SCOTLAND'S "STATISTICAL ACCOUNTS" OF PARISH, COUNTY AND NATION: c. 1790-1825 *and* 1835-1845

Arthur Geddes *

In his Advertisement to his *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland* (1825-6), Sir John Sinclair wrote, "That great undertaking, namely, the publishing, 1. An account of every Parish in Scotland; 2. An account of every Shire or County in it; and 3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE WHOLE, is at last accomplished; and thus a more full and accurate inquiry into the state of that country has been completed than of any other hitherto known." Sinclair had coined the English word "statistical", which he had found in German describing the political strength of a country, but which he used "to ascertain the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants and the means of their future improvement". He wrote that the engraving of "The Pyramid of Statistical Inquiry", which accompanies his *Analysis* (1826: vi), explains the nature of the three-storeyed plan of 938 parishes, 33 counties and the nation as one, "which has at last been happily brought to a termination". Yet it is all the more interesting to read in Sinclair's introduction to the first of the 21 volumes of Parish Accounts (1791: v), that only as he read these did he realise their full value. "It is now about twelve months since I first had the honour of circulating among the Clergy of the Church of Scotland a variety of Queries, for the purpose of elucidating the Natural History and Political State of that Country. My original idea was to have drawn up from their returns a general Statistical view of North Britain, without any particular reference to Parochial districts. But I found such merit and ability, and so many useful facts and important observations in the answers which were sent me, that I could not think of depriving the Clergy of the credit they were entitled to derive from such laborious exertions; and I was thence induced to give the Work to the Public in its present shape."

The plan or questionnaire "submitted to the clergy for

* Lecturer in Geography, University of Edinburgh.

their consideration" includes the name (and its origin), situation, extent and description of the parish; climate, diseases and longevity; state of property; mode of cultivation, in detail, and seasons; quantity and value of crops and produce, rents and prices, with local consumption; wages and services, exacted or abolished; commerce, manufactures, fisheries; towns and villages; police, inns, roads and bridges; harbours, ferries, ships and seamen; state of the church, stipend, manse, glebe and patron; the poor; the schools; the population with its increase or decrease, birth place, age, religion, occupation and residence; dovecotes and particulars of stock; minerals and springs; coal and fuel; eminent men; antiquities and records; characteristics of the people, advantages and disadvantages and "means by which their situation could be meliorated". It can be seen that the perspective was primarily rural, including villages, still rare in Scotland, and small burghs, mostly still of little more than village size.

The County Reports followed the Parochial Accounts from *c.* 1793 to 1814 and the *Analysis*, or synthesis, in 1825-6. Appropriately, Sinclair dedicated his *Analysis*: "To the Clergy of the Church of Scotland; this work, founded on their patriotic labours, to ascertain the circumstances of their native country, with a view to its future improvement is, with every wish for their present and future welfare, most respectfully inscribed by the Author." Dr. James Playfair had issued an excellent summary in 1819, yet this memorable terminal volume deserves to be recalled and emulated.

To encourage the ministers Sir John had arranged that the profits should be devoted to the society for the "Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy"; in spite of this, he had to appoint "five statistical missionaries" over as many of the more remiss districts, including the Isles. Naturally the quality of the Accounts varies. For example, that of the Isle of Harris (Sinclair 1794:342-92) is a classic, freely quoted by Sir Laurence Gomme (1890) and, from a differing point of view, in my own studies; while the four parishes of the Isle of Lewis (Sinclair 1797:241-88), though sound enough, suggest the stimulus of a "statistical missionary" (Geddes 1955).

