

NUMBER X.

PARISH OF AIR.

By the Rev. Dr DALRYMPLE, and the Rev. Dr M'GILL.

Name, Situation, Extent, Soil, and Surface.

THE name of the town, parish, and county of Air, belonged first to the river, and was derived to them from it. It is probably of Celtic origin; for, according to the information of a gentleman skilled in the Irish language, *Abre* signifies thin or shallow, and is truly descriptive of the water of Air compared with the neighbouring water of *Doon*, now Doon, which, flowing out of a large lake, is furnished with a more deep and copious stream. There are two towns of the same name in France, *Aire* in Artois, and *Aire* in Gascony, which, no doubt, have the same etymology. The ancient name of this parish, as appears from some old papers, was *Are*; the modern name is Air or Ayr. It is situated in the county of Air, presbytery of Air, and synod of Glasgow and Air. Its form is quadrangular. The west side, about a mile and a half long, is bounded by the sea; the north, about 3 miles long, by the river Air; the south, about the same length, by the river Doon; the eastern side is fully 4 miles long, bounded by the parishes of Dalrymple and Coynton. For a mile and a half south of the town, the country is quite flat, and the soil sandy. It is nearly the same on the

M

north

north side of the river, and the rise is but small for two miles more. On the east the rise is gradual and beautiful for two miles and a half. The soil is for the most part deep, much improved of late, and beautified by elegant plantations. The shore is flat, and, in general, sandy. There are some funk rocks; but they are not dangerous.

Climate and Diseases.—The air, upon the whole, is rather moist, owing to the clouds, which are wafted by the south-west wind from the Atlantic Ocean. With a west wind, which is often the case, little or no rain falls upon the parish of Air; the clouds being broken on the highest point of the Isle of Arran. About the time of the Equinox, there are frequently high winds. In spring, there are often long tracts of cold winds, which blow from the north-east and the north. Though the climate is salubrious in general, yet persons of a consumptive habit ought to dwell at a distance from the parish of Air. A sea voyage gives the best chance of recovery. The common distempers incident to children prove less fatal here than in neighbouring towns. No fields can be more commodious for walking, or the healthful exercises of riding and golfing. Wise parents send out their children early to sport upon turf full of different sorts of clover, particularly the yellow and the white. Once or twice within these 40 years, a dangerous sore throat, accompanied with a putrid fever, has been epidemical.

Lakes and Mineral Springs.—There are two small lakes, one toward the south-side, named *Carleny*, and the other at the eastern extremity, called *Loch-Fergus*, which is mentioned in the town's charter about 600 years ago. It appears that some considerable edifice has stood in its vicinity, out of the ruins of which several houses have been built. It has a small isle
in

in the middle, and, probably, was a *hercury*. In this lake are pike and eels, but few trouts. There is a mineral spring on the north side of the river, found out near 50 years ago, and still used by a few poor people. It comes from a mixture of coal and iron, and has been thought efficacious in several disorders.

Fish.—Haddock and cod have been very plentiful on Air coast since the herrings left it: Mackarel has been scarce for some years past: Soals and turbot are rare. White fish are generally sold at 1 d. per English pound. The price of salmon in January, and till the month of March, is between 6 d. and 3 d. per pound. They are much scarcer than formerly, owing, it is supposed, to the liming of land. The price is kept high, too, on account of their being carried to Kilmarnock, Irvine, Glasgow, and chiefly Paisley. Forty years ago, herrings were caught in great numbers, and sold from 6 d. to 3 d. per hundred. Sail-fish of large size are sometimes taken, whence are got oils for tanners. The season for white fish is through the whole year, except about six weeks, from the end of March till the beginning of May, old stile. When herrings were caught at the mouth of Air river, a lamp was usually placed there. This lamp was of great use in preventing ship-wrecks; and the loss of several lives, and loaded vessels, at the end of the year 1789, may be imputed to the want of it.

Cultivation and Produce.—Very little ground in this parish now lies waste or common. Between 80 and 90 acres, free to every burghers, for feeding milk cows, was lately inclosed. About 20 acres of common was feued from the town, little more than 30 years ago, at L. 112 Sterling, with 18 s. 9 d. of feu-duty. Being brought into good tillage, and finely
planted,

planted, it fold in 1790 for L. 1100 Sterling. Thirty years ago there was much heath towards the east; it is now green, or yielding crops. Sea-weed is thrown in plentifully by winter storms, and much used in manuring land. Marle, in the highest grounds, is got in abundance, and is of great advantage, as there is little lime but what is imported from Ireland. Oats are sown from the end of February to the end of March; pease and beans are sown in April; barley in May and June. Wheat sown before winter is commonly first reaped, towards the end of August. The parish is scarcely able to supply itself with provisions, as appears from importations, and no great decrease of price. Little flax is raised, at least for sale. A considerable quantity of artificial grasses is raised with great success. Most of the wood in the parish is young, but thriving well.

Population.—It appears from the records of the Sailors Society, that, when wine was imported at Air from France, the population was much greater than at present. When a plague broke out here, near 200 years ago, according to tradition, about 2000 died. In 1745, the inhabitants were reckoned about 2000. The return to Dr Webster, in 1755, was 2964 souls. Trade since that time revived, particularly tobacco which added considerably to the population. Inclosing took place much about the same time; and in the years 1747, 1748, 1749, and 1750, the herring fishing was great: Sailors, coopers, &c were of course numerous. Upon the whole, the inhabitants have been increasing sensibly, though not rapidly, for more than 30 years past. The number of examinable persons in the parish, reckoning from 7 years of age and upwards, is above 3400. Of these there are 3000 in the town, and the remainder in the country. The number of souls may therefore be stated at about 4100 souls.

