

NUMBER VII.

PARISH of KEIR.

(COUNTY AND SYNOD OF DUMFRIES; PRESBYTERY OF PEN-
PONT.)

By the Rev. Mr. JAMES WALLACE.

Extent, Soil and Rivers.

THIS parish is about 8 miles long from E. to W. The breadth is unequal; about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, or near 3 on an average. The soil is, in general, light, dry, and fertile, with a sandy, gravelly bottom, and produces heavy crops of grain and grass, in wet showery seasons, but is greatly parched, and far less productive in hot dry seasons. There is some holm land on the banks of the Nith and Scarr, consisting of a deep rich loam, and produces fine crops in any season. The land that lies highest and nearest the hilly ground, is, in general, excepting the holms, the deepest and strongest, but so full of stones, as to render the cultivation of it difficult and expensive. More than a third part of the parish consists of hilly ground, or sheep-walks, mostly covered with short heath, in-

terfperfed with bent, and other kinds of grafs, neither very coarfe nor very fine, but generally allowed to be very good fheep-pafture. There are no rivers in the parifh, except thofe already mentioned, which run along the N. and S. E. fide of it. Into thefe, feveral little rivulets, or, as they are commonly called, burns, from the high or hilly ground, empty themfelves.

Woods and Plantations.—There is a confiderable extent of natural wood in different parts of the parifh, confifting chiefly of oak and afh, with fome birch and alder. In the woods upon the eftate of Barjarg, is an oak tree remarkable for its great fize and age. At the root, it is about $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet in circumference, and it lofes very little of its thicknefs at the height of 30 feet. Its age cannot now be afcertained, but it muft certainly be feveral hundred years old. The higheft branches feem now to be beginning to decay. There are alfo fome plantations, confifting moftly of fir. Thefe plantations, together with the natural woods, add much to the beauty of the place, and in ftormy weather afford fhelter to the cattle grazing in them, and in the adjoining fields.

Climate and Difcafes.—The climate is rather moift and damp, owing to the continued ridge of hills, on the S. fide of the parifh, intercepting and breaking the clouds into rain, which is poured down on the fides of the hills, and thofe places that are near them, much more frequently, and more plentifully, than on the plain and level grounds at a greater diftance from them. To this caufe, perhaps, are to be afcribed the flow nervous fevers, rheumatifms, and afthmatic diforders, which feem to be more prevalent here, than any other difeafes.

Proprietors, Agriculture, &c.—There are 5 proprietors,
one

one of whom resides constantly, two occasionally, and two never. The farmers, in general, when they break up a field, take two or three white crops from it, after that a green crop, or a summer fallow, which is succeeded by a crop of barley, along with which they sow grass-seeds, and lay out the field, cutting the grass two years, and pasturing it two or three more, before it is broken up again. They, for most part, use the little close jointed Scots plough, commonly drawn by two horses, and sometimes by three, where the land is stiff, and has never been well cultivated, and properly dressed before. Lime is much used here as a manure, and is found to answer very well. Many of the farmers spread it upon the surface 8 or 10 months before they plough their field. Others again plough their field, and give it a slight harrowing, before they spread the lime upon it, after which they sow their oats, and then harrow it completely. This method seems to answer better, as, by these means the lime is sooner mixed and incorporated with the soil. The quantity of lime must be adapted to the nature of the land on which it is laid. Deep, strong, stiff land requires more than a shallow, loose, open soil does. The quantity used for one acre is from 50 to 80 measures of shells, the measure containing two Manchester bushels. One liming is found to serve very well for two courses of crops, and sometimes three, before the liming is repeated. And when it is repeated, half the quantity that was laid on the field at first, or little more, is found to be sufficient. It is observed, however, that at the end of every course of crops, the field is renewed with dung, along with a green crop, or by a summer fallow*.

