NUMBER XXVI.

PARISH of GIRVAN.

(County of Ayr, Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Presbytery of Ayr.)

By the Rev. Mr. James Thomson.

Name, Geography and Natural Hiſtory.

THE origin of the name is unknown. In a decreet of locality, dated 1666, it is written Griffan, and was probably, at that time, ſo pronounced. The change of Griffan into Girvan, is ſomewhat ſimilar to that of Striveling into Stirling. The greateſt length of the pariſh from S. W. to N. E. is about 9 Engliſh miles; and it varies in breadth from 2 to 6 miles. About two-thirds of the ſouthermoſt part of the pariſh is hilly. The hills never riſe to a height, which, in Scotland, is conſidered as mountainous. They are, for the moſt part, green; and when they are heathy, the heath is ſhort, and generally mixed with graſs. Even in what may be

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be called the lowlands of the pariſh, ſituated on the ſea-coaſt, and the banks of the Girvan, though there be a conſiderable proportion of flat ground, yet the ſurface preſents, in general, a hilly appearance. A great variety is to be found in the ſoil; but that which is moſt prevalent, conſiſts of a dry light mould, on a ſandy, or gravelly bottom. In the low part of the pariſh, the air is remarkably dry and mild; and in the light lands, vegetation begins 2 or 3 weeks earlier than in the country in general. In the high grounds, the air being much colder, and more moiſt, vegetation of every kind is much more backward. It is generally thought there is abundance of coal in the low part of the pariſh; but no attempts to diſcover it have been yet made. The inhabitants are plentifully ſupplied from the coal-works in the pariſh of Dailly. There is a great quantity of lime-ſtone in the high part of the pariſh: but owing to its diſtance from coal, the want of roads, or the unfitneſs of the neighbouring grounds for agriculture, it has hitherto been but little uſed. The lowlands are well ſupplied from an extenſive lime-work in the neighbourhood. Little or no free-ſtone has, as yet, been diſcovered in the pariſh. Pudding-ſtone, and a kind of rotten rock, abound almoſt every where. In ſome places the grey and blue whin-ſtone is found. In one ſpot a ſmall quantity of gypſum, or plaſter-ſtone; and, in another, a conſiderable bed of ſhell-marl have been diſcovered. The houſes are all built of whin-ſtone, gathered partly from the land, but chiefly from the ſea-beach.

The ſea-coaſt extends upwards of 8 miles along the W. ſide of this pariſh. Above a third part of the ſhore is bold and rocky; and, when flat, the beach is very generally covered with large whin-ſtones. In ſome parts a conſiderable quantity of ſea-weed is occaſionally left by the tide; and is uſed in manuring the neighbouring lands. A little kelp is made once

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once in 3 years. A quantity of ſalmon is annually caught at the mouth of the Girvan *.

Population.—According to Dr. Webſter's report, the number of ſouls in 1755 was 1193. Of the ancient ſtate of population in the pariſh, no certain information can be obtained. No regular regiſter of deaths and marriages was kept prior to Auguſt 1783, when the tax on regiſters was impoſed. For about 5 years after that period, this regiſter was accurately kept †. A regiſter of births has been preſerved ſince the latter end of the year 1733. From an attention to this, ſo far as it goes, ſome probable conjecture concerning the ſtate of population at different periods may be formed: and a comparative view of the former and preſent ſituation of the pariſh in this reſpect may be taken. For this purpoſe, there is annexed a table of births for 10 years ſucceeding December 1733; and another for 10 years prior to January 1791: to which is added a table of deaths and marriages for 5 years ſucceeding December 1783.

* They are moſt in ſeaſon in the month of June. When ſold on the ſpot, they bring from 2 d. to 3 d. the lb. Engliſh. But the greater part is carried by land to Kilmarnock or Glaſgow. It is believed that abundance of cod, ling, haddock, &c. is alſo to be found off this coaſt; but the inhabitants of this pariſh have never much availed themſelves of their advantage in this reſpect.

† As ſoon as it was generally known that the act impoſing a tax on regiſters, did not oblige any perſon to keep a regiſter; and that the only penalty for neglecting to pay the tax, was the non-entry of the name in the regiſter: the conſequence in this pariſh has been, that the regiſter of deaths has, for ſome time, been totally given up, and thoſe of births and marriages are not ſo accurate as they ſhould be.

