A "GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION" OF SCOTLAND PRIOR TO THE STATISTICAL ACCOUNTS

F. V. Emery*

The response to a projected "Geographical Description" of Scotland, in the form of parish descriptions written mainly in the 1720's, is printed in the first volume of *Macfarlane's Geographical Collections* (Macfarlane 1906). When Sir Arthur Mitchell edited these papers in 1906, however, he did not give a clear statement of their extent and distribution, why, when, or by whom they were written. As a result, their value as a source for the historical geography of much of Scotland is unfortunately not as evident as it might be, and the replies have often been overlooked. This paper is designed in the first place, therefore, to serve as a geographical introduction to the Scottish replies. Further, it is intended to defend them against the faint praise with which Sir John Sinclair damned them seventy years later, when he went so much further in his *Statistical Account of Scotland.* His selective review of earlier, and generally abortive, attempts to complete such surveys in European countries led Sinclair to disparage his predecessors (Sinclair 1798). He was specially hard on those who had tried to do the same kind of thing in Scotland, and (although he had not looked at them closely) he dismissed the Macfarlane descriptions with the verdict that "hardly any of them (were) entitled to be printed". Printed they are, nevertheless, and it is hoped to suggest the unfairness of his libel by a comparative study, from the geographical standpoint, of the Macfarlane collection and Sinclair's *Statistical Account.*

As a preliminary, the collection itself needs some clarification, as to its precise nature and composition. It is unsafe to assume that Macfarlane, the Scottish antiquarian, had anything directly to do with the projected "Geographical

* Departmental Lecturer, School of Geography, University of Oxford. This article and the two following are here printed as read to Section E of the British Association Meeting in Glasgow on September 1st, 1958. They were prepared independently by the three authors, and any overlap in the material presented is due to this fact.

Description" of Scotland. In fact, his name is associated with it simply because he had the descriptions transcribed together in one manuscript volume. This he did in 1748, long after the project had faded away, and it was a service Macfarlane did for many other historical records at that time. If not Macfarlane himself, then, who was responsible for advancing the idea of a "Geographical Description"? It is suggested here that its organisation was not the work of any individual, but of the Church of Scotland acting through its General Assembly. Two circumstances support this suggestion. In the first place, such letters as survive were written (by authors of descriptions) from the country to Mr. Nicol Spence, and Spence was Sub-Clerk of the General Assembly from 1701 until his death in 1738; he was also Agent for the Church of Scotland, 1706-38 (Wilson 1863:291-2). The "compilers" or "promoters" referred to in this letter from James Fraser, minister of Alness in Ross-shire, were surely a committee representing the interests of the Church: "Sir. There follows a Geographical Description of this parish of Alness. It is perhaps too large, but I could see nothing that I could leave out, according to the printed directions; and perhaps it may not be amiss to leave room for the compilers to abridge . . . I reckon the printed rules and general recommendation will not answer your design, without you have particular correspondents in the several parts of the nation" (Macfarlane 1906:211-12). Unfortunately, there is no record of such a directing committee for 1720-21 in the Acts and Proceedings of the Scottish Church; on the other hand, neither was there any reference to the committee that produced the "New" *Statistical Account of Scotland* after 1832.

A second point in favour of its being a Church project is that the Macfarlane collection was overwhelmingly the work of parish ministers and Elders of the Church. Although Sir Arthur Mitchell in his introduction identified only seven authors who were clergymen, it is possible from internal evidence to ascribe no less than eighty-two descriptions—a good third of the whole—to ministers of the Church. The remainder were by landowners or schoolmasters who might feasibly be regarded as lay members. If this origin is accepted for the 1720-21 project, then it is brought into direct line with the "Old" and "New" *Statistical Accounts*. In each case, the collection of geographical and statistical data from every part of Scotland was made relatively easy by the distinctive structure of the Church. Ministers and Elders in the parishes could be

instructed in the task of compiling descriptions, and then co-ordinated through the regular meetings of their Presbyteries —all in a direct, controlled progression upward from the smallest units, through the counties to the national level of the General Assembly.

It must also be stressed that the collection copied by Macfarlane included replies for two quite separate projects. The majority were written for the Church plan of 1720-21, but twenty-six of the total of almost two hundred and fifty were compiled for William Maitland (1693-1757). In 1741 Maitland distributed questionnaires as a means of getting material for his *History of Scotland*, having already written a folio *History of London* (London 1739). Despite the full official support of the Church—the Assembly urged ministers to help him "by drawing up, and sending to him, answers to his printed queries concerning their respective parishes" (Wilson 1863:172) [1]—Maitland had to give up this source of information. He wrote only the first volume of *The History and Antiquities of Scotland* (London 1757) before his death in 1757, and is best known for his *History of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1753). In the Macfarlane collection, most of the replies for Maitland are dated between 1742 and 1744, relate chiefly to the county of Angus, and must not be confused with the "Geographical Description" of twenty years before.

