THE

MID PARISH KIRK,

GREENOCK.
THE

Mid Parish Kirk.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE CHURCH
AND ITS MINISTERS.

EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY JOHN MITCHELL POLLOCK,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE

Semi-Jubilee of Rev. D. S. Peters, M.A.

GREENOCK, 16TH APRIL, 1902.
The Mid Parish Kirk,

1739-1902.

There appears to have been several churches in Greenock, of which but little is known. One of these, the church of St. Lawrence, and probably the most important, stood on the site at the west corner of Virginia Street. At the beginning of last century, in digging the foundations of a house there, a number of human bones were found, which proves that a burying-ground must have been attached to the church. The edifice was in high preservation in 1760. Another stood at the east boundary of the East Parish, on the land of the farm of Chapelton. Here, too, there was a cemetery. The third, a Catholic chapel, was situated a little below what is now Kilblain Street. These chapels are supposed to have been swept away, amidst the general wreck of religious houses at the Reformation, and the inhabitants of the barony of Greenock were obliged to travel on the Sabbath six weary miles, through bad roads and over dangerous rivulets, to the church of Innerkip, or as it was anciantly known, the
parish of Daff. Much inconvenience having been found from the great distance of the parish church, John Schaw of *Grenok* obtained, in 1589, a charter from King James VI. authorising him to build a church, for the accommodation of the tenants and inhabitants of Greenock, Finnart, and Spangock, and for disjoining or separating a particular portion or territory from the parish of Innerkip for the formation of the parish of Greenock. This charter is dated at Holyroodhouse, the 18th day of November, 1589, and was subsequently ratified in the Scottish Parliament in 1592.

Sir John Shaw having obtained his charter, erected a church and manse in 1592 (where now stands the Old West Kirk), and also set apart a piece of the ground adjoining as a churchyard, but till 1602 the church had not a regular pastor. In 1594 another Act of Parliament was passed in favour of Sir John Shaw by which his lands of Greenock, Finnart, and Spangock were disjoined from Innerkip, and erected into a distinct parsonage and vicarage, which were assigned to the newly erected parish of Greenock. This place continued till 1741 the only place of worship. In that year the increasing population rendered it necessary to have more church accommodation, and accordingly a new parish church was established, and which was designated the Mid Parish.

At the time the first minister was ordained there was no regular place of worship, except a large loft at the Royal Close. This close had an entrance at the corner of the Rue-end and Cathcart Street. On each side were warehouses, through which all exciseable merchandise passed. The exit was in Bogle Street,
where all that remains of that once busy thoroughfare is marked by a keystone which may be seen to this day above the entrance to a plumber's workshop. (The old cannons which "guarded" the Bogle Street gate are now at the McLean Museum.) In the close adjoining the meeting place a bell was hung upon triangles, for the purpose of warning the people to church. Twelve years later the Town Council resolved, for the convenience of the inhabitants to place a belfry and clock on the town cellars. This was carried into effect, and a bell weighing over 2 cwt. was provided at a cost of £18 18s. A clock with four hands was also got and placed in the steeple at the Bell Entry, where it remained as the only public clock of the town until the spire was erected at the Mid Parish Church when a clock was placed in it also.

In the year 1758, Lord Cathcart gave a present of ground for the purpose of building the church on a plot fronting Cathcart Square, and the magistrates of the town and a number of individuals gave money for its erection, but the church was mainly built and endowed from the proceeds of the malt tax. On the 6th April, 1759, the foundation stone was laid, and early in 1761 it was pronounced a substantial, safe building, and immediately occupied as a place of worship. The architecture is plain, having a portico with four pillars of the Ionic order. The steeple, which still is a beautiful piece of masonry, was not finished till 1787, is one
hundred and forty-six feet in height, and is almost a

copy from that of St. Martin's, in the Fields, London.
At the time Lord Cathcart gifted the ground for the
erection of the church, Cathcart Square and the upper
part of William Street were occupied by gardens.

When the Mid Parish Kirk was opened for public
worship, the Rev. John Shaw, who was assistant to
Dr. Turner, Old West Kirk, and had conducted the
services in the Royal Close since the formation of the
new parish in 1741, continued his duties as minister
until his death in 1768. Following the common style
of the day, Mr Shaw's sermons had many divisions and
sub-divisions; he made one text do duty for a series of
Sabbaths. During his ministry the communion was
observed only once a year. The first ruling elder of the
church was Mr Quintin Leitch—a name still well
known in Greenock.