Continuity is all-important. By 1825 Sinclair was writing, "It would be extremely desirable to have the investigation repeated: . . . and the state of the country, as it now stands . . . explained." Ten years later the Second Parish Statistical Account had been concluded and the Accounts were printed

in 1836 though republished, by counties, unaltered, in 1840. Although the second and third storeys of the early pyramid were not repeated in 1845, the Second Accounts did contribute the materials for summaries and synthetic works for county and nation (Dawson 1853, 1862). In the Third Statistical Account, the Parish Accounts are pulled together by the Introductions to the county volumes which thus combine the first and second storeys, yet the apex of the new pyramid, a national volume, should surely be envisaged and organised. Sinclair remarked that "As a foundation for the intended Analysis"—synthesis would be a better term—"it was found necessary to make 5,000 extracts" from the parochial volumes. It was not without pride that on the title-page of his *Analysis*, Sinclair quoted from le Comte d'Hautrive's *Elemens d'Economie Politique*: "L'Écosse est le pays, ou l'esprit d'observation est aujourd'hui le plus perfectionné." Scotland has a reputation to renew, not only for observation but for synthesis, by the example of Sinclair's culminating national volume.

True to the spirit of the First Accounts, the organisers of the Third have sought to obtain local knowledge from local writers, feeling that the interest of the community in their parish would be awakened not merely by the reading but by the writing of the Accounts. There is now a wide choice of writers. In a Sutherland parish I know, the first draft was pencilled by a shrewd crofter but was unfortunately stolen from his car in a city garage to which he had taken it: the second was begun by a local minister whose death prevented completion: and the final was written by the local doctor. Elsewhere, schoolmasters and others have played their part.

Who were the writers of the First and Second series? By 1790, schoolmasters were mostly men of university education and deserved more than their mere pittance and better recognition (Sinclair 1794:247). However, the national organisation of the Kirk was not equalled by that of the schools so, following the precedent of 1755, the Clergy were enrolled for the First, and largely for the Second, Accounts. John Sinclair himself was born at Thurso Castle, Caithness, in 1754, succeeding at sixteen to the family property which was superintended until he was of age, by his mother. He was educated at the High School of Edinburgh and at the Universities of Edinburgh, of Glasgow, where he was a pupil of Adam Smith, and of Oxford. Trained to the Scottish and the English Bar, he was elected in 1780 M.P. for Caithness. From international and

financial politics he was recalled to the problems of Scotland by the disastrous famine of 1782. From 1786 to 1787 he made a Grand Tour of Northern Europe, including France, Scandinavia and Russia, and his correspondence is still interesting (Sinclair 1831). On his return, agriculture became his chief interest, in practice on his own estate, in Scotland, and in England. It was as a lay member of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland that he conceived of the Statistical Accounts, written from 1790 to 1798. In a first portrait of 1791 —at thirty-eight—his expression is thoughtful and firm (Sinclair 1831). The second, in the Scottish National Gallery, shows him some years later, with plumed bonnet, sporran and close-cut tartan trews, as Colonel of the Caithness Fencibles which he raised in 1794 and of which 19 officers were above 6 feet high and known as "the Great Chiefs, *an Tighearnan Mor*". This picture may remind us that, though he was a laird in Caithness, where the local dialect shows a strong Norse element in its vocabulary, Sinclair was also Gaelic in sympathy. Sinclair helped to record at least one Ossianic lay by its melody, gratefully acknowledged in Simon Fraser of Knockie's *Collection of Highland Airs* (1816). Of bilingual sympathy at home, he was thus prepared for wider understanding, nationally in Britain and internationally abroad. It may well be that the example of "The Pyramid of Statistical Inquiry" explains the outstanding worth of British colonial reports and gazetteers for districts, provinces, colonies, and for the Indian Empire, from Francis Buchanan (1780) to Sir William Hunter (1881), now worthily continued in independent India.