The first of three aspects by which the Macfarlane papers and the Statistical Account may be compared is that of their purpose and origins. The earlier volume was more geographical by intention than that of Sinclair, who wished to create "a sufficient idea of the political situation of Scotland". Such an exercise in political economy would lead him, he hoped, to the principles of what he termed "statistical philosophy".[2] On the other hand, the Church in 1720-21 aimed firstly at compiling a new and more accurate map of Scotland, and then to accompany it with a written description. "It would be both diverting and instructing," wrote a contributor from Fortrose, "to have a clear and distinct account of all the parishes in our kingdom, and none should be averse to contribute their endeavours" (Macfarlane 1906:203; from Lewis Grant, 14 July, 1732). He sent descriptions of four places well-known to him in Ross-shire, and his preoccupation with "ranging the bounds and distances" illustrates the sort of reply that was to be used for drawing maps. Outlining the form and situation of parishes, he gave the location of churches and settlements,

woods and marshes, the distances between country houses, the courses of the rivers and lochs. Such accounts were to help in checking and, if need be, correcting the existing maps, notably those by Pont and Gordon in Blaeu's atlases. Vastly inferior as a method and soon to be outmoded by Roy and his surveyors, it does show that there was dissatisfaction with existing maps and an attempt to provide something better, based on first-hand reports.

Besides the written bearings and directions which are included in accounts of parishes (e.g. in its extreme form, six Aberdeenshire accounts, 1723, pp. 97-99), the Macfarlane papers contain one sketch-map. It is part of New Deer (Aberdeen) drawn in 1723 at a scale of just over one inch to the mile, and shows chiefly the river Ugie and its tributaries, roads and bridges, settlements and antiquities. A similar sketch-map was evidently sent with the account of Kilpatrick-Durham in Kirkcudbrightshire, in the early 1720's, although there the scale was shown more exactly by circles drawn with the parish church as their centre. A third map, showing the parish of Peterhead, was placed with the description written in 1723, but again this is not reproduced in the Macfarlane collection; if it became lost, as seems likely, one wonders what else is missing from the original papers. More important, a fourth map should be included here: it was drawn by the schoolmaster of Monymusk (Aberdeenshire) and accompanied his description in 1722. It can be traced only in a piece of sharp practice carried on in the columns of *The Edinburgh Magazine*. In the monthly number for June 1760 the editors pretended to launch a set of descriptions supposed to have been sent by correspondents in the cause of "the geography of our country". An accurate account of every parish, added the editors sententiously, "is certainly the very best method for delineating a map free of errors". In fact, these descriptions were nothing more or less than the Aberdeenshire part of the original 1720-21 papers, slightly amended but mostly reproduced word for word. The only important exception and new feature was the map printed in *The Edinburgh Magazine* with the account of Monymusk. What we see there is the engraving forty years later of a sketch-map intended for the "Geographical Description" of Scotland. One of the more interesting features it showed was the position of improved and unimproved land at that time.

Not only was the 1720-21 scheme more geographical in design than the *Statistical Account*, it also grew out of previous

designs of a similar nature in Scotland. The same Scottish origins cannot be as firmly ascribed to Sinclair, who owed much to German surveyors of political units. He admitted that during his stay in Germany in 1786, he made up his mind to follow the German method of issuing "Inquiries respecting the Population, the Political Circumstances, the Productions of a country". On the other hand, the Scottish Church in 1720-21 had much in common with the earlier national aims of Sir Robert Sibbald for a *Scottish Atlas* and geography of the country. Indeed, it specified in greater detail Sibbald's survey of the counties. The printer and publisher Andrew Symson, one of Sibbald's best correspondents, and author in 1684 of a "full account of Galloway", can be said to personify this link. Symson (1638-1712) had this to say in a letter to Edward Lhwyd at Oxford, written in May 1708 [3]: "But if it be only the names of places that you desire, I hope God willing to give you a large account thereof in a Book which I intend to publish under the Title of Villare Scoticum, wherein I intend to give an account of all the parishes in Scotland, as spelled of old and as now, together with all the Severall titles and places of our Nobility Knight (*sic*) Baronets etc. which shall furnish you abundantly with Pictish names." Evidently Symson had spent a considerable amount of time at this task, for it is recorded in William Nicolson's diary for 9 June 1704 that Symson's son Mathias brought with him to Carlisle a copy of the "Villare Scoticum" (Gray & Birley 1951:124). There is nothing to show that it was published by Symson, and one presumes it remained in manuscript at his death—one of the earliest parish-by-parish surveys of any country.