Many

Many of the inhabitants are between 70 and 100 years of age. One walked to London after his 100th year; another above 100 died a few months ago.

Abstract of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, at different periods.

Years.	Births.			Mar.	Deaths.			
	M.	F.	Tot.		Men.	Wom.	Chil.	Tot.
1664—5	146	128	274					
1688—9	128	131	259	34				
1698—9	91	88	179	41				
1715—16	82	97	179	31				
1734—35	100	90	190	42	39	49	39	127
1745—46	90	86	176	49				
1756—57	112	107	219	54				
1767—68	112	133	255	66	33	41	45	119
1777—78	168	110	278	59	38	48	60	146
1788—89	117	113	230	89	47	45	65	157

There are above 600 inhabited houses in the parish. The number of heritors is about 60. There are 2 ministers of the Established Church, 2 Moravians, 1 Episcopalian, and 1 Methodist. There are 2 physicians, 3 surgeons and apothecaries, and about 16 writers. The seceders amount to about 50 or 60.

State of the Poor.—Weekly collections, and other parish funds, put it in the power of the session to distribute L. 100 per annum. The town gives L. 30, the sailors L. 10, the writers L. 5, the merchants L. 3; and other small corporations contribute to the extent of L. 14 or L. 15; besides which, there is a half year's *stent* of L. 50. The session retains, for occasional charities among poor tradesmen, and others, about L. 20. If any part of this sum is saved at the end

end of the year, it is added to the funds of the Charity-house. This house was built by subscription in 1756, and is fit to receive 60 persons; but, as many pensioners prefer a small weekly allowance out of the house, there are seldom more than 40 in it. Alderman Smith of Londonderry, born at Air, left L. 100, several years ago, to purchase land for poor housekeepers. This charity has proved very reasonable. Provost Cochrane of Glasgow, born and educated at Air, left likewise L. 100, the interest of which is appointed to be given to a reputable burghers's widow or daughter during life. An infirmary and bridewell are much wanted;

Price of Labour and Provisions.—A labourer, with a wife and 5 children, is able to earn 7 s. per week, and sometimes a little more. At an average, he purchases 3 pecks of meal, and a greater quantity of potatoes, half a cart of coals, and soap to the value of 2 d. per week; 3 stone of wool, at 7 s. 6 d. the stone, for clothing, and 10 lib. of lint, at 10 d. per lib. *per annum.* His wife's attendance on the children prevents her from earning much. This may serve as a general specimen of the wages and expences of a labourer's family. A shoemaker, if industrious, gets from 1 s. 2 d. to 1 s. 8 d. a day; a mason from 1 s. 3 d. to 1 s. 8 d.; a wright from 1 s. 3 d. to 1 s. 9 d.; a taylor 1 s. 2 d. The price of provisions is more than doubled within these last 50 years. Beef and mutton is now from 4 d. to 5 d. per lib. Lamb is from 1 s. 3 d. to 2 s. 6 d. per quarter; pork 6 d. per lib.; veal from 4 d. to 6 d.; pigs from 2 s. 6 d. to 3 s.; geese 2 s.; ducks from 9 d. to 1 s.; chickens 4 d. and sometimes less; rabbits 9 d.; butter from 6 d. to 8 d. per lib.; cheese from 4 d. to 6 d.; wheat from 21 s. to 25 s. per boll; barley from 18 s. to 20 s.; oats from 16 s. to 18 s.

Church

Church and Stipend.—The present church was built in 1654, and is kept in good repair by the magistrates. The old church, stiled St John Baptist's, was converted by Oliver Cromwel into an armory; for which he gave an allowance of 1000 English merks to build another. It was in St John Baptist's church that the parliament met to confirm Bruce's title to the throne. Records of their federunt shew, that numbers of the nobility could only sign their initials. The senior minister's living, including the glebe, is about L. 130 *per annum*. The King is patron. The town generally allows the senior minister 12 guineas for a house. The legal stipend of his colleague would scarcely amount to L. 75; but, from regard to him who at present fills the charge, the magistrates and council, besides allowance for a house, have added a sum which makes his stipend L. 105. The town-council and session are patrons.

Miscellaneous Observations.—There are no volcanic appearances in this parish, unless large rocks, and fragments of rocks, which have numerous indented stones, or metals of different kinds, be considered as such. Various figured stones and petrifications have been found in the parish. There is a considerable quantity of moor-stone lying on the surface of the ground. The free-stone lies rather deep. Some houses in the town let at L. 20, but a greater number between that sum and L. 10. The rent of the salmon fishery in the river Doon is L. 80; that in the river Air a little less. The markets here are good. The common fuel is coal. The price paid at the pit, per cart, is from 2s. 3d. to 2s. 6d. The one pit is half a mile distant, and the other rather more. That at Drungan, in the parish of Stair, though a little dearer, is undoubtedly the best. According to tradition, there was a battle fought, before the Christian aera, in the valley of Dalrymple,

rymple, in which two Kings, Fergus and Coilus, fell. It is added, that Lochfergus takes its name from the former, and the river Kyle from the latter. Thither Coilus, it is said, was pursued and slain. The small village of Coylton, 6 miles east of Air, likewise is said to derive its name from him. It has been supposed that Dalrymple, *Dale-roi-mel*, signifies the valley of the slaughter of kings. There is a cairn of stones in the midst of this valley. In June 1734, a ball of fire passed through two opposite windows of the newest steeple, broke one end of the bell bomb-joint, and then descended to the street, but did no more harm. A boy in the neighbourhood was killed by another ball of fire. Perhaps the only inundation that deserves notice happened in 1739, attended with a great storm. This raised the river much, and forced ships of considerable burden quite out of the channel.

N U M.