What were the qualities of the Scots parish ministers which made young Sir John Sinclair so rightly, so unexpectedly, feel that their Accounts of "the state of" their parishes deserved to be published in full? Although rarely natives of the parish, the ministers often belonged to the region, spoke its dialect at will and were recruited, as a representative body, from most classes of society. For famous portraits of ministers of the period, our universities treasure examples of those who held office as professors or principals. For parish ministers there is Raeburn's famous portrait of the Minister of the Canongate skating with physical vigour, yet still with clerical gravity. Lorimer's "Ordination of the Elders" and Reid's "Highland Funeral", though later, convey the solemnity of relation traditional between a true minister and his working Elders. Even when chosen by the proprietors or "heritors", not the Crown, a

minister of independent mind, backed by his Elders, was not necessarily the laird's man, but could be frank about "feudal prejudices . . . mistaken submissiveness . . . and Gothic services" (for labour dues) and about short leases, high rents or insufficient improvement by a landlord. After all, a laird, no less than a humble tenant or cottar, could be publicly rebuked by minister and Kirk Session, for example, a notorious Laird o' Cockpen, as Kirk records tell.

The minister, and his wife, were also practical farmers, for the glebe was necessary to supply the table of the manse until farming ceased to be for mere subsistence plus rent. The annually cultivated infield of the tenantry was thick with weeds and the unmanured outfield, in the words of the grim proverb, might give little more food than it got from its threefold return: "Ane to gnaw, ane to saw, and ane to pay the laird witha' ". As agriculture improved, the glebe had become less important; the rural Lowland minister was less closely knit to farming by 1835; his Free Church rival had no glebe. On the whole, the ministers were looked up to as learned men by their working parishioners, most of whom could read (and write) and who valued religion and took their part in it as Elders of the Kirk.

As for the ministers' cash relations with the tenantry, the collection was of course voluntary and anonymous, while manse, glebe and stipend came mainly from the State which supported the Kirk but in principle was not supposed to over-rule the decisions of the Kirk's democratic organisation. Yet the fact that by 1835 the Evangelical Movement, often led by fervent catechists, was attacking the "carnal Moderatism" of the Established Church, lessened unity between minister and parishioners and thus diminished the sociological value of the Second Accounts. Lay Patronage, the prerogative of the Crown or of the lairds or "heritors" to choose or "call" a minister, was effectively disputed and this led to the Disruption of 1846, when most ministers left the "old" Established Church, sacrificed their stipends, and stood out against their patrons and with the body of their working parishioners in a national Free Church.

"The wee kirk, the Free kirk,
The kirk without the steeple;
The Auld kirk, the cauld kirk,
The kirk without the people!"

Although the auld Established Church abolished Lay Patronage forty years later, reunion with the United Free Church had to

wait until 1929. This reunion united Scots Protestants, except for the Evangelical and Episcopal minorities, into a coherent body probably of more effective force as compared to Protestants in England, whose communities are so divided between a rather state-controlled "Church" and free "Chapels". If the final one-volume Synthesis of the Third Statistical Account for Scotland, suggested here, could be complemented by one for England, for Wales and for Ireland, South and North, we should all learn more about one another's countries—and our own.

In Lothian where "the veritable Revolution in agriculture" of which ministers wrote had been completed by 1790, writers in 1835 mainly confirmed their predecessors' statements. Elsewhere change was carried through in the generation after 1790 and so the agricultural improvements and changes discussed or forecast in the First Accounts could be assessed in the Second.

With regard to "manufactures"—manufactures or handcrafts—a minister in 1790 could know what he was talking about: his wife could spin and knit and he himself, though neither weaver, smith nor mason, was competent to understand and judge their skills. By 1836 handicrafts had given way to machinery and the minister was no longer competent to deal with this or with its effect in mill and factory, foundry or ironworks. The interest of both Accounts is primarily rural. Even by 1790 the economy of the cities and ports and their society had become too extensive and complex, too specialised and too impersonal to be grasped by Sinclair himself, let alone by a parish minister. Of Edinburgh, the writer frankly confessed that the problem was beyond the scope of an Account.