On 12th July, 1770, Rev. John Adam, West Kilbride,
was admitted to the pastoral charge. During his
ministry, in September, 1776, the community having,
through the Kirk-Session, expressed a desire for a
"winter sacrament," application was made to the Town
Council "by sundry feuars craving that they would
give some allowance to both the Kirk-Sessions of the
town and parish of Greenock to enable them to defray
the expense." The Kirk-Session supported the appli-
cation. "The meeting was, by a great majority, of
opinion that as the New Parish Church belonged in
property to the community, from which the town drew
a considerable revenue, that the new Kirk-Session
should be allowed £5 annually to defray the expenses
of the winter sacrament." This is the origin of the
local celebration of the Lord's Supper twice a year. Before the year 1791 the Gaelic speaking inhabitants had no place of worship of their own, and Mr Adam placed his church at their disposal for evening services, despite the remonstrances of the seat-holders, who complained "that the seats were dirted by the grease from the candles dropping on seats and books, and that the pews were left in an untidy condition." In 1792 harmony was restored, the Gaelic people having built and occupied a church on the banks of the West Burn. Dr Adam, having fallen into delicate health, was laid aside from active duty, and on Sabbath, 5th August, 1792, he breathed his last.

On 10th May, 1793, Rev. John Scott was solemnly admitted to the pastoral charge of the parish. Mr Scott was a native of Perthshire, studied at Glasgow University, and at the age of twenty-two was licensed to preach the Gospel. After receiving license he came to Greenock, where he was tutor for some time in the family of Mr John Wallace, father of Mr Robert Wallace of Kelly. (Mr Robert Wallace was Member of Parliament for Greenock, and by his casting vote as Chairman of Committee the nation had conferred upon it the advantages of penny postage.) Mr Scott's residence in Mr Wallace's family brought him much in contact with the people of Greenock, who frequently heard him preach, and appreciated his qualifications for the ministerial office which they afterwards bestowed on him. In 1803, the Glasgow University conferred on Mr Scott the degree of D.D. During his attendance at the General Assembly in 1829 the Doctor was struck down by an attack of paralysis, from the effects of which he
never recovered, and he died on 26th March, 1836, in his 71st year. His remains were interred in the Inverkip Street burying ground.

The late Mr George Williamson describes Dr Scott as "an eloquent and evangelical preacher, a very 'presentable' person, dignified and formal in manner. He was among the last of the town ministers who wore long black silk stockings, and short trousers buttoned or tied with silk ribbon at the knee. In the pulpit he wore black gloves, silk or leather, in conformity with ministerial etiquette, and it used to be remarked that the glove of the forefinger of the right hand had a small slit near the end, to admit of his easily turning the leaves of his Bible or manuscript while reading or preaching. His congregation stood in considerable awe of him, and we assert, without exaggeration, that he himself stood somewhat in awe of his beadle, William Griffith, whose path he was careful, from long experience, not to cross. The Doctor was punctuality itself in the discharge of ministerial duty. The moment the bell 'rang in' he entered the pulpit from the small vestry behind, and gave out the psalm and commenced to read. Should any hearer have the misfortune to enter late, the Doctor instantly paused till the pew was reached, and thus the eyes of the whole congregation were turned in the direction of the offender. This practice, we have been informed, had the effect of making the congregation careful to be in their places before the service began."

In October, 1831, Rev. William Cunningham was appointed assistant and successor to the Doctor. Two years later, in December, 1834, he was translated to
Trinity College, Edinburgh. Having cast in his lot with the Free Church, he demitted his charge.

Rev. James Smith, M.A., another assistant to Dr Scott, next took up the duties of pastor. At the Disruption of the Church, he, too, renounced his faith in the "Auld Kirk," and continued his ministry in the new church erected for him by the larger number of his congregation in West Burn Street.

The next appointment was that of the Rev. Dr Brown, who came to Greenock from Swallow Street Scottish Church, London. He was a man of great scholarship, but was not an attractive preacher, and the church greatly declined during his ministry.

