

NUMBER V.

PARISH OF URQUHART,

(COUNTY AND PRESBYTERY OF ELGIN, SYNOD OF MORAY.)

By the Rev. Mr WILLIAM GORDON, Minister.

Name, Extent, and Situation, &c.

THE etymology of the name cannot be ascertained with precision. If it be of Gaelic extraction, some information may be received from those quarters where that language is understood. There are other two parishes of the same name, the one a few miles from Inverness, and in that county; the other in Ross-shire. This parish extends about 4 miles from E. to W. and 3 from N. to S; and lies at an equal distance from Elgin on the W. and the river Spey on the E; the post road passing along it on the S.

Surface, Sea Coast, Fuel, &c.—That part of the parish which lies to the N. W. is flat and low, rising a few feet only above the level of the sea, and has probably, at some former

mer period been covered by water, as there are evident marks of the sea having receded from the coast: The rest is a good deal more elevated, and of an unequal waving surface. The sea coast, which is about 4 miles in extent, is low and sandy; it contains no creek nor landing place of any kind. Our grain, which is our only article of exportation, is shipped from Speymouth or Lofsiemouth; and our great article of importation, which is coals, is imported at the same harbours; the former of which is at the distance of 4 miles, and the other of 6. It is proper here to mention, that this, as well as several other neighbouring parishes, was formerly ill supplied with fuel; but now, that article is rendered much less expensive, by taking off the high duty on coals, that was laid on with little attention to political economy, and which has lately been abolished by the exertions of a great statesman; to whom this country is more obliged on account of that measure, and many others, than to any other native of this part of the united kingdom.

Climate, &c.—The air is dry and salubrious, and the people in general healthy; there are, however, few instances of remarkable longevity to be met with. The climate here, like that of all that narrow tract of land, which lies along the south side of the Moray Firth, is mild and temperate to an extraordinary degree: Its superiority, in that respect, over the high country, is most remarkable in the spring months. Often in that season, while all the operations of husbandry are going forward in the low parts of Moray, there are many places in the high country, distant only a few miles, where these operations meet with a total interruption, from the inten-

tenses.

tenseness of the frosts, and from deep falls of snow.* Our winters likewise, in general, are so open, that several plants commonly ranked amongst the hot-house division, stand throughout that season in the gardens of Innes, exposed to the open air, and lose little of their verdure.

Soil and Cultivation, &c.—The soil is various, and, though in general light and sandy, is of a kindly and fertile nature, exceedingly well adapted for raising turnips, potatoes, barley, and all kinds of artificial grasses. And a considerable part of it would be extremely fit for wheat, if there were any opportunity of procuring sufficient quantities of manure. Notwithstanding the mildness of the climate, and the kindliness of the soil, agriculture has made but slow advances. Some patches of turnips are indeed to be seen, and a few acres are sown with grass seeds; but the fields in general are rather in a state of bad cultivation. This seems to be occasioned, in a great measure, by the expence and difficulty of constructing sufficient inclosures; there being no stone quarries in the parish, nor any stones in the fields fit for this purpose; and thorn hedges are so long of coming to perfection, and so difficult to be fenced when they are young, that no tenant, on a lease of ordinary endurance, can attempt them with any prospect

* It may likewise be observed, as a farther proof of the excellency of this climate, that in the end of the last, and beginning of the present century, while there was so great a deficiency in the crops, in many parts of Scotland, as bordered on a famine, owing to the cold and wet seasons; in Moray, at that period, the land was so productive, as not only to supply its own inhabitants, but also to spare considerable quantities of grain for the subsistence of their neighbours. And it is a fact well ascertained, that in those years of scarcity and dearth, people came from the shire of Angus, to purchase oat meal in this country, for which they paid at the rate of 30 s. *per* boll.

prospect of success. The farms also are of too small extent for carrying on any substantial improvements in agriculture. There are a few that may contain from 60 to 100 acres; but the common run is from 20 to 30.

Farm Rents and Ploughs, &c.—The rent of land varies according to the nature of the soil; there are some fields let for 20s. *per* acre, while others are below 10s.; the average rent may be from 10s. to 15s. The ploughs, of which there are above 100, some of English, some of Scotch construction, are drawn chiefly by a pair of horses. In this branch of farming, an improvement has been introduced about 20 years ago, which now begins to be pretty generally adopted; that is, plowing with two oxen, harnessed in the same manner as horses. This method is warmly recommended, and the advantages of it fully explained by the late Lord KAIMES, in his book called *The Gentleman Farmer*.

Produce, Exports, &c. The produce of this parish, consists principally of barley and oats; besides supplying the inhabitants, it exports annually a considerable quantity of grain; which must increase yearly, partly by the increasing improvements of agriculture, but chiefly by the use of potatoes, which are now almost universally cultivated, and during a great part of the year, are, in a manner, the principal subsistence of a considerable number of the inhabitants. This food, which at first was not in general use, becomes more and more so every day, from the various modes that have been discovered of dressing it, by different seasonings, at little or no expence. They make an excellent dish with milk, but above all with onions, which are raised in abundance in this county, and sold at such a moderate price, as to come within the reach of the poorest inhabitant.