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Years.	Births.		
	Males.	Fem.	Total.
1734	21	16	37
1735	9	18	27
1736	16	12	28
1737	14	12	26
1738	17	16	33
1739	14	19	33
1740	16	17	33
1741	19	13	32
1742	9	13	22
1743	23	14	37
Totals,	158	150	308
Average,	15.8	15.	30.8

Years.	Births.		
	Males	Fem	Total.
1781	26	28	54
1782	24	23	47
1783	16	23	39
1784	24	28	52
1785	26	36	62
1786	31	20	51
1787	31	35	66
1788	29	26	55
1789	25	35	60
1790	33	27	60
Totals,	265	281	546
Average,	26.5	28.1	54.6

Years.	Deaths.		
	Males.	Fem.	Total.
1784	9	17	26
1785	18	15	33
1786	11	18	29
1787	12	10	22
* 1788	30	30	60
Totals,	80	90	170
Average,	16	18	34

Years.	Marriages.
1784	11
1785	9
1786	8
1787	13
1788	13
Totals,	54
Average,	10$\frac{4}{5}$ †

From

* A great number of children died this year of the small-pox. All of them had the disease in the natural way. There is still, in this parish, a considerable prejudice against inoculation.

† From the foregoing tables, it appears, that the annual average of births for 30 years, preceding January 1744, was 30.8. This, if multiplied by 26, gives 800, as the average number of inhabitants during that period. If multiplied by 28, the number must be stated at 862; and, if by 29, at 893. From the register of births, it is found, that the annual average for 5 years, preceding 1756, was 40. This, when multiplied by 26, gives only 1040, as the number about the period of Dr. Webster's reports: but, when multiplied by 28, the number at that period is brought to 1120. The annual average of births, for 5 years prior to 1791, was 58 2-5ths. It is necessary this should be mutiplied by 29, before the population can, in this way, be brought nearly to correspond with what it was in 1791.

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From an accurate liſt taken in the year 1791, it appears, that the total number of ſouls was then 1725:—Of which there were,

Males, - - -	849	Unmarried above 20,	312
Females, - - -	876	In the town of Girvan,	1012
Under 20 years of age,	701	In the country, -	713
Above 20 years of age,	1024	Born out of Scotland, chiefly in Ireland,	63
Married and widows,	712		
Unmarried, - -	1013		

According to their different occupations, the inhabitants may be diſtributed as follows:

Handicraftſmen, including 33 apprentices,	203	Day labourers, - -	49
Servants, - -	153	Surgeons and apothecaries, - - -	3
Seamen, - -	22	Students at the Univerſity, - - -	2
Shopkeepers, - -	9	Miniſter of the Eſtabliſhment, - -	1
Licenſed inn and tavern keepers, - -	8	Preacher of ditto, -	1
Farmers, - - -	78		

From the above ſtatements concerning the population of the pariſh of Girvan, it appears, that for upwards of half a century it has been gradually increaſing: that it is now double of what it probably was 50 or 60 years ago. Though it be probable that the number of inhabitants in the country part of the pariſh, eſpecially in the Lowlands, may be ſomewhat greater than it formerly was; yet, without doubt, by far the greateſt part of the increaſed population is owing to the extenſion of the town of Girvan. 40 or 50 years ago, this town was very inconſiderable. According to the beſt accounts, it

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conſiſted of about 24 houſes only; and probably contained not many more than 100 ſouls. It now contains upwards of 1000. For this great increaſe various cauſes may be aſſigned. About 30 years ago, a conſiderable herring fiſhing took place at the mouth of the river very near the town. This fiſhing continued for 2 or 3 years. By the concourſe of people it drew together, and by the wealth it produced, a ſudden and conſiderable extenſion of the town was occaſioned. The throwing of a number of ſmall farms together, which, at one period, was frequently practiſed in this country, with the almoſt total excluſion of cottagers from the farms, obliged a number of families to take up their reſidence in the towns and villages. The practice of ſmuggling, too, which, for a number of years, was carried on to a conſiderable extent on this coaſt, contributed, in no ſmall degree, to the increaſe of the town of Girvan.

Productions, &c.—The number of trees is very ſmall. There is ſcarcely any natural wood better than bruſh-wood. A few trees have been planted in the low part of the pariſh, and in ſheltered ſituations have grown tolerably well. It is believed, that on many parts of the high grounds, trees might be reared with ſucceſs and advantage. All the low part of the pariſh is capable of bearing grain; and, with the exception of a few encloſures near the ſhore, has been chiefly employed for that purpoſe. Conſiderable advances have been made, within theſe 30 years, in the improvement of agriculture. The low lands have been almoſt wholly encloſed. By the proper uſe of lime, marl, and ſea-weed, together with a more regular rotation of crops, the produce, both in quantity and quality, has been, to a great degree encreaſed. Oats, barley, bear, peaſe, beans, and potatoes, are the only kinds of crops commonly raiſed. A ſmall quantity of wheat and rye is occaſionally

