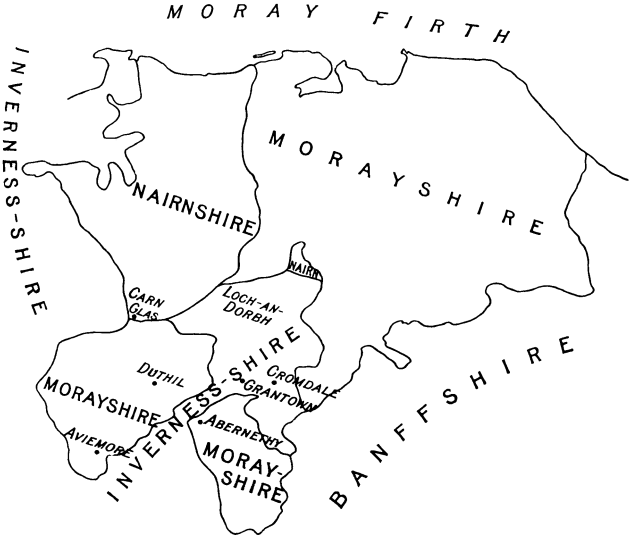
1. County and Shire. Morayshire.

The word *shire* is of Old English origin, and meant charge, administration. The Norman Conquest introduced an alternative designation, the word *county*—through Old French from Latin *comitatus*, which in mediaeval documents stands for shire. *County* denotes the district under a count, the king's *comes*, the equivalent of the older English term *earl*. This system of local administration entered Scotland as part of the Anglo-Norman influence that strongly affected our country after 1100. Our shires differ in origin, and have arisen from a combination of causes—geographical, political and ecclesiastical. The boundaries, though often perplexing, have in the main been determined by the geographical features. Such is the case with Moray.

Formerly the Province of Moray embraced a very much larger area, including not only Nairn but also the greater part of the modern shires of Inverness and Ross. In early times the district was governed by mormaers who frequently acted independently of, or in opposition to, their nominal sovereign. But in the reign of David I

the Province of Moray came to an end as a separate historical entity, and as a sign that he had incorporated it in the Scottish kingdom, David established a priory at Urquhart and a Cistercian abbey at Kinloss. Henceforward Moray included "all the plain country by the seaside, from the mouth of the river Spey to the river of



Sketch Map of Moray and Nairn in 1840

Farar or Beaulie, at the head of the Frith; and all the valleys, glens and straths situated betwixt the Grampian Mountains south of Badenoch and the Frith of Moray, and which discharges rivers into that Frith." From time to time this area was still further reduced.

Till the latter half of the nineteenth century Morayshire consisted of two widely detached parts, separated by a portion of Inverness-shire. In order to get rid of the anomaly, "The Inverness and Elgin Boundaries Act" (1870) transferred part of the united parish of Inverallan and Cromdale from Inverness to Moray, and parts of the parishes of Abernethy and Duthil from Moray to Inverness. The boundaries of Moray were again rearranged by the Boundary Commissioners in 1891. Bellie and Rothes, parishes formerly partly in Morayshire, partly in Banffshire, were placed wholly in the former county, and Boharm, Inveravon and Keith in the latter. Of the parishes partly in Morayshire and partly in Nairnshire, Dyke and Moy was placed wholly in Morayshire; while the detached parts of the Nairnshire parish of Ardclach were transferred to the parish of Edinkillie. The parish of Cromdale had been partly in Inverness-shire and partly in Morayshire. The commissioners left the boundaries untouched by transferring the Inverness-shire part to the Inverness-shire parish of Duthil, and restricting the name of Cromdale to the Morayshire portion.

The name Moray is supposed to be an old locative plural of the Gaelic word *muir*, the sea. If this derivation be correct, Moray means "among the seaboard men." The designation is an apt one, for the Moray Firth is an all-important factor in the history of the district. As regards the derivation of Elgin, the other name for the county, authorities are completely at variance.

