

## CHAP. XXII.

## CANTIRE BUCOLICS PAST AND PRESENT.

A Farm-house. — English Associations connected with the Word. — The Highland Farm-house. — Tastes differ. — Highland prejudice against Pork. — Fingal and Ossian ate Pork. — Three pleasing Features in Cantire. — Rents and Soums. — A Time of Scarcity. — Blood-cakes. — Servants' Wages. — Farm Leases. — Rotation of Crops. — Enclosures. — Soil. — Sea-wrack for Manure. — Sheep-farming. — Agricultural Implements. — The Caschrom. — Harrowing at the Horse's Tail. — Creels. — A strong Man. — The Braidh. — The Quern. — Present State of Agriculture in Cantire. — Condition of the Farmer and Labourer.

LEAVING the mansion and the moors, let us now pay a visit to the farm-houses and cottages in the near neighbourhood of Glencreggan, and look a little into the past and present condition of agriculture in Cantire, in which we shall be able to find other matters of interest besides dry statistics and blue-book records.

At the mention of the word farm-house, the English reader places before his "mind's eye" a pleasing picture of a two or three-storied house, more or less gabled

and half timbered, old fashioned and picturesque, irregular and roomy — with a front-yard, and a back-yard, and a straw-yard, and a fold-yard, and a stack-yard, and ever so many yards — and a garden and orchard, and big barns and granaries, and rows of cow-houses and stables, and hovels, and sheds enclosing a square, paved two or three feet deep with golden straw, where the half-smothered cattle are feeding out of picturesque little pent-houses; and a confused medley of crowing cocks, cackling hens, cooing pigeons, gobbling turkeys, and grunting pigs; and a pond with ducks and geese; and rows of majestic stacks, like giant bee-hives, or little parish churches minus tower or steeple; and an old cart-shed, overshadowed by a great walnut-tree; and a big sheep-dog mounting guard on a horse-block; and, perhaps, a noble screen of elms to shelter the farmstead from east winds; and indoors the large paved or quarried kitchen, with its fireplace, that might almost roast an ox, and its oak tables and benches, and highly-polished chairs, and the dresser, and the rows of shining plates and mugs, and the eight-day clock, and the corner cupboard, and the strings of onions, and the home-cured hams and flitches, hanging like banners, and far more useful, even if not quite so ornamental; and the best parlour, and the dairy, and, in short, all the other places so comfortable and cleanly; all this mingled mass of pleasing items form themselves into

the picture that appears before the "mind's eye" of an Englishman, at the word farm-house.

Now if the English reader will have the goodness to dismiss this picture from his gaze, he will be able to study the counter-part picture of a Highland farm-house with a less prejudiced mind. To an Englishman a farm-house is usually the centre of an aureola of golden joys and solid comforts; and doubtless, so far as all practical results are concerned, a Highland farm-house is the same. Yet, if fulfilling the same ends, with how different an outside show does it accomplish its purpose! I visited more than one farm-house in Cantire, and though I could not speak too highly of the friendliness and hospitality of the people, yet their homes, and ways, and manner of life were certainly as far removed from our English notions of the farmer's home, as is a palace from a cottage. Many of the farm-houses on the Glen-barr, Largie, and other estates, where the proprietors are resident, and attend to the comforts and wants of their tenants, have been either rebuilt, or put into proper condition; but a large proportion of farms in Cantire still remain in a very sad plight, either from want of capital on the part of the landlord, or from the poverty of the over-weighted tenant, and may be seen in much the same state that they must have presented a century ago.