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caſionally ſown; but the former is thought an uncertain crop, and the latter is found profitable only when the ſoil is extremely light and ſandy. On one farm, ſeveral acres of turnips are annually raiſed with good ſucceſs. The kind of plough moſt commonly uſed, is one with an Engliſh mould-board, and a Scotch ſock. Even in the hilly part of the pariſh, they have begun to cultivate ſuch ſpots of land as are capable of it. For the moſt part, lime is uſed as their manure. In ſome places the ſurface is pared and burnt, and the ground manured with the aſhes. In general, however, the diſadvantages of the climate, together with the want of ſhelter and encloſures, render the crops, in this part of the pariſh, both ſcanty and precarious. The high grounds are, therefore, chiefly employed in the paſture of cattle and ſheep. The greater part of them is indeed capable of being uſed in no other way. There are about 1700 head of cattle in the pariſh. Though, occaſionally, there may be ſingle inſtances of their riſing to a great ſize *, yet the cattle, in general, are rather ſmall. In ſome parts of the pariſh they are completely fatted; but the bulk of them are ſold for the purpoſe of being driven to England. In the low paſture grounds, the graſs is remarkably rich. A ſingle acre is ſometimes more than ſufficient to fatten an ox or cow of moderate ſize. There are about 214 ſcores of ſheep. Except a very few of the mixed breed between Scotch and Engliſh, they are all of the ſmall black-faced kind common in this country. Attention is paid by almoſt all the farmers to the improvement of the kind they already poſſeſs; but no attempts have been yet made to introduce a different breed.

The property of this pariſh is very unequally divided among

* An ox bred by Mr. Kennedy of Dunure, on his farm in this pariſh, was killed when 6 years old; the beef and tallow of which, together, weighed 61 ſtone 8 pound, reckoning 24 pound Engliſh to the ſtone.

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mong 10 different heritors. One only of them reſides. Mr. Hamilton of Bargeny, is proprietor of the town of Girvan, and of by far the greateſt part of the country pariſh. There is a ſpot of ground among the hills, ſuppoſed to be above 30 acres in extent, which may be conſidered as a kind of common. It has never, in the memory of man, been claimed or poſſeſſed by any individual; but is paſtured in common by the tenants of thoſe proprietors who have land in its immediate neighbourhood. In conſequence of the improvements in agriculture, the advance in the price of cattle and ſheep, and the increaſe of the town of Girvan, the rent of land in this pariſh has, within theſe 40 years, been very conſiderably advanced. At preſent (1791) the rents of the whole may be ſtated at about 3200l., and, when ſome old leaſes are out, they will amount to a good deal more. Its valued rent is 4621 l. 4s. 10d. Scots. With the exception of a few, whoſe leaſes are of an old date, the tenants pay their whole rent in money. In ſome inſtances, they are bound to lead coals to their landlords, or to pay a certain ſum for this purpoſe.

Antiquities.—There are, in this pariſh, 5 of thoſe ſmall round encloſures on the tops of riſing grounds, which are commonly called camps. Two of them are very near the ſea-ſide, and none of them more than 2 miles from the coaſt. One of theſe is remarkable for having 2 ditches, the 1 parallel to the other, and each ſurrounding the hill on the top of which it is ſituated *.

Eccleſiaſtical

* A number of cairns were formerly to be ſeen in the pariſh; ſeveral of them are now ſcarcely diſtinguiſhable, the ſtones being almoſt wholly removed. In one among the hills, which, about 7 years ago, was laid open, there was found a veſſel ſomewhat like an urn, open at top, made of earthen ware, unglazed, and rudely ornamented. It will hold about two Engliſh pints, and, when found, contained a ſmall quantity of duſt or aſhes. It was encloſed in a kind of coffin, conſiſting of broad thin ſtones laid looſely together.

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Eccleſiaſtical State, Stipend, Schools, Poor.—The inhabitants of this pariſh belong almoſt wholly to the Eſtabliſhed Church. There are not more than 20 Seceders, and only 2 Roman Catholics. The King is patron. By the laſt decreet, given in the year 1666, the miniſter's ſtipend is fixed at 57 bolls 1 2½ pecks of meal, paid at the rate of eight ſtone and an half the boll; 31 bolls 8 pecks of bear; 1 boll 4 pecks of oats; with 369 l. 4 s. 8 d. Scots, of money. He has alſo a manſe and glebe, which may be valued at 12 l. or 15 l.—There is one eſtabliſhed ſchoolmaſter, who reſides in the town of Girvan. He has, at an average, about 50 ſcholars. Of theſe, 30 are taught Engliſh, at the rate of 2 s. a-quarter; 16 are taught writing and arithmetic, at the rate of 2 s. 6 d.; and 4 are taught Latin at 3 s. Theſe wages, and 100 l. Scots of ſalary, with his emoluments as ſeſſion-clerk and precentor, render his place worth about 30 l. a-year. A number of private ſchools are alſo occaſionally kept, both in the town and the diſtant parts of the pariſh.—The poor's funds of this pariſh are wholly under the management of the kirk-ſeſſion. They ariſe from the intereſt of 165 l. of ſtock, from voluntary contributions, and from penalties received from thoſe who ſubject themſelves to the diſcipline of the church. From the accounts for 5 years preceding January 1791, it appears, that the ſum of 41 l. Sterling has, at an average, been annually received; that during the ſame period, the ſum of 38 l. has, at an average, been annually diſtributed; and that in theſe years, the average number of thoſe

