

NUMBER XVII.

PARISH OF RUTHWELL.

(*Presbytery of Annan.—County and Synod of Dumfries.*)

By the Reverend Mr JOHN CRAIG.

Name, Extent, &c.

SO far back as the fourteenth century, this parish is called, in a charter by Thomas Randolph Earl of Murray, to his nephew Sir William Murray, *Ryual*, and that name is continued in all succeeding charters to Sir William's descendants. This, however, has been changed in more modern times to Ruthwell, or more probably Ruthwäld. Wald or wold in Saxon signifying a wood; the appellation is properly applied, there being still extensive natural woods in the parish; and, from the number of trees found in the mosses, it is evident that, at a remote period, they were much more considerable. The parish extends from E. to W. along the Solway Frith, about 6 miles in length, and the broadest part is not more than 3 miles: It is bounded on the E. by the parish of Cummertrees; on the S. by the Frith; on the W. by the Water of Lochar, which divides it from Caerlaverock; and on the N. by the parishes of Dalton and Mousewald. The land rises in a gentle acclivity, from the sea to the end of the ridge called Dalton Bank, which begins here, and terminates

minates in the parish of Tinwald, a few miles to the northward, separating the two vallies of Nith and Annan.

Soil, Climate, &c.—The soil, though in some places shallow and inclined to sand, is, in general, when properly manured and managed, sufficiently fertile; and, as the exposure is good, the crops are early, a singular advantage in this part of the country. Situated upon the sea, the air is of course moist, but by no means unhealthy. Many persons from different parts of the country repair here in summer for the benefit of bathing, and sea air. The sea has rather receded from the Scotch side of the Frith of late years, and the tides do not rise to the same height they did formerly, so that the land has gained considerably, and large tracks of green merse now appear, where the tides flowed over a surface of sand. It was, some time ago, in the contemplation of Lord Stormont, the proprietor of these lands, to attempt an embankment for recovering a considerable track of these flat sands, and preventing their being inundated, as is done in Holland, but the violence of the tides discouraged the undertaking, and nature is herself now performing what art was to have accomplished; the green ground or merse extending almost a mile further than it did some years ago. At the mouth of the Lochan there is a small port, where barks and little coasting vessels load and deliver coals and grain.

Population.—The parish is the property of four heritors, (but much the greatest part of it belongs to the Viscount of Stormont,) of these only two are resident. The number of souls is 1061, whereof 519 are males, and 542 females. The inhabitants have increased within this last twenty years in the proportion of five to three, which may be ascribed first to the division of large farms into smaller possessions, and particularly

particularly the extensive track called the Mains of Comlongan, consisting of above 2000 acres, formerly kept for pasture; and, secondly, to the lime quarries lately discovered near Comlongan, which have given employment to many labourers; for whose accommodation Lord Stormont has built a small village upon the side of the military road, where a garden and a little possession of land is inclosed and annexed to each dwelling house.—The return to Dr Webster in 1755 was only 599 souls.

Ecclesiastical State, &c.—The church is an ancient fabric, perhaps now the most so of any in this part of the country; it is a long building, remarkably narrow, and has a projecting aisle or wing joined to it, which was formerly the burial place of the Murrays of Cockpool, and is now of the family of Stormont. The stipend is 76 l. Sterling yearly, and is paid in money. The glebe consists of 36 acres, a great part of which was laid off to the minister at the division of a common where he had a servitude. The manse is large and commodious, and built of brick about sixty years ago. The Viscount of Stormont is patron.—The poor are not numerous, and are supported from the weekly collections in the church; where these prove deficient, a voluntary charitable contribution is made by the inhabitants, as often as they are called upon, and the supply received upon such occasions is always so ample as to answer the immediate wants or necessities of the poor, whether arising from dearth of provisions, or other incidental causes. There is a good school in the parish, where children are taught Latin, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping, navigation, and other branches of education; and as some come from distant parts, they are boarded in the schoolmaster's house, which is fitted up with suitable accommodations. The salary is only 100 merks Scots.

