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~~1961-20 (15)~~  
**STATEMENT**

AS TO THE WANT OF

**SCHOOLS AND CATECHISTS**

IN THE

**HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS.**

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BY A COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

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EDINBURGH:

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1825.

COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

THE MODERATOR.

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## STATEMENT, &c.

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THE General Assembly, in 1824, appointed a Committee to enquire and to report to their next meeting, as to the existing means of education and religious instruction throughout Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. This Committee accordingly transmitted to each of the ministers of the 907 parishes in the church, a list of queries in order to ascertain the facts of the case. They received in the course of the year 800 returns, and laid before the Assembly which met in May last, a summary of the information which these returns contained.

On considering this report of the Committee, the Assembly came unanimously to the following decision: 'The Assembly highly approve of the exertions of the Committee in acquiring the knowledge of facts, necessary for the prosecution of this most interesting and important object, and rejoice that the result of these exertions has been the attainment of such varied and valuable information. In regard that there does not appear to be a risk of any obstacles occurring to impede, or at least to prevent, the ultimate adoption of the proposed scheme, and that it is of the utmost importance to commence immediately to raise the funds necessary for carrying it into execution, recommend a collection to be made throughout all the churches and chapels of the establishment, on or before the first Sabbath of February. They instruct the Committee, which is hereby re-appointed, to open a subscription for the general purposes of the scheme, and to take every proper and prudent measure in their power, towards forwarding the object in view; and when the funds thus raised are ascertained in whole or in part, the Committee is farther authorised, if it shall be judged advisable, to nominate a schoolmaster, or catechist, in the stations that appear most urgently to require them, after due communication held with the heritors and others concerned.'

The following abridged view of the leading facts which produced this decision, will be sufficient, at once, to demonstrate a deplorable want of schools and catechists in many parts of the Highlands and Islands, and to secure the sympathy and liberality of the benevolent, for the remedy of this great evil.

The whole population of Scotland amounts to 2,093,856, and the church is divided into 16 synods.

## AS TO SCHOOLS IN SYNODS.

In the 10 Synods of Lothian and Tweeddale, Merse and Tiviotdale, Dumfries, Galloway, Glasgow and Ayr, Perth and Stirling, Fife, Angus and Mearns, Aberdeen, and Moray, there are 764 parishes, and 1,716,126 persons, and so abundant is the number of Schools in these districts, that, with a few exceptions, they may be said to be well supplied with the means of education, and that there is scarcely an individual who has not been taught to read.

The remaining 6 Synods however, namely, Argyle, Glenelg, Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, Orkney, and Zetland, situate chiefly in the Highlands and Islands, and containing only 143 parishes, and a population of 377,730 persons, are, as stated in the parochial returns, in the most urgent need of not less than 250 additional Schools.

The number of scholars that would attend each of these 250 Schools, it is computed, at a low average, would amount to 42. It follows therefore, that in these Synods there are 10,500 children left without the means of any education; and the Committee are quite satisfied, that the number is, in fact, *much greater* than the calculated number of 10,500.

These 10,500 children alluded to, are all, it is to be noticed, under 15 years of age. If persons of all ages are included, the number of those not taught to read almost exceeds belief. But how could it be otherwise, when more parishes than one are described as not having a sufficient number of Schools to accommodate one-tenth of their population? Several are said to be in need of 3 and 4, and one of even 6 Schools; and as to another, the appalling fact is mentioned, that it consists of 1000 square miles, and has a population of 4747 souls, and that of these only 995 have learned to read at all.

## AS TO CATECHISTS IN SYNODS.

In the first 10 Synods above mentioned, there are only 6 Catechists stated to be necessary for the due means of religious instruction to the people, and this necessity arises from the large territorial extent of some particular parishes.

In the other 6 Synods also above mentioned, no fewer than 130 Catechists are required!—Nor will this lamentable deficiency seem surprising when the physical localities of the country are considered. There are many islands in it at great distances from the coast. The coast of the mainland is often indented by long arms of the sea, and its whole surface is intersected, and in many places rendered impassable by precipitous mountains, and by rapid rivers.

One parish, 17 miles long, on the mainland, has an island be-

longing to it with a population of 300, situate at 24 miles from the shore, and owing to its great distance, and a dangerous navigation intervening, the minister cannot visit it above once in the year. Another parish consists of 9 islands, of which 6 are inhabited, and it extends, including sea, 50 miles in length, and 30 in breadth; and a third parish of 24 miles long, on the mainland, includes 4 inhabited islands, some of which are 20 miles distant from each other.

Each of these parishes has only the parochial minister to perform every pastoral spiritual duty to the people.

The inducements that we have to attempt the remedy of the evils in question are great and inviting.

I. In reference to the means of education by the establishment of Schools, every encouragement is held forth which can arise from the characteristic acuteness of the population concerned,—from their habits, connected with their peculiar custom of frequent village meetings, for hearing and committing to memory the history and poetry of their clans and country,—and above all, from the extraordinary and growing eagerness they have of late manifested for the blessing of education.