Writing twenty years since, the Rev. D. Macdonald,

the then minister of the parish in which Glencreggan is situate, says, "The farmers, with a few exceptions, enjoy, in a reasonable degree, the comforts and advantages of society." I confess that I do not understand this sentence. Its meaning and force would depend upon what is meant by the word *society*. "They are, upon the whole, comfortably lodged, and well fed with wholesome and substantial food." Here again, all depends upon what is meant by *wholesome and substantial food*. As old Lady Perth said to the Frenchman, "Tastes differ, Sir; some folks like parritch, and some like puddocks"—*i.e.* frogs. And the Skye boy who was pitied by the English visitor for having nothing to eat but porridge, indignantly exclaimed, in defence of his accustomed food, "Would you have me quarrel with my *meat*?" And not so very long since, at a public meeting in Edinburgh, where the subject of discussion was the sameness and poverty of workhouse fare, it was shown that it was better and more varied than the daily food of the majority of the Scotch peasants. From which we come to Lady Perth's conclusion, that tastes differ; and that an English farmer would turn up his nose at the fare that would be considered wholesome and substantial by the Highland farmer. There is no doubt but what the latter class (in Cantire) are a very hard-working class of men, and that, in many instances, they live very poorly. On

very sufficient authority I can say, that butcher's meat, or *flesh*, as it is termed, is very rarely seen at their tables, and that their food mainly consists of porridge made of oatmeal, potatoes and fish,—the “fish,” however, being smoked herrings. Bacon is comparatively unknown; for although many of the farmers rear pigs, yet they are fattened for sale. Where pigs are reared, they are not allowed to go at large; they are invisible to all but the farmer's eye. The consequence was that, during the time I was in Cantire, I only saw one pig throughout the whole district; so that one might at first imagine that Cantire had been a colony of Jews\* instead of Presbyterians and Protestants.

But although pigs (if searched for) are to be met with, though not commonly seen in Cantire, yet there, as elsewhere in the Highlands, exists a popular prejudice among the lower orders against pork, or swine's flesh. Sir Walter Scott refers to this in his notes to “Waverley,” and says, “King Jamie carried this prejudice to England, and is known to have abhorred pork almost as much as he did tobacco. Ben Jonson

\* Captain Moore, R. N., jocularly asked Dr. Wolff why there were so few Jews in Scotland? Wolff replied, “The Scotchmen are called Caledonians, which proves their Chaldean descent.” “And this Dr. Wolff believes seriously; and the Chaldeans themselves say that three Jews are needed to cheat one Chaldean, which may be the reason why so few Jews are in Scotland.” — *Dr. Wolff's Travels and Adventures*, vol. ii.

has recorded this peculiarity, where the gipsy in a masque, examining the king's hand, says,

‘You should by this line  
Love a horse, and a hound, but no part of a swine.’ \*

James's own proposed banquet for the Devil was a loin of pork, and a poll of ling, with a pipe of tobacco for digestion." † Lord Teignmouth mentions as a proof of the distinctness of race of the Orcadians, that they entertain no prejudice against swine, as the Western Highlanders and Hebrideans do. ‡ The author of the "Letters from Scotland" says, "I own I never saw any swine among the mountains, and there is good reason for it; those people have no offal wherewith to feed them; and were they to give them other food, one single sow would devour all the provisions of a family." He also mentions a case where the chief of a clan declined pork at a public dinner, and his followers did the same; but a few days afterwards, when the chief dined with him in private and was under no restraint, he ate it with a good appetite. Macculloch thus pleasantly and learnedly treats the subject:—"They may fancy

\* The Gipsies Metamorphosed.

† Waverley, vol. i. p. 219.

‡ Vol. i. p. 276. Dr. Somerville, in his recently published "Life and Times," speaking of Scotch customs during the latter half of the past century, says, "Though pork was sometimes presented at table, few ate of it when fresh, and even when cured it was not generally acceptable." (p. 335.)

