 3.

In 1814, Mr. Fraser, schoolmaster at Inverurie, had been ordained as assistant but on the death of the minister his ministry also ceased. He afterwards became minister of Cluny where he died in 1850. We must now recall a figure which eyes still wide-a-woke have looked upon. In September, 1817, the Rev. George Garioch was presented to the Parish by James Urquhart, Esq., of Meldrum. He was born in Oldmeldrum; his father being at once the medical man of the Burgh and the laird of Gariochsford in Forgue. Where Mortimer's Inn now affords shelter and refreshment, Dr. Garioch used to afford relief to the suffering, for there was his surgery and consulting room. George was born in 1793. He was educated at Oldmeldrum until he went to King's

College, Aberdeen, where he graduated Master of Arts and was licensed by the Presbytery of Aberdeen in 1815. It has been said of Mr. Garioch that he was more like a laird than a minister, and it might almost be said that he was the last minister of Meldrum of the distinctively "Old School" type, a school not so much of theology as of habit and character. The style of dress even showed the man. Only one man in the Church, the Moderator, is allowed to-day to wear what was the common dress of ministers in the beginning and up to the middle of the present century. That dress consisted of a loose-fitting court dress-coat, a white neck cloth of soft limp fold, whilst knickerbockers generally adorned the lower part of the person. The face was clean shaven except for a minimum of whisker on the cheeks. (It is told of a young man who appeared for license before the Presbytery of Brechin that he was told to go home and shave). On the head there was generally a broad—and broken—brimmed hat of large proportions, and in the hand was a stout staff of bamboo or some such wood, with gold or silver top and a tassel. Such was the outward appearance of a minister of the last generation, before the dog-collar and the frock-coat had been introduced. The "old school" ministers were a distinct type of the human species, men of strong individuality, of uncommon common sense, of considerable scholastic ability, combined with a certain pawky humour—in short, well possessed of the three qualifications which, according to the late Charles Spurgeon, go to make a good minister—Greek, Grace, and Gumption.

Nearly every minister of Meldrum, as we have seen, has had his peculiar trial, and Mr. Garioch was not to be without his portion. After nineteen years ministry, during which things had moved quietly, the troubles of '43 visited the parish introducing dissension and discord where hitherto unity and concord had prevailed. Before '43 Mr. Garioch was a stout supporter of the constitutional policy in the Presbytery, and the only reason he gave for his change when challenged in the Synod was:—"Whereas I was blind, now I see." We are glad to think that to the end he never showed himself a bitter opponent of the Church, and we are only sorry that he did not live to see the wound healed.

It is quite possible that the events of that day, evil though they were, were not unmixed with good. There is reason to believe that

an actual increase was made to the number of church-goers, for whilst the new Free Church congregation was a large one, the Parish Church congregation cannot have been less numerous, and the fact that the collections were larger after than before the Disruption would lead us to imagine it was actually more numerous.

This may have been due to the fortunate selection of Mr. James Jaffray as the new minister made by B. C. Urquhart, Esq., of Meldrum. He was a man of commanding influence as well as of commanding appearance. Born in Turves in 1811, he was the son of Robert Jaffray of Headitoun, since added to Hattonslap. His father afterwards went to Banks, in the parish of Fyvie, of which the Jaffrays had been tenants for many centuries. In 1830 James graduated Master of Arts in Aberdeen and entered the Divinity Hall. While a student he taught in the school of Slap, in the parish of Turriff, and after being licensed by the Presbytery of Turriff he became tutor in the family of a Mr. Menteith, who lived near Elgin. This appointment he held until he was ordained to the parish of Meldrum by the Rev. William Middleton of Culsalmond in 1843. Mr. George Peter of Kemnay is the only member of the Presbytery of that day who survives to tell of its proceedings. Two years after ordination Mr. Jaffray married Christina, daughter of Captain Smith, Aberdeen, but that same year marked the beginning of an illness against which he struggled bravely but which finally overcame him. All that was possible was done to restore his health; he was frequently abroad, and whilst away had the satisfaction of knowing that his work was being well done at home by men such as Mr. Logie, afterwards Dr. Logie of Dirleton; Mr. Abel, afterwards of Forgue; Mr. Nicol, afterwards of Nevay; Mr. Mitchell, afterwards of S. Fergus; and Mr. Ferguson, all of whom acted in turn as assistants. But in 1853, while proceeding to Aberdeen, intending there to reside henceforth, Mr. Jaffray was seized with a sudden illness, being unable to get farther than Newmachar, where his brother-in-law, Mr. Allan, was minister, and where, after seventeen weeks suffering, he died. He was buried in S. Machar's Cathedral burial ground. The story of his life is thus a sad one. The Parish did not enjoy much of the ministry and fellowship of a man whom it deeply respected, but the courage with which he bore his sufferings, and

the eloquence with which he preached the Gospel, have not yet been forgotten.