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* *Seed Time and Harvest.* Wheat is sown from the beginning of October to the end of November. Oats, pease, and flax, from the middle of March to the 20th of April. Barley and potatoes from the 20th of April to the middle of May. Turnip from the middle of June to the 20th of July. Harvest, in ordinary

There is but little wheat raised in the parish, as the soil, in general, is found to be too light, for producing an advantageous crop of it, not more than 15 or 20 acres yearly, worth from 7 l. to 8 l. Sterling the acre. Barley is raised in much greater abundance, from 100 to 120 acres yearly, worth, at an average, about 4 l. 10 s. the acre. Between 400 and 500 acres of oats are sown annually, worth, at an average, about 3 l. 10 s. the acre. There also are large fields of potatoes, about 70 or 80 acres yearly, worth from 8 l. to 10 l. the acre. 70 or 80 acres of pease are raised annually, worth from 3 l. to 4 l. the acre. The farmers in the parish have hitherto sown no more flax than is necessary for the use of their own families. The real rent is about 1509 l., reckoning 10 l. per cent. on the grassums given for some farms, and adding that to the yearly rent of them*.

Towns, Villages, Inns, and Ale-Houses.—There are neither towns nor villages in the parish, a few houses near the church hardly deserving the name of a village. Nor are there any inns. There are 2 or 3 ale-houses, or, as they should more properly be called whisky-houses, for whisky is the principal article they deal in, and they have a great demand for it. The pernicious practice of drinking whisky has made a very rapid

ordinary seasons, begins about the 20th of August, and ends about the beginning of October, but for some years past has been considerably later.

* *Wages of Servants and Labourers, &c.*—The wages of men labourers are 8 d. a-day with victuals, and 1 s. 2 d. without victuals. The wages of women for working at peats, hay-making, and other farm work, is 5 d. with their diet, and 9 d. and 10 d. without it. In harvest, both men and women are commonly 8 d. a-day, with victuals, and 1 s. and 1 s. 2 d. when they furnish their own provisions. The day's wages of a master mason, carpenter, and slater, are 2 s.; of a tailor, 8 d. with victuals. The average wages of farming men servants are 8 l. yearly with bed and board; and of women 3 l. 10 s. The wages of domestic servants are much the same with those of farm servants.

rapid progress in this corner of the country within a few years last past. It is purchased at a very low price, and a small quantity of it is sufficient, not only to intoxicate, but even to make a man mad. Its pernicious effects upon the morals, the industry, and the constitutions of those who are addicted to it, must be visible to every sober observer.

Roads.—The principal road in the parish is in very indifferent repair. A part of it is still in its natural state, and those parts of it, that have been repaired, were done in a very superficial manner. The conversion of the statute-labour, amounts to little more than 12 l. a-year, which might keep our roads in repair, if they were once sufficiently made; but will by no means both make, and keep them in proper order. The badness of our roads is a great bar to improvements of every kind.

Church, Stipend, School, Poor, &c.—The church was repaired about 30 years ago, but has never been properly seated, and the number of inhabitants having increased considerably of late years, it is rather too small for their accommodation. The manse and offices were all new built in the year 1778, and are in very good repair. His Grace the Duke of Queensberry is patron of the parish. The stipend is 700 l. Scots money, and 3 chalders of victual, two-thirds of which are meal, and one-third bear; which, with the manse, and glebe of about 8 acres, may be reckoned worth about 90 l. yearly.—The parish school is inconveniently situated, being about 2 miles too near the upper or west end of the parish, by which the lower or east end is in a great measure deprived of the benefit of it. The number of scholars, in the winter season, is between 30 and 40, during the rest of the year they are not so numerous, many of them being employed in herding,

ing, or any other occupations suited to their years and strength. The school salary is 100 l. Scots, with a free house. The school fees are very trifling: for teaching English 1 s. 3 d. the quarter; writing and arithmetic 1 s. 6 d. No Latin has been taught here for many years.—The poor who regularly receive alms from the kirk-session, are 6. They are supplied from the collections in the church on Sundays, and the interest of a small sum appropriated to their use, amounting in all to about 12 l. a-year. They are all maintained in their own houses. They earn about a half or two-thirds of their own maintenance; and none of them beg from door to door. The parish, however, is much infested with beggars who do not belong to, nor reside in it.