they dislike pork, if they please; but if they do, it is certain that Ossian was not a Highlander, and they must then renounce all claims to a descent from Fingal. Indeed, I think this argument against the Highland origin of Ossian's poems quite insurmountable; and if they really mean to prove their lineage and claims, I recommend them to take to pig meat as fast as possible. There can be no question that Fingal had a seat in Valhalla, with his father Trathal, and his grandfather Trenmor, and his son Ossian, and his grandsons Ullin, Carril, and Rhyno, voices of the days of old. It is equally certain that they breakfasted, dined, and supped upon the boar Scrymner, and that the goddess, Gna, was the housekeeper. To be sure it would be against the liberty of the subject to cram the modern Fingalians with this diet by force, as you do a sausage, particularly as Dr. Kitchiner considers forced meat unwholesome; but I think when once they have heard my theory, and Vallancey's, of their real origin from the Jews, a descent quite clear, they will hasten to remove the stigma by taking the pig into their embraces, and the office of a hog in the Highlands will no longer be that of a gentleman and a sinecurist. There must be some oblique and Mosaical parentage of this kind, because the pig (I never speak his name without respect) was highly favoured by the Welsh, and the Britons, and the Gauls, as well as by the Saxons and

Scandinavians — all brethren from whom our friends have so basely degenerated. Honourable must his state have been when he and his family are represented in basso relievo on the ancient British coinage.”\*

Thus although pigs *do* exist in Cantire, yet they so little obtrude themselves on the public gaze, that a casual visitor might leave the country without seeing a solitary porker; and the tourist in this part of the western Highlands might mention among some of its attractions these three pleasing features,—no turnpikes, no beggars, no pigs. Since the failure of the potatoe crops, it has been out of the power of the Highland labourer to keep his pig, and from the same cause some of the farmers have given up rearing them.

They don't know much in Cantire about the acreage of their farms, and describe them according to their rental. Thus when you ask a Cantire farmer what is the extent of his farm, he will tell you it is a two-hundred pound farm, or whatever its value may be. The rent has frequently to be determined more by the *soums* that the hill-pasture will keep than by the value of the arable land, the average rent of which is somewhat under a pound per acre. The *soum* is the keep of a milk cow, or two heifers, or three stirks, or ten sheep. But from the variable quality of the hill pasture it is

\* Highlands and Western Isles, vol. iii. p. 339. See also Mr. Campbell's "West Highland Tales," p. 92.



extremely difficult to estimate its value: While some of it in the glens is luxuriant and of great value, other portions are not worth more than half a crown per acre. The rents have been greatly raised during the last sixty years.\* In the time of the war with France farming became very profitable; and, with the improvement of agriculture and the drainage of marshy ground, the soil was made more productive and remunerative. During the Irish rebellion of 1799, when the Cantire people lived in daily dread of a descent being made upon their coast, the scarcity of food and the consequent rise in the price of provisions was very great. Oatmeal was sold at the rate of five shillings the ten pounds, Dutch weight; and when the oatmeal was exhausted at Campbelton, and only barley remained, a small quantity only was allowed to each family, who, before they could receive it, had to procure a certificate from a magistrate stating the number of their children. At this time the barbarous practice of bleeding cattle in the spring, for the purpose of making cakes of their coagulated blood, was not uncommon, and was continued until some twenty years within this

\* Sir John Sinclair estimated that the rental of Scotch estates, between the years 1660 and 1750, increased from two to three-fold. By 1770 it had doubled. By 1790 it had doubled again. By 1841 it had again increased two-and-a-half times. Since the Restoration, therefore, the land rental of parishes in Scotland has increased two thousand per cent.!

present century.\* The wretched beasts were so reduced by it in strength, that it became necessary to lift them up, and "being at the lifting" formed a part of the farmer's business.

"The wages of farm-servants (says Mr. McIntosh of Campbelton) were very low till about a hundred years back, when they began to rise. It was much talked of when the first servant girl got twelve merks† Scotch of wages for six months, and able-bodied young men from twenty-five to thirty shillings. They had other perquisites which increased their wages, such as a pair of shoes and stockings, with some ground to grow a certain quantity of flax or potatoes on." The little kail-yard and the wretched cottage form the usual perquisites of the Cantire labourers of the present day. They make themselves very contented with their lot; and in cases of emergency, when a neighbour has been reduced by untoward circumstances to a state of privation and poverty, they have often been known to contribute, without any solicitation, a sum of money for his relief. On every Sunday, too, they give their mite to the support of the church, and it is wonderful where they can find the money to pay for the "drap o' whiskey."