Villages

Villages and Roads.—Ruthwell, in which a privilege of holding markets and fairs was given by the old charters to the family of Cockpool, is the only village in the parish. It is a long straggling place, through which the high road from Dumfries to Annan passed, before the military road was made. The houses were formerly all built of clay; but these have lately been pulled down, and the whole rebuilt at the expence of Lord Stormont with stone and flates; the street has also been enlarged, and laid out in a straight line.—The high road from Portpatrick to England, made by the military at the expence of government, runs through this parish from E. to W. And, in consequence of an act of Parliament lately passed, another road was last year made to the northward, and running almost parallel to the military road, which shortens the distance between Annan and Dumfries something more than a mile. Tolls are now levied upon both roads.

Manufactures, Fisheries, &c.—No species of manufacture in the linen or woollen branches are carried on in this parish; but, in the summer season, the people upon the sea coast employ themselves in making a kind of coarse salt, which answers the common uses tolerably well. They practise the following method: When the tides have risen very high, and covered the sands for three or four days, a white crust is left upon the sand, from which all the fresh water particles are exhaled by the heat of the sun during the neap tides, and the remanent substance appears to the eye like pounded crystal. This crust is pared off by a machine formed like a roller, only the moveable part of the roller is here immoveable, and has projecting from it, about half an inch longitudinally, a piece of thin iron, which scrapes up the crust into heaps, together with a portion of the sand. The whole is carried off
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in carts to the shore, and piled up in one heap. When a sufficient quantity has been collected, the people dig a little square pit in the ground, at one end whereof they form, with tough strong clay raised a foot above the surface, a basin 18 feet long, 3 in width, and 3 deep, which rises, from the mouth of the little pit, in a gentle ascent to the further end; the bottom of the basin is laid with square white coloured peats, and above these, clean turf sods cut from the merse with the green sides up, are placed, joined as close as possible to one another and to the sides of the basin. After thus preparing the basin, a layer about a foot and a half thick, taken from the heap of sand formerly laid up, is placed above the sods, and sea water being poured upon it, filtrates through the whole mass, and, when it comes to the lower end of the basin, runs off by a small tube into the pit or reservoir. When the saline particles of the sand in the basin are by this means carried off, it is removed, and new sand put in, which is managed in the same manner. The proper strength of the liquor in the reservoir is ascertained by its carrying an egg; and when this happens, it is boiled in lead or iron pans until a residuum of dry salt remains, which is taken up in wicker baskets; a liquid, something of the appearance of oil, runs from it, which the people call salt droppings, and esteem a good remedy for rheumatic complaints and sprains. The salt thus made is neither so white, nor so strong as that from the salt pans. A measure of it weighing about 24 lb. is sold for a shilling; and, in consequence of an exemption or grant by one of the kings of Scotland, no duty is paid for it; notwithstanding which, the tenants on the shore who practise this manufacture are supposed to be no considerable gainers.

Minerals, &c.—At Brow, in this parish within tide mark, is a chalybeate spring, the water of which is light and agreeable,

able, creates an appetite, and has been found beneficial in stomachic complaints. When mixed with brandy, it changes to an inky colour, and a piece of silver put into it, is soon covered with a black varnish. Many resort to the Brow in the warm season, believing the well water, and sea bathing, specifics for all diseases. Some appearances of coal have been found in different parts, but the expectations of those, who have attempted to sink a pit, have always been frustrated, although it must be admitted, that the strata in those places are similar to what is met with in Cumberland, on the opposite shore, where coal is found in great plenty; the want of success, in this research upon the Scotch side, may therefore proceed from the inefficacy of the trials, and probably the unskillfulness and knavery of those employed in making them. Limestone was accidentally discovered in the neighbourhood of Comlongan about 10 years ago, and the discovery being prosecuted, and the quarry opened by instructions from Lord Stormont, all his Lordships tenants and the inhabitants of Mousewald, Toothorwald, and Tinwald, have from hence been supplied with burnt lime, and raw limestone, which has contributed to the progress of improvement *.