Population, &c.—According to Dr. Webster's report, the number of souls then, was 495. The population of the parish has increased considerably of late years. In the year 1778, the number of souls did not exceed 300, whereas they are now 520. This increase is chiefly to be ascribed to two causes; the division of large farms into smaller ones, and a lime-work which was begun a few years ago, of which we shall take more particular notice afterward. Of the inhabitants of the parish, 12 are Antiburgher Seceders; 12 are Cameronians; all the rest are of the Established Church. There are 3 blacksmiths, 4 carpenters, 2 masons, 8 weavers, and 4 tailors. All the other inhabitants of the parish are farmers, and their cottagers, who live in detached houses, there being, as was before observed, neither towns nor villages in it.

Number of Horses, Black Cattle, Sheep, &c.—There are 120 horses, mostly of the Scots breed, strong made, and very hardy. There are a few of the breed of Ireland, which generally

ally improve here, and are found to answer every purpose of the farmer. Their value, at an average, may be about 14 l. Sterling, each. There are about 280 milch cows, with their calves, or followers as they are called, usually kept in the parish; worth, at an average, about 6 l. Sterling each. The number of sheep in the district does not exceed 1880; they are the common Scots kind, white on the body, and black on the face and legs; they are very hardy, but their wool is strong and rather coarse. No swine are bred in the district. Most of the farmers buy a pig or two annually, which they feed for the use of their own families.

Fuel, &c.—The greater part of the parish is but indifferently provided with fuel, for though there is some moss about the middle of the parish, it is at a considerable distance from the extremities of it, and consequently to the inhabitants of these parts, very expensive. The greater part of the fuel used here, is coal from Sanquhar, which is likewise very expensive, being carried about 14 miles. Nor is this all: of late years it has been of a very bad quality; and the demand for it is so great, that the carters are often detained 24, and sometimes 48 hours, before they can be served. And it cannot but be supposed that there must be a great demand for coal at Sanquhar, when it is considered that there is no other coal-work in Nithsdale, Annandale, the shire and stewartry of Galloway. The lower parts of Annandale, and of Nithsdale, and all along the sea-coast of Galloway, would be supplied with coal from England, at a moderate and easy rate, were it not for the high duty, amounting also to a prohibition, laid upon them. Were this duty abolished, the demand at Sanquhar would be greatly lessened, and consequently this part of the country much better supplied.

About

About 6 years ago, a lime rock was discovered in the estate of Barjarg, and from that time has been carried on with considerable success. The rock seems to be inexhaustible, but has about 14 feet deep of earth above it; the removing of which is attended with no small expense. Between 30 and 40 hands are constantly employed for 7 or 8 months in the year, when they continge to burn lime; but not so many during the rest of the year. Between 20,000 and 30,000 measures, in shells, have been sold annually; the measure, as before observed, containing 2 Winchester bushels. It is sold at 9d. the measure, and as the lime is of an excellent quality, it is not improbable that the demand for it will increase.

Character of the People, &c.—The people, in general, are sober and industrious, though it must be confessed, that, since the pernicious practice of drinking whisky became so prevalent, there are too many exceptions. They enjoy, in a reasonable degree, the necessaries, and even the comforts and conveniencies of life, and are, generally, as contented with their situation, as most people. Their condition, however, might be meliorated, were our roads put into proper repair, the duty on the English coal abolished, the inhabitants better supplied with coal from Sanquhar, and the heavy multure, which they are bound to pay to the mills to which they are thirled, removed. More than one-half of the parish pays the eleventh peck as multure, besides paying the miller for working or grinding their grain. This is certainly a very great discouragement to improvements in agriculture.