Other models for the Church project in Scotland included the *New Description of Angus* by Robert Edward (1678), which was the commentary for an excellent map of Angus at a scale of $\frac{5}{8}$ inch to one mile (Edward 1793). The purpose of the 1720-21 venture was to extend such studies to the whole of Scotland. It coincided, too, with other activities showing the widespread zeal for improvement which was to transform Scotland later in the eighteenth century. It coincided, for instance, with the experimental programme of Robert Maxwell, secretary of the Honourable the Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture. This Society, the earliest whose activities were national in breadth, also turned its attentions to manufacture, and was to play "an important part in the development of eotechnic economy in Scotland" (Clow 1952:41).

Turning now to the actual achievement of the 1720-21 project, the surviving record shows that it was only partly completed. From the table it can be seen that in only seven counties were there replies from more than half the present total number of parishes. Not all these counties were small, however, and the replies from Caithness, Banff and Aberdeen, and some of the southern counties, are considerable by any

TABLE I

County	No. of Parishes described	Duplicates or Triplicates	Dates	Percentage of Civil Parishes described in each County
Selkirk	7	...	1722	100 per cent
Kincardine	18	4 (2)	1722-25	95 ,,
Caithness	8	1 (2)	1724-26	80 ,,
Aberdeen	62	32 (2) 4 (3)	1721-33	75 ,,
Stirling	14	...	1723-24	66 ,,
Dumfries	24	...	1723-26	55 ,,
Banff	11	1 (2)	1724-42	50 ,,
Angus.	24	...	1724-44	46 ,,
Sutherland	5	...	1725-26	42 ,,
Clackmannan	2	...	1722	40 ,,
Perth	24	4 (2)	1722-27	33 ,,
Ross & Cromarty	8	...	1723-32	28 ,,
Moray	4	1 (2)	1723-24	21 ,,
Nairn	1	1 (2)	1726	20 ,,
Ayr	10	...	1723	18 ,,
Fife	8	1 (3)	1724-44	13 ,,
Renfrew	2	...	1725	13 ,,
The Lothians	5	...	1722-26	10 ,,
Orkney Is.	1	...	1726	10* ,,
Kirkcudbright	2	...	*c.* 1723-40	7 ,,
Inverness	1	...	n.d.	6 ,,
Lanark	1	...	*c.* 1723	3 ,,
Berwick	1	...	1725	3 ,,

No replies:—Argyll, Peebles, Roxburgh, Wigtown and the Islands.

* of the "Mainland".

reckoning. Certain places were described twice or even three times, and the total number of parishes that figure at least once is two hundred and forty-three, which was a good quarter—in fact, 27 per cent—of all those parishes in Sinclair's *Statistical Account*. This is rather more than one might expect from Sinclair's own reference to them as "short memoranda respecting a number of parishes" (Sinclair 1798).[4] Why should the outcome, at any rate as it stands, be so disappointing? The first of several contributory reasons was surely the reluctance or inability of the informants. A contemporary

broadside against the abuses of Church patronage throws some light on the nomination as ministers of "such raw illiterate or enthusiastick Candidates as had got any little Education in Literature very imperfectly"; many Elders were depicted as "Men of Sobriety and regular Lives but of mean Abilities" (Anon. *c.* 1730:11). Sinclair's correspondents at the end of the century were of a greatly improved standard of education. Indeed, it is reasonable to compare the replies of the 1720's not with Sinclair, but with other ventures in its own historical context. The endeavours of Edward Lhwyd in Wales brought replies from only 140 parishes, or 15 per cent of the whole.[5] Again, a contemporary plan for a new geographical description of Ireland, based on replies from correspondents, resulted merely in the publication of *A Topographical and Chorographical Survey* of the one county of Down, in 1740.

After numbers, distribution: the map (Fig. 1) shows the geographical pattern of the response. Although the coverage was far from complete, in their full range the replies did come from almost every part of Scotland. In the far north, Caithness was well represented (even Sinclair, with local pride, noticed this), likewise the northern parts of Sutherland, while on the southern border there was a good response from Dumfries and Selkirk. As to the detailed distribution of where the replies were most numerous, the eastern counties of Scotland were outstanding, especially Aberdeen and Kincardine. So, too, were others in the Central Lowland—Fife, Stirling, Dumbarton and adjoining parts of Perthshire. This reflects the comparatively high population and progressiveness of those regions as early as 1720. On the other hand, replies were not forthcoming from the main bulk of the Highlands in Inverness and Argyll, nor the Western Isles. In Perthshire, the silent uplands stand apart from the informative region south of the Highland line, suggesting the handicap of distance and poor communications, remoteness and lack of development. A map showing the success or otherwise of Sibbald's project a generation earlier has the same gaps in Argyll, Inverness, Ross & Cromarty, and a good series of replies from east-central and southern Scotland. Such a map, by the present writer, is given in *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* 74 (1958) p. 9.