The farms are commonly let on a nineteen years' lease. Indeed the Duke of Argyle, who is the chief

\* Lord Teignmouth so testifies. Macaulay refers to this practice.

† The value of a merk is 13s. 4d.

proprietor in Cantire, is prevented, by the provisions of the entail, from granting leases beyond this term. Sometimes, however, farms are let on a twelve or fourteen years' lease, and occasionally are let from year to year without any lease. The Rev. D. Macdonald writes as follows:—"In terms of leases, which are generally for nineteen years, the majority of landlords bind their tenants to follow a regular rotation of white and green crops, to sow grass seeds along with bear, and not to take more than two crops of grain from the same field in succession. But, except by such as are in easy circumstances, the above system is seldom adopted. A great proportion endeavour to study what they conceive to be their own interest and convenience, and are very reluctant to lose two successive crops. The natural consequence is that the succeeding tenant finds his farm so much exhausted and impoverished, that, in spite of all his efforts to improve his lands, his lease has nearly expired before he begins to reap the benefit of his expenditures. At the termination of the lease another tenant steps forward and outbids his offer; or, should he be permitted to retain possession for an equivalent rent, the great increase discourages him, and holds out no temptation to expend more money upon his improvements. . . . The heritors would not only improve the general appearance of the parish, but advance their own interest, were they to encourage farmers

to enclose their fields, either by remunerating the tenant at the termination of his lease for improvements and expenditures, or by being themselves at the expense of inclosures and sub-divisions, and charging interest for the money expended to accommodate the farmer."

The most prevalent soil is a light loam; in the immediate vicinity of the sea the soil is of a sharp and sandy nature. Potatoes are very largely cultivated; and at one time the farmers chiefly depended upon them for the payment of their rent, as the Cantire potatoes were in great demand and had a good repute for seed. Barley or bear is cultivated to a great extent, together with oats, pease, and beans. The corn-stacks are made very much smaller than those which we are accustomed to see in England,—a circumstance attributable to the precariousness in the Scotch weather, and the apprehension of the corn heating if put together wet. The want of inclosures and subdivisions is a great obstacle to a regular rotation of crops, and many of the farmers are in the practice of ploughing more land than they can afford manure to keep in heart, and do not recruit, by pasturing, such fields as have been sown with clover or rye-grass. The sea-wrack, or wraic (*Alga marina*), furnishes an unlimited fund of excellent manure; and those fields in the near neighbourhood of the sea have been from time immemorial, without any cessation, alternately cultivated with bear and potatoes, and,

except in seasons of long continued drought, had never failed to yield fair crops. But “by a too frequent application,” says Mr. Macdonald, “the wraic acts as a caustic, pulverises and weakens the soil to such a degree as to nourish weeds of diverse sorts, particularly wild mustard — provincially sciloc.” I saw them drawing the wraic on to the fields of barley, and spreading it about before they had removed any of the standing sheaves from the ground.

Although much ground has been claimed during the last half century, yet the arable soil bears but a very small proportion to the uncultivated and mountainous regions. The hill pasturage, however, has greatly increased in value and estimation since the introduction of the sheep-farming and cattle-grazing system ; and in some parts of Cantire the farmer has sacrificed everything to the system, and the depopulation of those parts has been the result. Emigration stepped in to the aid of the Cantire Highlander, who, from the want of any reasonable prospect of employment or support in his native land, was compelled to quit those hills and glens to which he was attached by the dearest ties.