In the town of Girvan, there is a whin-ſtone of a dark ſea-green colour, oval-ſhaped, its circumference meaſuring 2 feet 4 inches, by 2 feet 9 inches. Concerning this ſtone, tradition ſays, that in former times, when a perſon got his foot on it, he could not be attached for debt. From time immemorial, it has lain behind ſome houſes, which, with their yards, formerly belonged to the church.

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those who were regularly on the poor's roll, amounted to 36, besides a number of others to whom occasional assistance was given. It is to be observed, that out of the above sum, received chiefly on account of the poor, between 2 l. and 3 l. are annually given to the presbytery and session-clerks, the precentor, and kirk-officer.

Town of Girvan.—The town of Girvan is situated at the mouth of the river bearing that name. It is a post town, and lies on the great road between Ayr and Port-Patrick *. The town of Girvan possesses many advantages for trade and manufactures. In the neighbourhood of a plentiful corn country, with abundance of coal within 2 or 3 miles, and probably much nearer, it enjoys in sufficient quantity, all the necessaries of life. Standing very near the sea, and built on a dry sandy soil; its situation is remarkably healthy. Its harbour, far from being now a bad one, is capable of much improvement. In its present natural state, the entrance into the harbour is, at high water, from 9 to 11 feet deep; and were a key to be built, which, it is said, might be done for 2000l. or 3000l., it would be rendered considerably deeper. The

* This town is a burgh of barony. A charter of erection was originally granted to Thomas Boyd, Esq. proprietor of the lands of Ballochtoul, on which the town is chiefly built. This charter was afterward renewed by King William to Sir Archibald Muir of Thornton, in the year 1696. The powers and privileges granted by it to the proprietor of Ballochtoul, were regularly carried down, in all the subsequent charters and investitures, from the Crown. These powers were, however, never used; till, in consequence of the great increase of the town, Mr. Hamilton of Bargeny, the present proprietor, thought of exercising them. Accordingly, in the year 1785, the town of Girvan did, by his direction, assume the form of a burgh of barony. It is governed by 2 bailies, and a council of 10. The bailies are annually chosen by the council, and the vacancies of the council are filled up by themselves. But the superior has a negative upon both elections. The town, by its charter, enjoys all the liberties and privileges belonging to other burghs of the same kind.

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The ſurge never riſes here to any very great height; and ſo happily is the harbour ſituated, that veſſels can get out to ſea with a wind from almoſt any quarter, if it does not blow very hard. With ſuch advantages, any kind of trade, and eſpecially the coal-trade, might, with good proſpect of ſucceſs, be carried on. Hitherto, however, little or nothing has been done in this way. There is at preſent, no more than one veſſel above 20 tons burden, belonging to this place, or trading to it. The reſt are all ſmall, open, or half-decked boats, uſed for running ſalt from Ireland, or freighting goods from one part of the coaſt to another. Nor, till very lately, was there any thing deſerving the name of manufacture to be found in Girvan. The weaving of cotton-cloth has of late been introduced by the manufacturers of Glaſgow. Upwards of 100 looms are now employed, and the buſineſs is extending every day. That a ſituation ſo advantageous for trade or manufactures ſhould have been ſo long neglected, may appear ſurpriſing; but may perhaps be in ſome degree accounted for by obſerving, that Girvan is placed at a conſiderable diſtance from any great trading or manufacturing town; that no perſon bred to buſineſs, and at the ſame time poſſeſſing a good capital, ever happened to ſettle here, or in the neighbourhood; and that habits of regular induſtry were probably prevented or deſtroyed by the practice of ſmuggling, to which the inhabitants were, for a long time, ſo much addicted. There is reaſon, however, to hope, that if trade and manufactures continue to flouriſh in the country, in general, Girvan will, in a ſhort time, acquire that ſhare in them, to which, from its natural advantages, it appears to be entitled.

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