A glance at the length of time involved helps one to understand the mechanism of both the 1720-21 design and the *Statistical Accounts* while giving some idea of the difficulties they faced. The diagram (Fig. 2) shows the former to have been active

for eight years, with a post-script in 1732. The most prolific years were 1722-23, followed by a steady decline; the column for

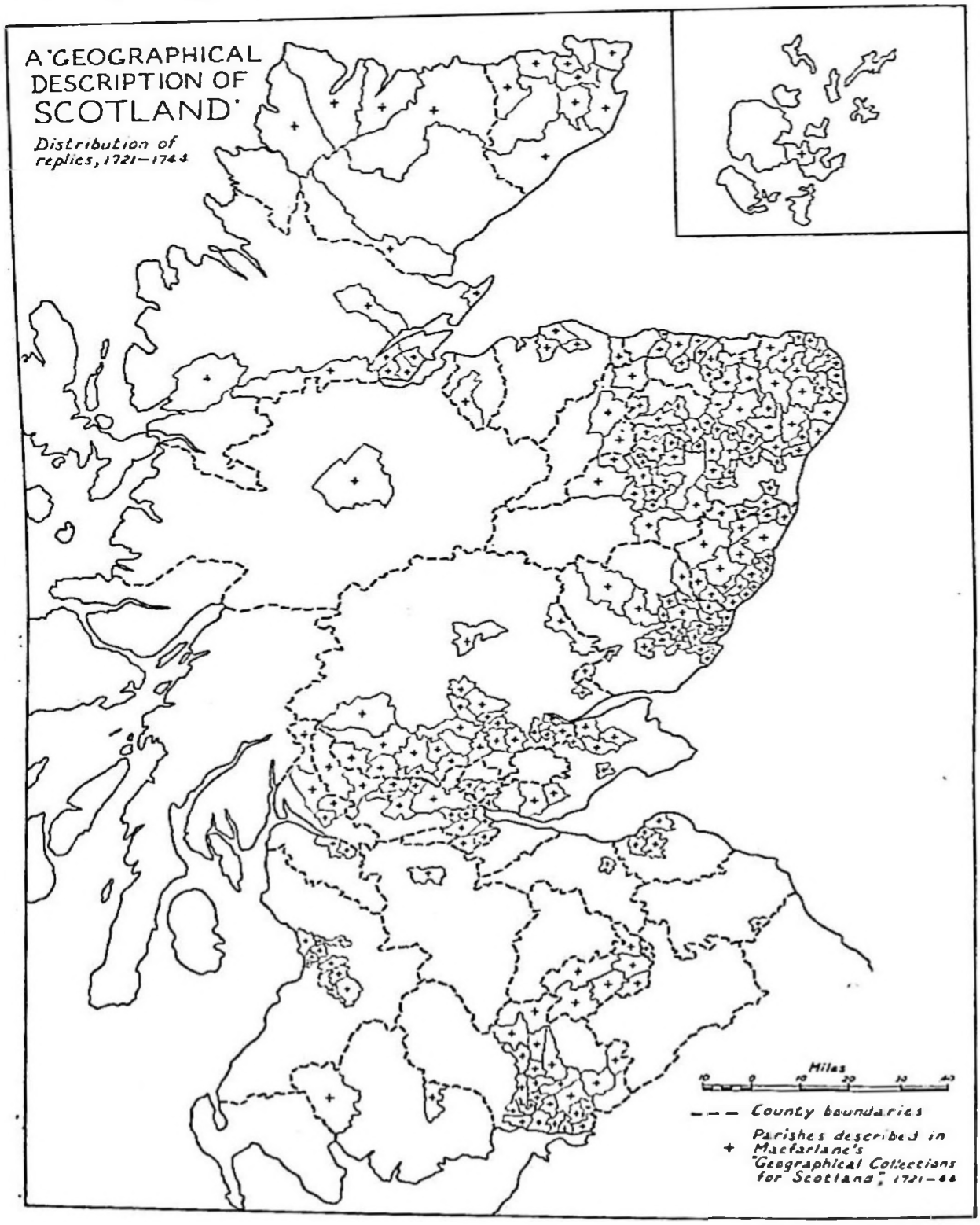

FIG. 1

1742-44 shows the separate replies for Wm. Maitland.[6] Severe difficulties facing the sponsors are summed up in that decline; long delays were inevitable and common to all such enterprises. In Scotland, Maitland was discouraged and gave up in the

1740's; Dr. Webster had the utmost difficulty in finishing his population *Lists* in twelve years, 1743-55; Pennant in the 1770's had to be content with a bare handful of parish descriptions.[7] Even Sinclair himself had to endure eight years' delay before the last description came in.