One of Sinclair's teachers, Adam Smith, 1723-90, was a native of a little port in Fife, where I have seen a cartload of coals brought down straight from a small minehead to be tipped into the hold of a two-mast brig bringing timber from the Baltic or North Sea, a sample of exchange as basis of the wealth of nations. In 1751 Smith became professor of Logic, and next of Moral Philosophy, in Glasgow where, as the patron of James Watt, he was alert to the need to improve industrial machinery and power. But his sound assessments of the Commercial Revolution in his *Wealth of Nations*, written in Kirkcaldy, 1766-76, could not yet extend to the Industrial Revolution, of which the effects belong rather to the nineteenth century. And by 1835, the sheer size, dynamism and complexity

of cities and their accompanying problems, demanded a new technique of survey based on adequate economic theory, a truer social philosophy and a new ethic of urban relationships. All this lay beyond the grasp of ministers or indeed of almost any, at that time. The Third Statistical Account will be the more valuable, in that systematic urban survey is applied on social, economic and geographical lines.

All generalisation must be elastic in Scotland, Highland and Lowland, a land of which the length equals that of England and Wales, a land diversified by language and dialect and by links to England itself and over the sea to Ireland and Norway. All that can be hoped for here is an attempt to sample differences in time and place: in time, over the periods of the First, the Second and (briefly) the Third Accounts, and in place, by comparisons of Lothian for the south-east, with Aberdeenshire for the Lowland north-east and adjacent Highlands, with the Lowland south-west and with the Gaelic north-west. While Orkney is comparable to the Lowland north-east, Shetland is comparable to the Western Isles, though Norse, not Gaelic in tradition.

The ministers' words did something to describe the landscapes of Scotland and the changes, from rig and baulk to levelled and hedged fields, from windswept bareness to shelter by hedge and tree, shelter-belt and plantation, from weedy crops and weedy fallow to a clean rotation suited to the region, the farm and its purpose, and from "byre, but and ben" under one roof to cottage and to farmhouse and steading. In addition, John Galt's "Annals of the Parish" gives an imaginary diary from 1760-90, and a self-portrait, in the setting of an Ayrshire manse family and rural parish, of a Scots minister, kindly, shrewd, and not too sententious in his descriptions of ameliorations. Similarly, Galt's "The Provost", 1822, describes social progress in small-town life and its administrative morality while "The Entail" describes the lairds. Yet we miss illustrations in the first Accounts. Pictorially the landscapes can live for us in illustrations such as those in the second edition of Graham's "The Social Life of Scotland . . ." or in vivid paintings by Wilkie, Naismith or Geikie. The mapping of Scotland was undertaken in the north under General Roy after 1745 for strategic reasons and as Accounts tell, it was also proceeding, one estate at a time, under progressive landlords; for before attempting to improve their lands, they had to map them. From these Plans, what was

often called "the barbarous medieval system of agriculture", is seen to be the breakdown of a civilised communal system laid out in the Middle Ages. Quite often the Plans record the names of the tenant "possessors".

In Lothian transformation came after 1750 by the consolidation under a single tenant, of joint farms or "fermtouns", formerly cultivated by groups of tenants greater and smaller and more or less hereditary, as rentals show (Geddes 1938, 1951; Third 1957). In the Ayrshire Lowland early fermtouns had been divided up, in many cases earlier than was remembered even by enquiring ministers in the eighteenth century, but fences and rotation came after 1775 (Ogilvie 1953, after Lebon 1946).

The change from the small Gaelic group-hamlets with four or five equal labouring joint tenants, "the little commonwealths" of the Rev. John MacLeod's First Account of Harris (Sinclair 1794:368), gave place after 1800 either to single farms or crofts or to crofting villages aligned along a raised beach or road, though still with their common pastures.