A vacancy occurred in the Mid Parish on the death of the Rev. Dr Brown, which after some little delay, was filled up by the appointment of the Rev. F. L. Robertson, the then popular minister of Bonhill Parish. The vacancy occurred during the Provostship of Mr James J. Grieve, afterwards M.P. for Greenock, and it was a good deal through his influence the necessary arrangements were made for Mr Robertson being elected. When he came there was a very small congregation in the Mid, but it was not long before a change in this respect was made, and in a comparatively short time the church was crowded. It was also during Mr Robertson's (afterwards Dr Robertson) ministry that an organ was introduced (28th May, 1867), and the church re-seated and otherwise improved internally, the upper windows all round the gallery being, as they are still, filled by fine stained glass—giving the church a most handsome appearance. The old Post Office and the old Provident Bank were bought as mission stations;
a missionary was set to work, also a Biblewoman, and
a number of Sabbath Schools (both congregational and
mission schools), staffed by teachers and energetically
carried on. Apart from the church work, Mr Robertson
took an active part in many public movements. Among
these may be mentioned the Monday Popular Concerts
in the Town Hall—most popular for several years,
when such concerts were less known in Greenock—
and it is well known that the Smithston Poorhouse and
Asylum was originally a proposal of Mr Robertson's,
when a member of the Parochial Board. He came to
Greenock in 1861, and left for St. Andrew's, Glasgow,
in 1873.

Following Mr Robertson in the Mid Kirk was the
Rev. James Campbell—a strong, broad-shouldered,
active Highlander. He carried on with great energy
the various schools, &c., begun by Mr Robertson, and
was an able preacher. He left Greenock for Troqueer,
Dumfries, in 1877.

Rev. D. S. Peters, M.A., the present minister, next
succeeded. He came from Newton-on-Ayr to Greenock,
and was ordained on 13th March, 1877. The celebra-
tion of the semi-jubilee of his ministry was made the
occasion of a meeting of the congregation in the Town
Hall, when together with other handsome presents, an
Illuminated Address was presented to him. The follow-
ing is the text of the address:
Reverend and Dear Sir,

This being the twenty-fifth year of your ministry in the Mid Parish Kirk of Greenock, it has been deemed a fitting time to place on record the feelings of affectionate regard and esteem in which you are held, not only by the Members and Adherents of your Congregation but by the Community at large.

As a Parish Minister you have maintained in purity and free from innovation the grand and simple services of Scottish Presbyterianism, in conformity with its best traditions. As a preacher you have been constant in the discharge of your pulpit duties, ministering with sound and practical discourses to the spiritual welfare of your people. While maintaining the distinctive principles of the Established Church, you have yet exhibited a width of thought and freedom from Sectarianism, which have secured to you the friendship and esteem of your ministerial brethren of all denominations.

As a pastor, you have spent freely of your time and strength in visiting and ministering especially to the sick, the aged, and the poor, and in the truest sense "letting not your left hand know what your right hand doeth." The various organisations of Christian life and work in connection with the Congregation, the Sabbath School, the Bible Class, and other agencies for good have also been the constant object of your care.

It may be permitted to refer to the fact that during the earlier years of your ministry here you were called on to play a peculiarly difficult part in defence of the rights of the Church of Scotland in Greenock. The calm and unflinching manner in
which, during a protracted period, you contended for justice, not shrinking from personal inconvenience and even hardship, until your efforts were crowned with success, revealed a strength of character and high moral qualities which evoked the admiration of your friends, and compelled the sympathy of those who were opposed to you.

While conscientiously labouring as a Parish Minister, you have not been unmindful of your duties as a citizen, having shewn your interest in the cause of Education by serving for a period in the Burgh School Board.

On behalf of the Members and Adherents of your Congregation and Friends, we desire you to accept, along with this address and the accompanying gifts, their warmest congratulations and earnest good wishes for your future welfare.

Trusting that by Divine favour you may be long spared in happiness and prosperity to pursue your sacred calling amongst us, we subscribe ourselves in their name,

Yours in sincerity,

JAMES M'KECHNIE. ARCHIBALD HENRY.
DAVID ARTHUR. GEO. C. ANDERSON.
ROBERT LEMMON. THOMAS SMITH.
JOHN ALEXANDER. W. B. M' MILLAN.
ROBERT DIXON. ALEX. ANDREW.
ADAM BROWN. F. M'QUISTAN.

TOWN HALL,
GREENOCK, 16th April, 1902.