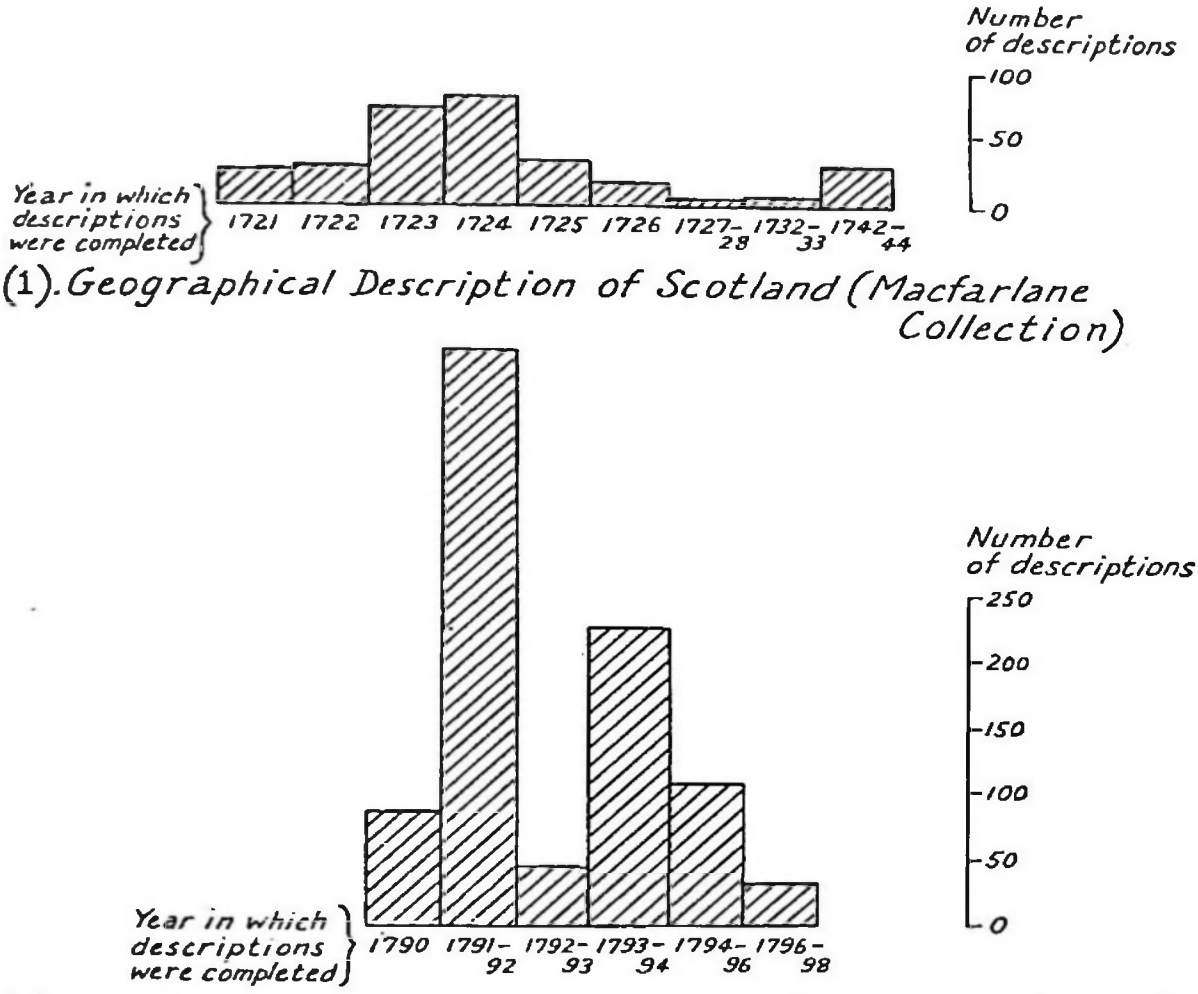

FIG. 2

It is worth following Sinclair in his many devices to speed up the rate of progress. Within two years he had replies from more than half the parishes, and then in June 1792 found himself with four hundred "deficient clergy", as he called them, who for reasons of old age, sickness, disinterest or suspicion, were slow to reply. He was forced to circulate no less than sixteen letters, which changed in tone from earnest flattery to cold scorn and impatience. Among other things,

Sinclair relied heavily on thinly-veiled threats of a monetary nature; he threatened to billet soldiers from his private militia—"Large parties of the Rothsay and Caithness Fencibles" —on the deficient clergy; in the autumn of 1795 he sent forth what he called "Statistical Missionaries" to the most stubborn regions; and finally a note in red ink concluding: "from the Draconian colour of his ink, any Statistical delinquent may see, what the rear rank has to look for". With his exceptional energy, persistence, and financial means, with improved means of communication, Sinclair still found it a hard struggle to complete the sort of parish survey that the Church contemplated in its "Geographical Description" in 1720-21. A similar fate awaited the second or *New Statistical Account* in 1832, which followed a longer progress even than Sinclair's.[8]