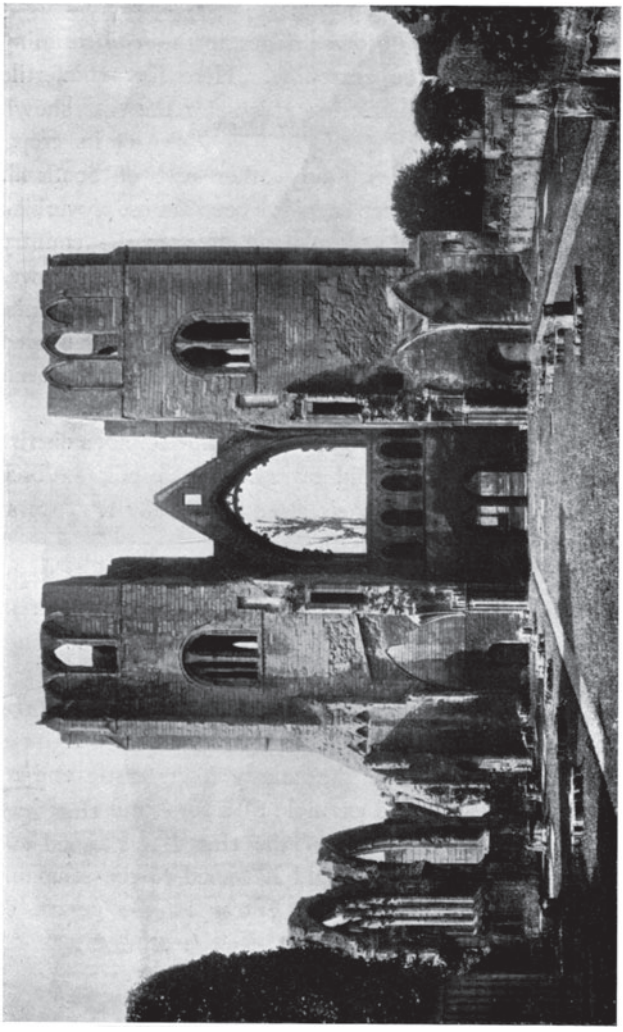
2. General Characteristics. Position and Relations.

Scotland is usually said to consist of three well-defined natural divisions—the Northern Highlands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Uplands. But the area of which Morayshire forms a part—the lowlands on the Moray Firth—does not fall very well within any of these divisions. For meteorological, topographical, and geological reasons we may look upon this region as a separate geographical unit, which, for want of a better designation, we may call the Northern Lowlands.

Most of Morayshire enjoys a very favourable climate. Besides this the county possesses the advantage of great stretches of rich soil, the result to a large extent of the weathering of the Old Red Sandstone.

Writing in 1618 Taylor, the Water-Poet, says: "the countie of Murray is the most pleasant and plentiful country in all Scotland; being plaine land, that a coach may be driven more than foure and thirtie miles one way in it, alongst by the sea-coast."

Morayshire is bounded on the north by the Moray Firth, on the east and south-east by Banffshire, on the south and south-west by Inverness-shire, and on the west by Nairnshire. The county falls naturally into two well-marked divisions. To the north an extensive plain extends westward from the Spey, between the shore and a range of hills, for nearly forty miles, and varies in breadth from five to about twelve miles. This low-lying area is



Elgin Cathedral

diversified by a series of lower ridges, in the main running nearly parallel to the coast-line. Here lies the fertile "Laigh of Moray," a district which, for the skill shown by its farmers and the quality and quantity of its crops, compares favourably with any other part of Scotland. For centuries its productiveness has been almost proverbial. In the famine which was general all over the country towards the close of the sixteenth century the Laigh was able not only to produce sufficient for local requirements, but also to spare large quantities of corn for less-favoured parts of the land. Men came across the Grampians even from Forfarshire to buy the necessaries of life.

To the south of the plain lies a mountainous district where an unkindly soil and an unfavourable climate force the inhabitants to give their attention chiefly to pastoral pursuits.

The rivers of the county flow in a north-easterly direction. In part of their courses they flow with great rapidity, and occasionally do great damage by flooding, especially in the low-lying parts of the county.

Nearly all the important towns and villages of the county are situated in the northern plain. Elgin owes its position as capital of the county to its castle and its cathedral, and is a good example of a town nurtured into prosperity under the aegis of the church. Purely geographical considerations would have led to the selection of Burghead or, less likely, Forres as the centre of government.