The modern improvements in all instruments of agriculture have now found their way into Cantire, and threshing-machines and good ploughs are to be met with. Not long since, their ploughs were exceedingly cumbrous and most laborious to work, requiring

for this purpose, four horses to draw, and three men to manage them; one man to drive, another to guide the plough, and the third to dress the furrows after the plough. Still earlier, the universal plough was the *caschrom* or hand-plough, which is even now to be met with here and there. It is a kind of wooden plough-share, with a curved handle, the share part being tipped with iron, and a projecting piece of wood being placed



THE CASCHROM.

for the foot. It is peculiarly adapted for the western Highland soils, where the ground is encumbered with protruding rocks, and where the soil is consequently dispersed among them in an intricate manner. Being constructed to grapple with these difficulties, it is very different in its character from the "breast-ploughs" used in the English fens. The *caschrom* was (and is) greatly used in Skye, and was noticed by Dr. Johnson in his Hebridaean journey. He thus describes it:—  
 "The soil is then turned up by manual labour, with an

instrument called a crooked spade, of a form and weight which to me appeared very incommodious, and would, perhaps, be soon improved in a country where workmen could be easily found and easily paid. It has a narrow blade of iron fixed to a long and heavy piece of wood, which must have, about a foot and a half above the iron, a knee or flexure with the handle downwards. When the farmer encounters a stone, which is the great impediment of his operations, he drives the blade under it, and bringing the knee or handle to the ground, has in the long handle a very forcible lever." \* The author of the "Letters" from Scotland in 1754, also describes the *caschrom*. Macculloch says, that it "is a far more powerful instrument than the spade, yet it is not so effectual in pulverising the soil. As far as is yet known, this primitive plough is confined to the Highlands; no traces of it at least have been found elsewhere, not even in India where the simplest draught-plough, formed merely of a crooked branch, is still in use. We might imagine the *caschrom* to have been the contrivance of man where the use of animals was unknown." †

So much for ploughing. The harrowing was on a par with it. The harrows (called *racans* or "clod-breakers") were heavy frames of wood, with stout

\* Dr. Johnson's "Works," vol. viii. p. 301.

† Vol. iii. p. 209.

wooden pins fixed in them ; and, at an earlier period \*, were tied to the horse's tail, without any sort of harness whatever, in a like manner to the Irish practice, as described to us by the lively author of " Paddiana ;" † and, when the tail (either by nature, or by that long service which must literally have proved more harrowing to the horse than the ground) had been so docked as to become too short of the purpose, instead of being considered exempt from this peculiar system of education at Harrow, the unfortunate beast's tail was artificially lengthened by twisted sticks.

Wheeled carts were vehicles rarely to be met with. In their place, they used wicker *creels*, which were slung across the horses' backs ; and, in this fashion, they took peat and other necessaries to their homes, and carried manure to their fields.‡ If they had a load which could not be divided, they placed it in the one creel, and counterbalanced it by placing stones in the other. Their potatoes were placed in sacks, and carried home on horseback. The labourers of that day were

\* In use in 1754, according to Capt. Burt.

† In the two last chapters of the book, where (and also by Lord George Hill, in his " Facts from Gweedore ") it is adduced in evidence of certain peculiarities in the character of the Celt.

‡ The author of the " Letters from Scotland " says, that near Fort William, where the manure had been brought in this way, he saw the women " on their knees, spreading it with their hands upon the land, and even breaking the balls, that every part of the little spot might have its due proportion."



accustomed to lift heavy weights; and it is told of two Cantire Highlanders who were disputing as to their strength, that the one said to the other, "Put that sack of potatoes on to my back." It weighed four hundred pounds; but the man lifted it on to his back. When the man had got it fairly balanced on his back, he gave three hops on one foot, and then, throwing the sack from his shoulders, challenged his neighbour to do the like. But he declined the offer.