A final word about method and content. Sinclair in 1790 turned to the printed questionnaire as "the most natural" means of fulfilling his task. The Church in 1720-21 had simply circulated a sheet of "directions" or "rules" with a "general recommendation" to the ministers. It gave the requirements— a geography of the parish, its church, population, natural features, settlements, roads and economy. Perhaps the most clear-cut set of replies were for the united parishes of Gretna and Reidkirk in Dumfriesshire, written *circa* 1722 (Macfarlane 1906:381-7). "To the first article" the minister, James Black (who was Moderator of the Church at that time), replied by describing the location, limits and bounds of the parish; then secondly the old and new houses of the gentry; the borough and its market rights; rivers and brooks, with their fords, bridges and products; moors and mosses; inns; battles and antiquities; "To the 7th article", the landforms, hills and ridges; settlements and highways; numbers of "catechisable persons", with baptisms and burials for the last seven years; and finally details of the ministers, past and present. It seems, too, that a parish-by-parish format would have been preserved in the final work, had the "Geographical Description" been completed. Sinclair, by contrast, did not at first intend retaining the separate identity of each parish description, and kept as his final goal the preparation of county and national surveys.[9]

The content of the 1720-21 papers, like those in the *Statistical Accounts*, varied in quality; at their best, they compare favourably with the Accounts, e.g. this extract from the description of Fetteresso in Kincardineshire (*c.* 1722) (Macfarlane 1906:247-8): "lying about the 57 degree of Northern

Latitude and the 17 degree of Longitude, is of a pretty large extent for one parish, containing in length from the water of Carron the south boundary of it, to the Northern limits of the same full six miles: all along washed with the German Ocean, from whence to the skirts of the Grampian Hills westward it is in breadth full three miles . . . As this spot of ground cannot be called levell, neither are there any hills in it that deserve that name being rather gentle risings and fallings which render it in the main, fitter for pasturage than tillage, though there be not wanting of abundance of corns as wheat, rye pease, barley and oats much more than the inhabitants can consume, especially the three last; and upon the sea coast, where it is also accommodate with four fishing villages viz. Cowie, Muchalls, Elsick and Skaterow, which do not only supply it with fishes; but afford to be carried twenty or thirty miles up the countrey south and westward: besides a great quantity to be salted for exportation. There is no place better accomodat for fireing, having many inexhaustible mosses, wherein are digged the best of peats,... wherby the inhabitants are not only supplyed . . . but likewise serve to accomodate the parishes of Dunnotre Catarlin, Keneff and Bervie, fully serves the town of Stonhive and over and above send many to Aberdeen." A Highland example, less polished but carefully expressed, depicted the united parish of Boleskin and Abertarf (Inverness-shire) (Macfarlane 1906:220): "9no In this end of the parish belonging to Stratharig the countrey was once covered with woods but now only at Lochness side where are birks, arns, oaks, ash, holly tree and some firrs . . . This countrey is very rocky, yet in Shealings and Strath there is a good pasturage, the land yields bear, black and white oats in many corners and only close on the Lake of Ness, beans, pease or any grain growing in Murray land. here the catle are horse, nolt, sheep and goats, deer roe and hare in hills and woods. The earth and soil is gravelish and on a hard channel. This Stratharig is reckoned the second highest countrey in the highlands and so, very subject to frost mildew near the Strath of rivers and storms of snow."

There are many references to the former extent of woodland in the descriptions, e.g. a ridge of small hills "which in old time was all growen over with wood" (Alyth, Perthshire, 1727) (Macfarlane 1906:114; cf. pp. 154, 164, 220). Antiquities, too, were often described and supplement the awakening field-archæology of that time, e.g. a number of *brochs* figure in

accounts of northern parishes, such as Durness (Sutherland 1726)—" . . . a mile above Mussall stands an old building made in the form of a sugar loaff and which a double wall and winding stairs in the midle of the wall round about, and little places for men to ly in as is thought and all built of dry stone without any mortar. Its called by tradition Dundornigil." (Macfarlane 1906:194; cf. pp. 209 Lochcarron ROS, 330 Larbert STL). The Caithness descriptions were specially good, and illustrate a variety of geographical features—"The shire or county of Caithness being the most northerly of the Isle of Brittain has ten parishes, whereof the five that ly most southerly bordering on the countreys of Southerland and Strathnaver viz. Lathron, Watten, Halkirk, Thurso and Reay or Rhae speak the Irish tongue, at least the greater part of the common people do, and these parishes must have Irish ministers. But the other five northerly parishes viz. Wick, Canesbay, Donatt, Oldrig, and Bowar speak only the English language" (Geographical Description of the Parish of Cannesbay, *circa* 1726) (Macfarlane 1906:151). On the island of Stroma this account runs: "It pays in victuall and money toward 1300 merks of yearly rent, yet there is not one plough in it but is all delved with the spade or foot which makes it yeild good cornes and plentifull increase, tho much subject to blasting as lying naked in the midst of a tempestuous sea" (Macfarlane 1906: 152). In Lathron (*c.* 1725) it was noted that there were "some houses upon the brinks of both these waters (Berndale and Langwall) upon which the sun doth not shine, because of the high hills about, from the 22 of November untill the 8 of January" (Macfarlane 1906:165).