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that since he became proprietor of Innes, all the highways within the parish have been properly attended to, judiciously directed, and, by a regular application of the statute labour, kept in a state of good repair †. The only other heritor is Mr INNES of Leuchars ‡, who has about one fifth of the real rent of the parish. He is at uncommon pains to raise and fence hedges; he has planted stripes and belts about the ground round his house to a very considerable extent, besides several clumps similar to those executed by Lord FIFE. These clumps, like his Lordship's, at present consist chiefly of Scotch firs; but the plantations around his farm, and about his house, are all deciduous trees of the best kinds; oak, ash, and witch elm, with a proper mixture of larix, which are all uncommonly well preserved, besides being kept under the hoe for several years after they are planted. The water of Loffy runs through the property of this gentleman; that river swells sometimes to a great height, and frequently flooded the low ground on each side; but of late, with great industry and merit, embankments have been constructed, that will contain the river, and in a great measure prevent future inundations: By this circumstance the value of his lands is considerably raised.

Lakes,

† The house of Innes, one of Lord Fife's numerous seats, had been many years ago partly destroyed by accidental fire. Since his Lordship became its possessor, it has been repaired at a very considerable expence, and fitted up in the most fashionable stile; a large addition has been made to the gardens, and the grounds about the house have been laid out in the best taste; the whole makes now one of the most pleasant and elegant places of residence in the North.

‡ Before Mr INNES succeeded to this estate, it had been in the possession of a gentleman who paid very little attention to improvements of any kind. Since the present gentleman became proprietor, it has undergone a very great alteration to the better.

Lakes, Fish, Water Fowls, &c.—There is one lake in this parish called the *Loch of Cottis*. Pike is the only fish it contains: In winter it is frequented by a considerable number of swans, and, in the spring and autumn, by flocks of geese, ducks, and other water fowls. At the upper part of the parish, there is another lake called *Lochnabeau*, partly in this parish, and partly in Lhanbryd. Lochnabeau is in the middle of what was formerly an extensive bare moor; about 20 years ago Lord FIFE planted the moor, and particularly carried his plantations round the verge of the lake. These plantations are now far advanced, and by their vicinity to the water, which is uncommonly limpid and clear, form a most beautiful and delightful scene.

Stags.—This improvement, however, has been attended with one inconvenience. In some severe winters, several years ago, a few stags and hinds came down to the low country from the Duke of Gordon's forests of Glenfiddich and Glenavon; of late years they have taken up their residence in the neighbourhood of Lochnabeau, and the plantations around it, and are become so fond of their new habitation, that they have never returned to their native forests; on the contrary, they increase every year, by breeding, and by the addition of fresh emigrants. These animals make a very fine appearance, and afford much pleasure and amusement to the sportsman; it is therefore to be regretted that they are so hurtful to plantations and agriculture. Throughout the summer, they pasture in the night time on the corns; in the winter on turnips; and in the spring, as the winter crops of rye and wheat are then farthest advanced, they are particularly destructive to them; but the stems of potatoes seem to be their favourite food, as they are known to pass through fields of corn in order to browse on them. Upon the whole, it were

much to be wished, that they were either driven back to their antient habitation, or utterly exterminated. The last measure has been successfully followed by a worthy nobleman in the western part of this county, celebrated for his extensive and flourishing plantations, who kept hounds for the sole purpose of extirpating those destructive animals. I need hardly say that the nobleman I mean is the Earl of MORAY. If these plantations have attracted the deer to this corner, it has been remarked that they have not been favourable to the increase of hares and partridges: this may be owing to the protection which they afford to beasts and birds of prey. Were gentleman to give small premiums for the destruction of these vermin, it would prove more effectual in preserving the game and increasing its numbers, than all the game laws that ever were, or ever will be enacted,

Church, School, and Poor.—The present incumbent, who is a bachelor, had his presentation from the Duke of Gordon; but the patronage of the church has since been conveyed to the Earl of Fife, at the time that the exchange of lands took place between his Lordship and the family of Gordon. The stipend, by a decree obtained February 1793, is 8 chalders victual and 40*l.* Sterling, including 5*l.* for communion elements. The glebe consists of 5 Scotch acres. Some years ago, the minister entered into a contract with the heritors, for keeping the manse and offices in repair during his incumbency, for which he receives an annuity of 15*l.* Sterling, besides 30*l.* paid per advance. The church was completely repaired about 18 years ago.—A new school-house was then built; the school-master's salary is 12 bolls of oat meal, and 6 bolls of barley.—The average number of poor in this parish is about 20. The funds for their support arise from the weekly collections at church, which amount to 10*l.* yearly

yearly, together with some mortifications that produce 2l. 11s. 4d. of annual interest.

Population.—The number of inhabitants has decreased within these 40 years, as appears from the following statement :

STATISTICAL TABLE OF THE PARISH OF URQUHART.