*Many* children, it is stated in the returns of the clergy, are prevented from attending a school by their distance from it, and by poverty disqualifying parents for paying the school fees, or purchasing school books; but *few* or *none* are prevented by indifference. On the contrary, the best clothes of the parents have in some instances been sold to defray the expence of educating their children. Adults too, from 20 to 70 years of age, crowd every where to newly erected schools which happen, from their situation, to be at all accessible to them; and from their ardour and assiduity in their tasks, such persons do often make a rapidity of progress unheard of in other districts; from 6 to 12 months (of which numerous instances are specified,) being sufficient to qualify them to read the Scriptures with facility. Nor is it uncommon for a boy to be sent by the joint subscription of the poor inhabitants of the hamlets of a glen, to be boarded and educated at a distance, and for this boy, on his return, to become the schoolmaster of his neighbourhood, after the labours of the day, with himself and those who are to be his scholars, are over. And to all this may be added the interesting fact, that when either a youth or an adult acquires the qualification of reading, it is the frequent practice of his less fortunate neighbours, (grandfathers and grandmothers, parents and children mixing in the same group,) to listen to—what otherwise they could not have heard but from their ministers, whose visits are necessarily “few and far between,”—the glad tidings of salvation read to them from the book of God.

11. In relation to increasing the number of school districts (1)

employing additional Catechists, the Committee have to state, that there are also powerful inducements to attempt this measure.

The inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands have a profound respect for religious institutions, and an ardent thirst for religious knowledge. Amidst difficulties totally unknown in the Lowlands, and next to insuperable in themselves, they repair in crowds to the accessible places of worship on the ordinary Sabbaths; and it is common for them, on occasion of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper being dispensed in their own or in an adjoining parish church, to go from great distances, sometimes by sea and sometimes by land, in large groups, and carrying with them all the necessary means of lodging and subsistence during the period of their stay. On the Monday after the sacrament, in one particular parish, there may be seen, the beautiful and touching spectacle of from 40 to 50 boats setting sail at once, to bear homewards the pious multitudes, who from the remotest boundaries of its vast extent \* have been devoutly in attendance on the service of communion.

While, however, the Committee state the sad privations, as to the means of education, and of religious instruction existing in these sequestered districts, and the inducements, from the dispositions and habits of the people, that encourage attempts to alleviate the evils to which they are exposed, they feel it their duty to state also, that the Committee on the Royal Bounty, the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, and various private Institutions, have rendered most important service in this good cause. But still the funds of these respectable bodies, though managed with the utmost judgment and economy, and their labours, though most faithful and zealous, are utterly inadequate to meet the exigencies of the case. An immense field of beneficence yet remains to be cultivated by the General Assembly, and through them by the Christian public.

Now, in the first place, to what quarter could an appeal for interposition in such a case have been made more appropriately, or with better grounds of confidence than to the General Assembly? Its ministers are the official overseers of every spiritual flock in the kingdom. They are the provincial guardians, through all its limits, of the Redeemer's religion and cause, and they know well that there is no portion of the population within the church, who in their general character and habits, are more peaceable and virtuous, or more deserving of the protection and kindness of their country, than the inhabitants of the districts in question. The Assembly, accordingly, have on their part yielded to the appeal. But, in the second place, the Committee have no doubt of finding cordial support to the Assembly's plans,

\* 50 miles by 33.

from the munificence of the public, both at home and abroad. They know that this spirit is already widely and enthusiastically awakened. And to those at a distance it is merely necessary to give the assurance, that the great body of the Heritors interested in the Highlands and Islands, are prepared to give continued and permanent proof of that willingness which they have already evinced, to make every requisite exertion for accomplishing the great object in view.

On the whole, the Committee would earnestly press on the public attention, the peculiar claim to confidence and patronage, belonging to a measure, which in all the details of its administration is to be under the superintendence and direction of the General Assembly of the National Church. It must at once appear, that this circumstance affords the best ground for full confidence in the faithful and wise application of the fund that may be contributed, as entire reliance may be placed on the most scrupulous care being always taken, that both the Schoolmasters and the Catechists on the establishment, shall be men of good personal character, and of sound principles in Church and State, and regular, zealous, and diligent in their professional duties; since for all these qualifications their ecclesiastical superintendents will be the responsible guaranties.

The Committee would only farther add, the expression of their confident hope, that the preceding simple statement will secure the liberal support of the friends of education and religion, not in Scotland only, but in every quarter of the globe. And they especially flatter themselves, that the facts which they have brought forward, and the objects which they have in view, will not fail to obtain the efficient patronage of all who, from personal or family connections, or from birth and early associations, take an interest in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and in the improvement and happiness of their good and gallant inhabitants.

Signed in name, and by authority of the Committee,

GEO. H. BAIRD, CONVENER.

EDINBURGH, }  
June 13th, 1825. }

N. B. Parochial collections and donations, and annual subscriptions, may be transmitted through any of the Banks in Edinburgh, London, or elsewhere, to the Convener of the General Assembly's Committee here, or to any member of the Committee; and great care should in every case be taken, that contributions of every kind be made in express terms, for behoof of "*The GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S Fund for increasing the means of Education and Religious Instruction in Scotland.*" And the same terms should be inserted in every order transmitting contributions.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S CORRESPONDENCE  
CONCERNING SCHOOLS.