New influences and trends in all parts of Scotland are well brought out. In Fetteresso the farmers "have very ingeniously imployed the many springs they have to the watering of their land, to the greatest pitch of improvement" (Macfarlane 1906: 249). At Muckells, in the same parish, in a very exposed situation, "the present possessor has much added to the beauty and profit of the place by inclosing severall large fields with very substantiall stone walls, wherein he hath both hay and very good feeding for cattell" (Macfarlane 1906:255). New estates were often described: e.g. at Levenside in Bonnill (Dumbartonshire 1724) Thomas Cochran had "a fine new house adorn'd with gardens and orchyeards and a great deall of old and new planting" (Macfarlane 1906:353). At Palgown (Kirkcudbrightshire) the great house "is surrounded with

pretty groves of Scots Pines black cherries, and other kinds of planting, which make a fine umbello to the house and from the front a walk down to the lake" [Loch of Troul] (Macfarlane 1906:401). There, in the barony of Garlies, the land was "so inclosed and divided for the orderly improvement of the sheep and black cattle, that the whole farmers of these grounds have considerable advantage thereby". Again, drainage was becoming usual: "There was lately a loch in Gladsmure which Lamingtoun has now taken care to drain and inclose and to set it round with sallows" (Gladsmuir, E. Lothian 1723) (Macfarlane 1906:374). New settlements were also mentioned: "The Kirk stands in the end of a pleasant and fine village called Gratnay Green, where Coll. Johnston has a fine house with all regularitys conforme. the whole village with a tolbooth being lately built anew by him after a new modell" (Macfarlane 1906:371). Nor were the older market centres without their descriptions: "The village of Fallkirk . . . has the plesant Kersses (a plot of ground, I doubt much if any in Scotland excells it) upon the North and Northeast, which with the windings and turnings of Carron at full sea, makes the prospect that way very delightfull . . It has a very handsome Tolbooth with a beautifull steeple, where are a clock and large bell, this stands in the center of the village. It has a well and pond near to the Tolbooth. It has a hospital near the west end of the town . . Upon the north side stands the church . . Hard by the Tolbooth stands the flesh market in the head of that street called Owers Street, covered above, and locks all night. A mile almost north of this town is a Pow in Carron called the salt Pow near to Abbotshaugh, where the merchants unload their goods and carries them to this place. This village has an excellent weekly market upon Thursday . ." (Macfarlane 1906:319-20, written in 1723). In some places there were signs of quickening growth, as in the village of Airth on the Forth, also in Stirlingshire (1723), with its ship-building, timber mills, and harbour or "Pow": "This village . . has a weekly market upon Saturday 2 yearlie fairs. There's building a tolbooth and fleshmarket. There's several good houses already built, and others building" (Macfarlane 1906:327). Similar developments were going on at Langholm in Dumfries (1726) (Macfarlane 1906:389). Trade and industry were prominent in coalfield parishes; Alloa had "a commodious harbour for shipping, ships of 500 tun of burden, can very easily come into the harbour, where a great many excellent coall is exported

for many parts of the kingdom and to many forreign countreys, very much esteemed of for a good coall, as also upon this water Brathie is two saw mils near the shoar which makes a fine timber trade in this place. There are a rope walk and duche manufactorie, where all sorts of ropes and saills for ships are made, . ." (1722) (Macfarlane 1906:308-9). In the parish of Larbert, the southern "coalshore" of the Forth used "a good harbour for small boats and barks yea sometimes at spring tides there comes ships here of 60 tun burden. Quarrell has a coal fold here for his coalls from which they are carried to the greenbrae to big ships, and by small boats and barks to Leith and the North countrey," (1723) (Macfarlane 1906:330). The neighbouring parish of Airth had a freestone quarry, salt pans, coalpits with "a fire engine to work the coall" and a pottery. The three descriptions of Dunfermline—two in 1723, the other in 1744—referred to its industries (pp. 287-294), but an item of particular interest figured in the account of Aberfoyle on the Forth (Perthshire, 1724): "In this paroch are plenty of oak and birch woods and three miles north from the church . . is a new set up iron work wher is made very good iron partly of tar [?oar] got in the country and partly of iron scraps got from Holland by the managers of the work. The charcoal made use of for refining the iron is made of birch timber, cut out of a large birch wood near the iron work" (Macfarlane 1906:343).