Disposition of the Inhabitants, &c.—The temper of the people is benevolent and charitable, of which an instance has been
already

* The air, as has been observed, is moist, and often foggy, which, it is supposed, proceeds partly from the vicinity of the sea, and partly from extensive mosses and deep bogs that are interspersed throughout the parish. Intermitting fevers prevail here sometimes in the after harvest, and are accompanied with pains in the bones, and a lowness and dejection of spirit, but are seldom mortal. Upon the whole, the people, notwithstanding the humidity of the air, are healthy and vigorous, though no remarkable instances of longevity have lately occurred. The people are in general of the middle size, though some may reach six feet.

already mentioned in their voluntary contributions for support of the poor, when the weekly collections in the church prove insufficient. Living upon the shore, many of the young men betake themselves to a seafaring life; those who continue at home, are farmers or labourers, with a few artizans, and are tolerably industrious. The farms are in general small, and many of the farmers are besides jobbers or dealers in cattle, which they carry to the English market; they also breed and rear many swine, disposing of the hams in England or Edinburgh, where they are much prized; thus trade is attended with considerable profits. The number of farmers may be about 70, but among these are included fundry persons who have small possessions of a few acres. There are in the parish 3 blacksmiths, 6 joiners, 5 shoemakers, 2 cloggers, 12 weavers, 6 tailors, 1 tinker, and about 75 day labourers; the wages of those last are from 10 d. to 1 s. 2 d. *per* day, and vary according to the length of the day. The wages of men servants who are lodged and maintained, are from 7 l. to 9 l. yearly, of women 3 l. or 3 l. 10 s. None of the natives of this parish are seceders from the established church; but two persons who lately settled here are antiburghers*.

Fish, &c.—The fish upon the coast, are flounders of a large size and good quality, herrings in the autumn, and cod and skate during

* The wood-lark and bulfinch, birds extremely rare in Scotland, are met with in the extensive wood of Comlongan: They are both natives. They make their nest among the long grass in the wood, and are, of late, observed to have much encreased: There also appeared in those woods, a bird of a new species, of the size of a thrush, the back of a light brown colour, the head light gray, and the breast almost white, the wings inclining to black, having a regular row of small white spots across the middle of each feather, the bill very short, as thick as a mans finger next the head, and the tail has strong short feathers. This description agree much with the size and figure of the Virginia nightingale or red bird, from which, however, it differs materially in the colour, and the want of the beautiful tuft on the head.

during the winter. The flounders are caught in what is called a pock-net, and sometimes the people grope for them with their feet in the sand, and kill them with a spear; they frequently weigh from 3 to 7 pounds, and are remarkably delicate. The herrings are caught in long-nets, extended upon poles fixed in the sand. They are chiefly carried to Dumfries market, and are sold, in a plentiful fishing, so low as 8 d. or 6 d. *per* hundred; they have however been scarce on the Scotch side for these four years past, which the fishers ascribe to the channels being altered, and running nigher the English shore than formerly. Cod and skate are taken in so small quantities, that they scarce deserve to be noticed; on the opposite coast, they are very plentiful, and are brought across the Frith, and sold proportionably cheap.

Soil and Productions, &c.—The soil is various, according to the situation. Along the shore it is dry and sandy, and there is a considerable tract of moss; further inland, it is a strong clay, and towards its boundaries on the E. and N. is a gravel; towards the W. there is a bed of coarse free stone, intermixed with which some limestone appears. About 694 acres are employed in the culture of oats, 132 for barley, 40 for wheat, 66 for potatoes, 30 for turnip, and 30 or 40 are laid down with grass seeds. The little flax that is raised, is used by the inhabitants; a few farmers in the west side of the parish, have, within these late years only, sustained some loss in their crops of oats, by a sort of blight or blasting, which is first discernible in the end of July, and, beginning in the middle of the field of corn, extends itself on all sides, till it has spread over the whole, the ear is dried up, and the stalk breaks down, and is not worth the trouble of reaping. Different kinds of manure have been employed, without effect, for the cure of this malady, and the people have also ineffectual-

ly altered their mode of ploughing. It is fortunate, that this blight never attacks barley, wheat, or potatoes. The crops raised in the parish, not only supply the inhabitants, but afford a surplus of barley and potatoes for exportation. The manures employed are lime and dung, and near the shore the farmers lead and lay upon their lands considerable quantities of sea fleech or sand, dug up within sea mark, which is used to great advantage in the mossy soils, where lime is of no benefit*.