No. of souls in 1755, as returned to Dr Webster,	-	1110
Ditto, in 1793, males 506, females 544.	-	1050
	Decrease	60
Annual average of baptisms,	-	30
CONDITIONS, PROFESSIONS, &c.	Dissenters † from the Established	
Proprietors, - - -	Church, - - -	20
Minister, - - -	LIVE STOCK, RENTS, &c.	
School-master, - - -	Horses, - - -	310
Gardeners, - - -	Black Cattle, - - -	900
Smiths, - - -	Sheep, § - - -	1570
Tailors, - - -	Valued rent in Scotch mo-	
Joiners, - - -	ney, - - -	L. 5567 : 15 : 6
Masons, - - -	Real ditto in Sterling,	
Weavers, - - -	about	1800 : 0 : 0
Shoemakers, - - -	No. of acres, planted by the Earl	
Millers, - - -	of Fife, - - -	2478
Ale and spirit dealers, - - -	Deciduous trees,	230,835

Manner of Living.—Though the progress of agriculture has not been so rapid as might be wished, the increasing comfort of the people is very observable. Within these 20 years, a great

† These consist chiefly of Seceders, of the Antiburgher persuasion.

§ Since the moors were planted, the number of the sheep has considerably decreased, there having been formerly in the parish more than double the above number. The farmers are every day becoming more reconciled to the want of these animals, which cannot be kept with any advantage in an improving country, without sufficient inclosures.

a great difference to the better may be remarked in their clothing, their cleanliness, and every other circumstance that tends to make life more agreeable. Their habitations have likewise been very much improved; within less than the period above mentioned, there have been upwards of 50 neat farm houses built in this parish, either by the landlord or the tenant.

Character.—Though the number of ale-houses, mentioned in the table, may, at first appearance, seem to bear hard upon the sobriety of the people, it is to be remarked, that only two of these houses retail any considerable quantity of ale or whisky. The people in general are very sober, and diligent in their several occupations; their efforts of industry being as well directed as their situation and circumstances will permit.

Antiquities.—The site of the old priory ¶ has lately been converted into an arable field; and the name of *Abbey-well*, which the country people still give to the fountain that supplied the Monks with water, is the only memorial of it that now remains.

Proposed

¶ In the 12th century, the whole of this parish was King's property. As early as the year 1125, a priory, dependent on the Abbey of Dunfermline, was erected at Urquhart. It was very liberally endowed; all the lands now called the Lordship of Urquhart, the lands of Fochabers, as well as several others in this county, together with a part of the fishing on Spey, appertained to it. It appears that about the year 1345, this cell, as well as that of Pluscardene fell into disorder; and the Roman Pontiff having commissioned the bishops of Scotland, to enquire into those irregularities, it was soon after separated from Dunfermline, and conjoined to Pluscardene, with which it continued united till the Reformation. At and before that period, the priors began to feu out the lands, reserving only in their own possession the manor places and mills; the revenue which by that method they drew from thence, if we take into the account the tithes, multures, and services, would even at this day

Proposed Bridge.—This account ought not to be concluded, without mentioning the satisfaction entertained in this parish, and the rest of the country, at the late prospect there was of a BRIDGE across the Spey. At present the ferry is extremely troublesome, attended with some danger, and necessarily very expensive to travellers. If there were a bridge thrown across that river, the commerce and intercourse of the country would be very much increased; travelling would be rendered much more easy and comfortable; and, above all, it would be singularly useful for the march of the King's troops; this, in the winter, being the only road by which they can pass either South or North. For these reasons it is universally hoped, that measures for a bridge across the Spey, which have been begun, and generously promoted, by a most illustrious family † in the neighbourhood, will be taken up by government, and aided by the subscription of every person

day be nearly adequate to a moderate rent. The priory was situated a little to the east of the present church, in the midst of a morass, and probably went to ruin soon after its union with Pluscardene. In the year 1644, the greater part of the materials were carried off to build a granary near the shore at Garmouth; the remainder, soon after that period, was employed in repairing the manse, and inclosing the church-yard.

In the year 1167, the *Moravians*, or inhabitants of Moray, (for what cause is not now known) took up arms; they were met in the moors of Urquhart by the King's army, which was sent to quell the insurrection, and, as we learn from some of our historians, were, after an obstinate resistance, defeated there with great slaughter. As the inhabitants of Moray were at that period, according to Buchannan, of a restless and turbulent disposition, all the families engaged in this rebellion were dispersed through the different provinces of Scotland. It is said that those who were then removed into the Northern Counties, received the name of SUTHERLAND, which their descendants still retain, and that those who were sent to the South, assumed the surname of MURRAY, which they likewise have transmitted to their posterity.

† The family of GORDON.

son who wishes well to his country. A great part of the said road, from that to Elgin, will, in a short time, be bounded with wood on each side. The large plantations of his Grace the Duke of Gordon begin where Lord Fife's end, and are likely to be continued East-ward to the river side.

NUMBER