Thus rural society was virtually fixed by the size of the new farms and their farm labour team, from the large farms of S.E. Scotland averaging six to eight workers, through medium teams to West and North with small teams of three to two workers over most of the rest, but with the addition of individual crofters from Aberdeenshire northwards to Orkney. In the south-western and eastern Highlands mixed farming is practised both by small farm or family teams and by single crofters, but northwards from Mull, by the crofting townships of the north-west coast, the Hebrides and Zetland. Speaking both as one who has worked as a farm servant, and as an observer, I know of no single fact of agricultural organisation which sums up so well the differing regional types of class society in rural Scotland (Geddes 1955:map p. 15). Many Accounts show keen awareness of the significance of the number typical of the regional farm team. And as Dr. Snodgrass (1953) has shown in her Introduction to the pioneer *Third Account* of East Lothian, the consolidation in big farms created the threefold hierarchy of class: landlord, farmer and farm-servants. The effects are enduring in S.E. Scotland. In Ayrshire, on the other hand, the farmer and his farm-servant, often one of his own family, work side by side as did the brothers Robbie and Gilbert Burns. The former servant becomes an enterprising farmer at home or far afield. In the

S.W. Highlands farmer and crofter mix readily; and in the N.W. crofting townships a co-operative democracy prevails.

Of studies made before 1950, comparing the First and Second Accounts for one county, the fullest known to me is that of Dr. Isabel F. Grant (1929). Aberdeenshire was selected as a large East Coast county, including both the N.E. coastwise lowland and the S.W. upland and highland, which was little affected by Clearances for sheep, and in which the agricultural reforms were largely being carried through between the First and Second Accounts, but were still incomplete up in the straths. They bring out the fact that, in Aberdeenshire, it was improved cultivation and especially turnip-growing that chiefly brought about the demarcation of individual holdings in order to make fenced fields, a fact emphasised by the County Reports of the Board of Agriculture of *c.* 1810. . . By 1790-8, in about a dozen parishes reformed methods were widespread even among "the small men" and in others improvement was being carried on in a rather tentative piecemeal way. Even in the ridgy uplands knowledge was spreading and "a spot" of turnips was commonly grown. Only in the remote districts "all the old-fashioned prejudices of husbandry are still looked upon as sure and infallible rules of good management" (parish Alford in Sinclair 1795:451). Nowhere in the county was there as yet a regular rotation of crops, and "infield and outfield" still prevailed (with free access of cattle over the stubble) as shown in the Estate Plans which we have collected for the period, e.g. of Castle Forbes, for the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the University of Edinburgh. Sir Archibald Grant, of Monymusk, is the best remembered improving landlord, by his *Essays*, by economic history, by a famous strathspey tune and by the words solemnly practised for a well-known psalm: "Hou pleasand is thy dwelling-place," Sir Archie Grant to me: / "The kailyard and the policies, / Hou pleasand, Sir, they be." By 1792, Sir Archibald had been gathered to his fathers, but his people were described as "enthusiastically content" with the results of his enforced improvements.

The gains may be estimated by increased area, by larger returns for cereals and stock, by better quality of both and by a better balanced system. Thus on Deeside, in Kincardine O'Niel, in 1792, roughly 5,000 acres of oats produced 14,000 bolls and made £7,000, and in 1836 less than half the acreage (2,000 acres), produced the same quantity. Similarly for *bear* or barley. And while 100 acres of precious potatoes and turnips

had formerly made £600 in 1836 at two-thirds the price, 700 acres of these roots totalled nearly £3,000. Whereas 500 acres of grass were valued at £200, by 1836 2,300 acres under hay and arable pasture valued three times higher made £3,200. Total for the parish, 1792, £10,000: 1836, £15,000. It is interesting to refer such comparisons, when given for N.W. Scotland (e.g. in Sutherland for Eddrachillis) to recent figures, e.g. the changes in the ratio of sheep to cattle, mapped in F. Fraser Darling's *West Highland Survey* (1955:234-5).

Between the First and Second Accounts, other occupations were profoundly altered. The First recorded the rise of rural "manufactures", notably stocking knitting and flax-spinning and weaving. The Second recorded the development of manufacture by machinery powered by water or steam, mechanofacture as one might call it, and the concentration in new towns and of course in Aberdeen itself. The rural population came to depend increasingly on agriculture alone. Round the coasts, the fishing ports developed.