Each farm had a kiln to dry the grain. The form of their kilns was round, with a long oven on the outside, in which they had a peat fire, and rafters of wood over the kiln pot, covered with hair-cloth. These kilns often took fire. If they were at any time very short of meal, they would take in a sheaf of corn from the field or barn, separate the grain from the straw, and grind it with the *braidh* in a short time. The *braidh* was a round stone with a hole through the centre, in which was fixed a handle. The grain was placed upon a flat stone, and the *braidh* was turned round upon it, so as to crush the grain. It was, in fact, a hand corn-mill; and appears to have been the same as the *quern*, figured in Pennant's "Voyage to the Hebrides," and here copied. He says that it employed two pairs of hands four hours, to grind a single bushel of corn.\* I need hardly remind the reader, that this Highland

\* Pp. 281—286.

*braidh*, or *quern*, is precisely similar to the eastern hand-mill for grinding corn referred to in the Scriptures, and still in use in the Holy Land.\*

Such was the rude state of agriculture, and agricultural implements, not a hundred years ago in Cantire. That there has been a vast improvement since then, is apparent everywhere; and that agriculture is, in most instances, at this present day, in an



THE QUERN [FROM PENNANT].

advancing state (especially where the landlords countenance and aid their tenants in improvements), I am assured by one who has a long knowledge of the country. But, that very much remains to be done is also painfully and obtrusively apparent; and the cases are neither few nor far between, where the farms and farmers are a century behindhand in improvement, and where the dwellings of master and man are alike opposed to cleanliness, comfort, and even common decency. As compared with even the lowest class of

\* See Dr. Clarke's "Travels," vol. iv. p. 167, and his account of the custom still existing at Nazareth. It also exists in Lapland.

English farms and labourer's cottages, the majority of those that I saw in Cantire seemed to me to be miserably inferior in every way. The reader will be better able to judge for himself, by accompanying me to almost any farm-house and cottage in the near neighbourhood of Glencreggan; but, before doing so, let me quote two authorities on the subject.

Lord Teignmouth says (and his words hold good at the present day), "The farm-houses are generally, throughout Cantire, old and poor habitations, far behind the general improvement visible in this part of the country. The entrance is usually through the byre, which is a continuation of the house in the same line; the fire is placed on the middle of the floor, contained in a grate, either square or shaped like a bowl, and raised a little above the ground, a custom peculiar to Cantire. They are without lofts, probably as the country furnishes no poles, and are cold, as the thatched roof forms their only covering. There are some few farm-houses in the modern style, indicating the slow growth of improvement." \*

Of the cottagers in the parish of Killean (in which Glencreggan is situated) its former minister, the Rev. D. Macdonald (who of course, had abundant opportunity of arriving at facts) thus writes: — "The most numerous class of the community are cottagers or day-

\* Vol. ii. p. 388.

labourers, and the fact cannot be concealed that the privations under which they labour are truly deplorable. Three or four poor families frequently congregate into one farm, live in wretched hovels, rudely constructed without any mortar, one division of which is occupied by the family, and the other converted into a kind of byre, and often no partition in the hut to separate the human from the brute creation. They hold their dwelling-houses from year to year, and the tenants (who are their landlords) can dispossess them at pleasure. A rent of 4*l.* or 5*l.* sterling is exacted for a house kept in bad repair, a small kail-yard, the scanty pasture of a cow, and some ground for planting potatoes in the outskirts of the farm. Their meagre diet consists of potatoes, sour milk, and when they can afford it, a little oat bread and porridge. Animal food is a luxury in which they seldom indulge. Such as can salt a little fish occasionally use a change of diet. Their sole dependence for payment of rent is upon the earnings of their children, whom they hire out as servants through the district. For the honour of human nature it should be recorded, that their sons and daughters would conceive themselves deficient in gratitude and natural affection, did they not reserve a portion of their wages to pay house rent for their parents. For culinary purposes they sometimes use a species of wild leek which grows among the rocks of the shore ;

the juice of bogbean for rheumatism, and wild thyme for headaches. They also ascribe great virtue to the essence of ground ivy and centaury.”

Such is the present state of agriculture, the farmer, and the labourer, in Cantire. Having now got their general condition pretty well before us, let us pay them a visit in their own homes.