Of a more general geographical kind were those descriptions not of single parishes, but of groups of parishes which were known by regional names as "Countries" in their own right. Almost a century earlier Robert Gordon had distinguished the several "Countreys" of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire, and at least two of them were described in the 1720's. Sixteen parishes in "the Country rather than the Presbytery of Garioch" were depicted by Robertson and Gordon in 1724; then Alexander Hepburn gave a regional picture of Buchan in 1721, following earlier authors such as Gordon (1662) and two of Sibbald's correspondents there in the 1680's (Macfarlane 1906:2-19, 38-45). They provide a good comparative study of Buchan, marked off inland by hill and river lines such as the Ythan. Hepburn first ranged through the outermost parishes, and then described "the midland parts", but through both there appeared his regional division of coastal and inland Buchan: "The sea . . yeelds a great quantity of salt water weeds, which . . fattens the ground and make it yield plentifully. The soil

near the Coast for the most part, is deep clay, and very fertile; it produces aboundantly Barley, Oats, Wheat, Rye and Pease but the Inhabitants labour most for Bear and Oates . ." (Macfarlane 1906:45-6). Hepburn felt the local loyalties that prompted many to describe the geography and "present state" of their own "countries". Such men justified the attempt to compile a "Geographical Description" of Scotland. The chief merit of the 1720-21 parish accounts for historical geography is their extending of the earlier sources, and the depth or perspective they give to the later sources. Naturally they require to be checked for their accuracy in matters of fact, but where this is possible—as in comparing the parish figures of population in Caithness with Dr. Webster's estimates—the results are encouraging. Their value is heightened since they were compiled at a significant and formative period; they showed the onset of changes that were to modify the nature and aspect of much of Scotland in the eighteenth century. The outcome of such changes—in clearance, plantation, and enclosure, new houses, villages and towns, new methods, ambitions and responsibilities in agrarian or industrial affairs—was to be recorded finally in the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland.*

NOTES

[1] The Church's recommendation is given in the *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 1739-1752. Vol. I (Edinburgh 1838) 23.

[2] Sinclair's previous publications pointed in this direction: cf. Sinclair 1785-90.

[3] Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Ashmole 1817*a*, fo. 499; this letter was written from Edinburgh.

[4] The percentage would be slightly lower, nearer 25 per cent, for the total number of parishes in the 1720's. This was roughly 960 as opposed to 938 in 1798. In the Table the present disposition of parishes is followed; thus where two parishes in 1723 have since been united to form a single parish, the descriptions are simply counted as one.

[5] Lhwyd circulated his *Parochial Queries* in 1696; the printed collection is not a satisfactory version or portrayal of the response; it gives a total of 200 replies in Wales, which really should be 143, or, in terms of the present civil parishes, 163 (15·3 per cent of the whole). Only one county, Flint, (60 per cent) has more than half of its parishes described. Cf. F. V. Emery, "A Map of Edward Lhuyd's *Parochial Queries in order to a Geographical Dictionary, etc., of Wales* (1696)". *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1959:41-53). London.

[6] Fourteen descriptions cannot be dated precisely or approximately.

[7] In the late 1780's replies were made, in the form of parish descriptions, to queries distributed by the Scottish Society of Antiquaries. Five descriptions were printed in the first volume of their Transactions; they were under seven heads—a geographical and topographical picture; nature of the soil and population; state of the roads; mines, minerals and fossils; police, trade and manufacture; antiquities; various. Sinclair thought them "most valuable".

[8] The scheme was announced to the Assembly in 1832, and ministers urged to co-operate; in 1836, the Assembly pleaded for a speedier response, but not until 1845 was the *Account* completed (Wilson 1863:249).

[9] Cf. Sinclair 1817 and 1825.

REFERENCES

ANON.

c. 1730 *The Present State of the Church of Scotland.*

CLOW, A. L. and N. C.

1952 *The Chemical Revolution.* London.

EDWARD, ROBERT

1793 *A Description of the County of Angus, translated from the original Latin of Robert Edward, minister of Murroes.* Dundee.

GRAY, T. and BIRLEY, ERIC (eds.)

1951 "Bishop Nicolson's Diary (1703-4):Part II." *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society* 50:110-34. Kendal.

MACFARLANE, WALTER

1906 *Geographical Collections relating to Scotland, made by Walter Macfarlane.* Ed. Sir Arthur Mitchell. Vol. I. Scottish History Society Vol. 51. Edinburgh.

SINCLAIR, SIR JOHN

1785-90 *History of the Public Revenue of the British Empire.* 2 Vols. 1785, 3rd Vol. 1790. London.

1798 "An Account of the various Attempts, in Scotland, and in other Countries, to carry on Inquiries of a Statistical Nature, previous to the Commencement of this undertaking." Appendix G to "History of the Origin and Progress of the Statistical Account of Scotland." *The Statistical Account of Scotland* Vol. 20:lxix-lxxx. Edinburgh.

1817 "General report of Scotland; statistical tables, or result of the inquiries regarding the state of Scotland." Second edition. *The Pamphleteer* 10:93-107. London.

1825 *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland.* Vol. I. Edinburgh.

WILSON, J.

1863 *Index to the Acts and Proceedings of the Church of Scotland.* Edinburgh.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations in this article were supplied by the author, and drawn by Miss M. E. Potter at the School of Geography, Oxford.