All these factors led to change in the earlier population and its distribution, natural increase and trends of migration. In 1755, Aberdeenshire's population was 117,000: in 1792, 123,000. This net increase of 6,000 was variably distributed. The towns of Huntly and Peterhead had a net increase of 5,000. From 1792-1841, the population increased from 123,000 to 192,000; in 1801, 39,000 were employed in agriculture and 13,000 in trades, etc. By 1841, agricultural workers had dropped to 25,000 and those employed in "manufactures, commerce and trade" had risen to 28,000. In 1951, only 18,000 were employed in agriculture of 133,000 in "All Industries". In all Scotland in 1951, 145,000 were employed in agriculture out of 2,200,000 in "All Industries", or less than 7 per cent. Here I would draw attention to the historical population studies made for Aberdeenshire by Prof. A. C. O'Dell and Dr. K. Walton, almost unique in their intensive use of the county's population returns for 1696 (Walton 1950). As to the growth of our cities, in Scotland in the last 110 years, the rural or "landward" population, still 60 per cent in 1841, fell to 30 per cent. in 1951. Or to adopt a truer criterion, the population of the total "urban area" had swelled to 83 per cent, leaving a remainder of only 17 per cent.

Of great interest throughout both Accounts of Scotland are the changes in the standards of food, clothing and shelter among the different classes. The development of education

is noted. The increasing intensity of doctrinal differences and of Evangelism or "enthusiasm" is noted in the Second Accounts. Probably it was less marked in Eastern Scotland than in rural areas subject to migration between traditional hamlets and the great Atlantic ports along Clydeside. There, the uncontrolled exploitation of labour in ships, mines, mills and factories, and the slums with their appalling child mortality and deadly epidemics, may go far to explain the "evils" of Radicalism and the "wickedness" of Trade Unions on which the Second Account of Glasgow is eloquent. Lay Patronage meant that most of the writers of both Accounts of cities had been appointed by the Crown, i.e. by governments composed of the Lords and of the Commons before the Reform Bill of 1832 had cleared up extreme scandals; universal franchise of both sexes did not come until 1928.

In the countryside by 1799, not only the civil wars but the famines which had shaken society to its foundations had come to an end, and increased welfare tended to promote stability of family and of the individual. Although for centuries the constant tendency of population to increase had been checked by endemic smallpox and other, mainly infantile diseases, and by recurrent famines and occasional epidemics until 1755 or after, the land was "over-populated"; to put it the other way, the people lacked land, the population was under-landed. But after 1790, the increased population could find other means of support than land. In spite of this there were new elements of social instability. While both the small farm for which Prof. William Ogilvie of Aberdeen had pled, with a 19-year lease, and the part-time croft with long, traditional tenure, tended to give stability, the Accounts note some uprooting. Moreover the farm-servants, hired once, or twice a year, tended to move at each hiring. They still moved far too frequently from farm to farm until the last war brought the Scottish agricultural "Standstill Order", followed by post-war reforms throughout the farms of the Lowlands.

In this brief commentary on Sinclair's "pyramidal" achievement and its follow-up in the Second Accounts, I hope I have indicated their interest and their value for the understanding of Scotland today and the possibilities of rural planning. The impetus for the First Accounts consisted of the dynamic facts of revolutionary change, after long stagnation accompanied by breakdown and decline, and of the forward-looking reforming temper of the time. Both series show an

attempt to assess the major facts of locality, region and nation, of economy and community; both temporal and spiritual aspects are considered, not apart but together. And in the Third Account, urban life is seriously studied. Living history, by plotting the trends of change to the present, invites projection into the possibilities of the future. And these possibilities include both what may or what seems likely to happen, and what we may deliberately bring about. In Sinclair's words his purpose was "to ascertain the circumstances of our native country with a view to its future improvement . . . " and the welfare of all.

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