Valuation

* The only ancient building in the parish is the castle of Comlongan, the seat of the Viscount of Stormont, which, although erected some centuries ago, is still entire. It was a considerable place of strength before the Union of the Crowns, is 60 feet square and 90 feet high, with battlements, and port holes in the walls; the walls are of a sufficient thickness to admit of small apartments within them, and the hall and larger rooms are still occupied, as the roof is standing.—The castle of Comlongan was for many ages the residence of the Murrays of Cockpool, a family of great eminence in Annandale, as some of them were wardens of the western border, and Cuthbert Murray of Cockpool was one of the commanders of the Scotch army, that defeated the Duke of Albany and the Earl of Douglas, when they invaded Scotland. John Murray, a younger son of this family, having acquired a great estate, as well in Scotland as in England and Ireland, was created, by King James the 6th, Earl of Annandale; he afterwards succeeded to the family estate, and resided in the castle of Comlongan; but the title became extinct upon the death of his son without children, and Lord Stormont, who is heir of line, became proprietor of a considerable part of the estate. His Lordships grandfather, father of Lord Mansfield, resided here many years; and, for his accommodation, added sundry buildings to the castle, which are now possessed by his factor. The remains of an old castle are also to be seen at Cockpool, within half a mile of Comlongan, which was likewise a seat of the family. In the church yard of Ruthwell, a very curious ancient monument appears, although now broken into two or three fragments, which, however, have all been preserved. The whole, when entire, seems to have had the form of an obelisk, and was about 18 feet long; and the side of each square is ornamented with figures, in relievo, descriptive of sacred story.

Our

Valuation and Real Rent.—The lands in this parish stand valued in the cefs books, at 2905 merks Scotch. The real rents amount to about 1600 l. Sterling, and have been greatly advanced within these few years, by the opening of the limestone quarry at Comlongan, and the inclosures and improvements made by Lord Stormont and the other proprietors.

Miscellaneous Observations.—The division of the numerous commons in Annandale, the discovery and application of lime as a manure, and the system of inclosing, begun in this and other parishes, have produced the very extraordinary rise of rents, which have taken place within the last twenty years; and which, so far from injuring or impoverishing the tenantry,

Our Saviour is represented in different attitudes, and at the bottom of one of the sides, his crucifixion is discernible; the borders of each of the sides are inscribed with runick characters, much more ancient perhaps than the figures sculptured upon the stone. Tradition says, that this obelisk, in remote times, was set up at a place called Priestwoodside near the sea, in order to assist the vulgar, by sensible images, to form some notions of religion, but was drawn from thence by a team of oxen belonging to a widow, and placed in the church-yard, where it remained till the reformation, when, by an act of the General Assembly, it was ordered to be thrown down and broken, as a remnant of idolatry. This piece of antiquity has been often visited, and examined by travellers and antiquarians, and a description and draught of it is given by Mr Pennant in his tour, and by Gordon in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, where sundry other particulars relating to it may be found.

At a place called Kirkstyle in this parish, ancient records set forth, that there was very long ago a preceptory belonging to the knights of St. John, where they had a place of worship and a burying ground, and that they were also possessed of property to a great extent in the neighbourhood, which, upon the extinction of that order, came into the possession of the Murrays of Cockpool; but we have no certain accounts either from tradition, history, or writings, when this happened. Some tomb stones are still to be seen in the parish church-yard, on which the insignia and arms of the order are cut.

try, have contributed to their prosperity; as it is a certain fact that at the present period they are better lodged, better clothed, and have the necessaries of life in much greater abundance, than when their rents were trifling: yet the general spirit of improvement in agriculture, which now pervades Scotland, has not made so rapid a progress as might have been expected in Annandale. The purchase of the Isle of Man, however, and the stop put by that means to smuggling, in which all the people living upon the Solway Frith were more or less concerned, have wrought a surprising change on their industry, as well as improved their morals. Although French brandy has, in consequence of these alterations, almost wholly disappeared, its place is now occupied by whisky, a spirit equally fatal to the health of the people, though not so hurtful to the revenue. This accursed beverage is retailed in numbers of tippling houses, and coming so low as 1 s. 6 d. the Scotch pint, is greedily swallowed by the people, though it saps their constitutions, and ruins their health. When the proposed wise measures of allowing coals to be imported duty free, and laying an additional tax upon Scotch spirits, are adopted by government, it is to be hoped that the more wholesome liquor brewed from good malt will again be drunk by the people, and their attachment to whisky weakened, if not destroyed.

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