3. Size. Shape. Boundaries.

The total area of the county, excluding water, is 304,931 acres. In point of size it ranks eighteenth among the counties of Scotland. Its greatest length, north-east to south-west, from Lossiemouth to the neighbourhood of Dulnain Bridge, is 34 miles; its greatest breadth, east to west, from Croft of Ryeriggs to Macbeth's Hill, west of Forres, is rather less than 30 miles. In shape Morayshire is triangular, the base running from the south to the north-east, with the apex to the north-west.

The boundaries, though occasionally artificial and arbitrary, clearly show as a rule the influence of geographical control. Thus, for over twenty miles the Spey forms the boundary on the east, while on the west the north-eastern prolongation of the Monagh Lea Hills divides the county from Nairnshire. Starting from the north-east corner, the boundary line lies along the channel of the Tynet Burn. About a mile south of Ryeriggs it runs westward for a short distance, and then south, where it crosses the main road from Keith to Fochabers. Its course is then westward by Thief's Hill (819 feet) till it reaches the Spey about a mile south of Fochabers. It follows the river to a point about two miles below Rothes, where, running south-east for a short distance, it turns westward. After taking in a part of the slope of Ben Aigan (1544 feet), it again reaches the river, which is the march to the neighbourhood of Delnapot. Here it turns first south and then south-west along the watershed of the Cromdale Hills. The Spey from about two miles east

of Grantown is again the boundary to the south of Tom-na-Croich, the most southerly point in the county. Then its course may be regarded as north-westerly until it touches the slopes of Carn Allt Laoigh, where the counties of Moray, Inverness, and Nairn meet. From here it holds northward, and strikes the Moray Firth about five miles west of the mouth of the Findhorn. Continuing northward the line cuts The Bar into two almost equal areas, thus dividing it between Moray and Nairn.

4. Surface and General Features.

The main physical features of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland run approximately in lines from south-west to north-east. The county of Moray forms an excellent illustration of this fact. This becomes plain if we compare the direction of the valleys of the Findhorn and the Spey with that of the Outer Hebrides, the Minch, Glenmore, Loch Fyne, Loch Tay, and Loch Ericht.

The surface of Morayshire shows great variety, ranging from sea-level to over 2300 feet. The county can be divided into two distinct parts. The north consists of a lowland, the south of a highland region, the two areas being separated by a range of hills whose highest peak is under 1800 feet in height. Though the south of the county is hilly, none of the eminences can be fitly called mountains. Larig Hill (1783 feet), Carn Ruigh (1784) and Carn Kitty (1711) are the chief heights. This upland region forms an important watershed and is

drained by the Spey, the Lossie, and the Findhorn. On the Banffshire border we come to the Cromdale Hills, with several peaks over 2000 feet high. The highland country to the south—the "Brae of Moray"—abounds

The Doonie Lynn, Rothes

in glens and straths running from south to north and drained by the Spey and the Lossie. Here lie the great valley of the Spey and the glens and straths of its tributary streams, and here is found some of the most magnificent

highland scenery in Scotland. Several of the straths are very fertile; but an excessive rainfall and a lack of sunshine are serious drawbacks to agriculturists.

On the moors grouse and hares are abundant; and in the lower parts partridges, pheasants, snipe, and rabbits furnish excellent sport for the numerous shooting-tenants.

The seaboard plain contains "the garden of Scotland," and notwithstanding the northern exposure, forms one of the best agricultural parts of Scotland. Many circumstances, chiefly a mild climate and a rich alluvial soil, combine to give the district this enviable reputation. It is fertile and well-wooded and rises very gradually from the shore, until, at a distance of two miles inland, it reaches an average height of about 75 feet. For the next six miles the rise is less gradual to a height of about 600 feet. The whole district is highly cultivated or covered with beautiful woods.

The "Laigh of Moray," as this seaboard plain is called, is famous for the excellence of its climate. Occasionally, however, drought in the summer months causes great damage to the growing crops. In the highland part of the county, on the other hand, excessive rainfall is the agriculturist's most unrelenting foe. The contrast, in this respect, between north and south is well expressed in the old couplet:

"A misty May and a drappy June
Sets Moray up and Spey doun."

Slightly undulating in the east, the Laigh becomes practically dead level in the parishes of Alves and