On May 23, 1852, it is recorded that a certain Mr. Easton preached forenoon and evening. On July 18th of the same year the Rev. Mr. Burnett of Daviot preached and read the presbyterial edict, the last of the kind, bearing that "B. C. Urquhart, Esq., of Meldrum had been pleased to appoint James Cruickshank Easton as assistant and successor to the Rev. James Jaffrey." He was thus inducted to the charge in September 24, 1852. His father, the Rev. Dr. Easton of Kirriemuir, preached on the two following Sundays. Mr. Easton was born at Kirriemuir—now so well known as "Thrums"—in October, 1822. His father was a well-known "divine" in Forfarshire and enjoyed popularity for many years in his parish. James Easton was educated at St. Andrews and was a distinguished student of the University of that town. From St. Andrews he proceeded to Edinburgh, where he studied divinity, and on being licenced was appointed assistant to his uncle, the Rev. Mr. Burnett, the minister of Manor in Peeblesshire. In 1844 he was appointed minister of the South Church, Kirriemuir, where he laboured with great success in concert with his father—the minister of the North Kirk—until he received the call to Meldrum. In 1854 he married a daughter of the Rev. James Loudon—minister of Inverarity, Forfarshire—and many can rise up in the town and parish to-day and call her blessed, in memory of the tender ministry wherewith she assisted her husband. After a ministry that was distinguished by its high-toned earnestness as well as by a real and practical sympathy, an illness, which had often fettered him, finally overcame him in October, 1876. On October 28th a funeral service was conducted by the Rev. Mr. Smith of Newhills, and the remains of one, whose name is still dear to many, were laid close to the church in which he had so fervently and effectually preached the Gospel of Eternal Life.

We are passing gradually out "of the hallowed quiet of the past," and we come now to the last of the long list of faithful ministers who "do now rest from their labours." On the 9th of May, 1877, John Watson Leith, B.D., was ordained minister of the parish, the Rev. Mr. Stewart of Premnay conducting the service. The days of patronage were over, and Mr. Leith was

elected out of many applicants by a majority of the votes of the congregation. A brief review of his life before coming to Oldmeldrum will be interesting to many readers. He was born in Aberdeen in 1840. His early life was spent in the "Granite City," where also he received his early education. In 1862 he went to the University of Edinburgh, and in 1866 obtained the degree of Master of Arts. A distinguished student in the Arts course, he was still more so in the course of Divinity. In 1866 he obtained the Ramsay Theological Scholarship; in 1867 the King William Theological Scholarship; in 1869 the Hepburn Theological Prize. In the previous year, and in competing for the same prize, he had been almost equal with the winner of the prize, Mr. William Hastie, now Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow. In 1869 he graduated Bachelor of Divinity. In 1870 he was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and shortly thereafter was appointed assistant to the Rev. D. Ogilvy-Ramsay of Westhall, minister of Kirriemuir, thus linking himself to the past if not preparing the way for the future. In 1871 he was appointed assistant to the Rev. Dr. Robertson of the New Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh. There he ministered with great acceptance, being specially complimented on one occasion by the Lord Provost before the magistrates and the session of the Church for having so ably, in the absence of Dr. Robertson, conducted the service on the occasion of the annual visit of the Town Council. After some years in Edinburgh he was appointed assistant to the Rev. Dr. Begg (brother of the famous Dr. Begg of the Free Church) in the Church of Falkirk. There, as in previous places, his labours were much appreciated, and he himself greatly liked. When he came to Oldmeldrum, in 1877, he came with the wisdom of experience as well as with the spirit of enterprise, from both of which the town and parish received much benefit. No words can in a short space so well convey what he was to his parish than the words used by the Rev. James Donald, of Keith-hall, at his funeral service: "When he had been settled here for a few years, and the early friction of new methods and new ways of acting had been smoothed, it was felt he was just the man for the parish. He was Mr. Leith of Meldrum. The man and the place seemed to belong to each other. He was not only a minister of whom it could be said that he did many excellent things, but he did what his

Master put him in the ministry to do. His parish was always his first care. He gave a fresh interest and variety to the Church services, and there is scarcely a minister within a radius of many miles from here whose voice was not heard from this pulpit. Like many men who have risen to a position of public trust he developed useful business talents, from which the town profited in many ways. He threw himself with enthusiasm into everything that could promote its interests. He was one of the chief movers in the matter of public recreation grounds. Naturally he was the leading spirit in the beautifying of the Interior of the Church, and in the planning of the cemetery, where his body has found its last resting place, not far from that of his old faithful servant. And the sunshine that poured upon his grave on the day of the funeral, when all classes merged their differences in one deep feeling, was clouded by no shadow of unkindness. He was a man of Catholic spirit. There was nothing small nor narrow about him, and when the Free Church and the United Presbyterian brethren gave their valued services on the occasion of his funeral, it was just what Mr. Leith would have wished, for he was ever on the side of union and comprehension. Such was he as a public man and what he was privately in regard to personal character, you all know. He was a good man—a religious man—one whose faith was grounded on the gospel revelation. He entered your homes with 'feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.' Every one in trouble found in him a sympathising brother. He was not only kind-hearted, but he had that thoughtfulness for other's comfort which is the true test of warmth of heart."

He had enjoyed but a few years of married life before he died, his wife being a daughter of Mr. Simpson of Wardford, Methlick. She survives him, and her many acts of kindness and words of cheer will not easily be forgotten by those who had the fortune to receive them.

And now we have stepped out of the shadow of things departed into the light of common day. Modesty forbids that we should enquire any further. Suffice it to say, that the author of this book conducted his first service in Meldrum Church on the last Sunday of June, 1895. The day had been wet and stormy, but in the evening, and just before the evening service commenced, a rainbow stretched its radiant arch over the Church, seeming to give

mysterious promise to the young candidate who aspired to minister within and without its walls—a promise not unfulfilled, for on Thursday, the 18th day of September, 1895, he was solemnly set apart by the Presbytery of Garioch to the ministry of this Parish. On the following year—on the same month and on the same Sunday of the month, and at the same hour—the rainbow that had inspired hope again appeared to inspire courage, not only to the minister but to his partner in life, whose first Sunday in Meldrum that was, and he would feign believe that in that strange second appearance there was in some way for him a message that God who had called him to the ministry of this Parish would not leave him nor forsake him.

"The rest is silence."—*Hamlet*.



MINISTER AND KIRK SESSION OF TO-DAY.