

NUMBER XVII.

PARISH OF ROTHIEMAY,

(COUNTY OF BANFF, SYNOD OF MORAY, PRESBYTERY  
OF STRATHBOGIE).

*By the Rev. Mr JAMES SIMMIE.*

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*Situation, &c.*

THE parish of Rothiemay is bounded, on the E. and N. E. by the parish of Marnoch; on the S. and S. E. by Inverkeithnie, Forgue, and Huntly; on the W. and S. W. by Cairny; on the N. and N. W. by Grange. Its greatest length is from 7 to 8 miles; its greatest breadth from 5 to 6.

The northern part of this parish is inferior to the rest, both in fertility and beauty. Beside some hilly ground, and some plantations of fir, it consists of a large plain, containing partly arable, partly pasture-ground, and an extensive moor that supplies with fuel, not only the parishioners,

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but

but, in a great measure, the town of Huntly \*, which is distant about 6 miles. From this plain is a gentle declivity of more than half a mile, on the W. and S. W. to the Isla, and, on the S. to the Devoran; a river adorned with plantations and natural woods on its banks, and abounding with common trout, eel, and salmon. About a mile below its confluence with the Isla, the Devoran, running eastward, divides the parish into two parts, of which the northern follows the course of the river more than two miles, the southern near two miles farther. At this point, where the Devoran begins to divide the parish, and on its northern bank, are the Milltown, a small village containing about an hundred souls; the house of Rothiemay †; the church and manse; and a happy mixture of well-inclosed fields

\* When the parishioners carry peats out of the parish, they do so clandestinely, or merely by indulgence of their landlords,—not by stipulation and right. It is much to be wished, that both they, and others whom they supply with peats, would use fewer peats, and more coal and wood, not only because, in wet seasons, peats are a very uncertain fuel, but because the preparation of them consumes much of their time, which might be more profitably devoted to various agricultural improvements.

† There is a tradition here, that the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, passed a night in this house, and her bed-room is still pointed out. This tradition is confirmed by the authority of Buchanan, who, describing Mary's journey to Inverness, says, "*Proxima nox ad Rothimayum, Abrenethium villam, satis tranquille transacta est*:" Hist. Rer. Scot. Lib. 17 cap. 36. The Abrenethies here mentioned were Lords Abrenethies, afterwards of Salton. The tragical fate of one of them is celebrated in a popular ballad, called Fiennet-hall. Next to the Abrenethies, a family of Gordons were proprietors of Rothiemay till the end of last or the beginning of this century, when it was purchased by Ogilvie, whose son (afterwards of Inchmartin in Perthshire) sold it to William Lord Braco, father of the present Earl of Fife. The most ancient part of the house, which was going fast to ruin, his Lordship has lately taken down, and has repaired and furnished the rest in a manner which does honour to his taste.

fields and woods; which, with woods and corn-fields on the opposite side of the river, rising, by a gradual ascent, to a great height, form a beautiful rural scenery, equalled by few, and perhaps excelled by none, of equal extent, in the kingdom.

*Soil, Produce, Rent.*—Plantations and natural woods occupy a considerable part of this parish. They consist chiefly of fir, birch, ash, elm, and aller \*, which, in consequence of the scarcity of these in most of the neighbouring parishes, are sold at high prices, and bring the proprietors from L. 100 to L. 200 a-year. And it may be presumed, that, some years hence, they will bring much more, as many of them, especially firs, now young and thriving, will then be ready for sale; and as the proprietors not only supply from their nurseries the places of those they sell, but are carrying this kind of improvement still farther, by planting such parts of their estates as are less fit for cultivation or pasture.

The pasture bears only a small proportion to the arable land of the parish. It is such, however, as renders it profitable for some farmers to rear a few sheep, and all a few black cattle, for the market.

The soil, in general, is rich and fertile. It produces excellent oats, bear, pease, and lint, the common crops of the parish; and in such abundance, that large quantities, particularly of oats, oatmeal, and bear, are exported annually. A great part of the bear finds a good market at distilleries in the neighbouring parishes. Part of it, as well as oats  
and

\* Beside these, is a great variety of excellent larch, oak, beech, &c. particularly on the property of the Earl of Eife, whose example in planting, and other improvements, is well entitled to the imitation of other proprietors. Some old ash, belonging to his Lordship, are of an uncommon size, measuring, in diameter, four feet.

and oatmeal, is purchased, by commission, for merchants in other parts of the kingdom, and shipped at Portsoy, which is 12, Banff, which is 15, or Macduff, which is 16 miles distant.

Most farms are small, only five or six being rented above L. 40, of which one is rented at L. 110, another at L. 140. Few leases exceed 19 years. *Grassums* are in use. Personal service \* and harvest-labour are no longer exacted. Of late, a great part of victual-rents were converted into money at the rate of 12 s. 6 d. a boll; and multure-rent, formerly every thirteenth peck, is now 3 s. 6 d. for every pound of farm-rent. Conversions not less favourable in their consequences to the progress of agriculture, than to the immediate interest of the farmer. The miller's fee (which remains to be converted into money) is every eighteenth peck. Restrictions to particular mills prevail here, as in other parts of Scotland; and the grain of one of the best districts of the parish is restricted to a mill in a neighbouring parish, and belonging to a different proprietor. Would it be any disadvantage to society, if mill-restrictions of every kind being abolished by a just compensation, every one were at liberty to choose his miller, as well as his smith, his carpenter, or any other mechanic?

The valued rent of the parish is L. 3170 Scotch. The whole parish is the Earl of Fife's, except about a tenth part, the property of Major Alexander Duff of Mayen. His Lordship occasionally visits his property here. Major Duff † constantly resides in the parish.

#### *Advantages,*

\* By *personal service*, as different from harvest-labour, is meant, going on errands, and the like. The service of carrying the landlord's meal to the shore is still retained; nor, indeed, could it be conveniently dispensed with, where victual-rents are paid, and especially where the landlord does not reside.

† The Major, beside some very laudable improvements of his estate by planting and inclosing, has lately built an elegant and commodious house.

*Advantages, &c.*—Our chief advantage, respecting agriculture, is the nearness of lime. In the neighbouring parish of Grange, it is bought at the quarry for 1½ d.; at the kiln for 8 d. and sometimes 7 d. a boll\*. The abundance of peat here induces most farmers to buy it at the quarry, and enables some of them, beside supplying themselves, to bring a profit by retail. There are about 50 lime-kilns in the parish.

To this advantage I wish I could add good roads; but the proper method of making and repairing these is not even understood here. Instead of using for this purpose that abundance of metal and gravel which nature has supplied, the statute-labour is employed in throwing on the middle of the roads the contents of the ditches on their sides, which, being clay or soft earth, so far from improving them, (unless, perhaps, during the heat of summer), generally makes them worse than before. Though inclosing is far advanced in this, compared with neighbouring parishes, still there is much room for this kind of improvement: A proof, among others, that a great part of our land has not yet reached half its value. Nor has draining by any means obtained that degree of attention, which a great part of our land evidently requires, though to this kind of improvement its natural situation is, in general, very favourable †.

*Population, &c.*—The number of inhabitants is 1125; of whom, 481 are males, 644 females. In 1755 it was 1190. The average of marriages for the last 10 years is 10; that of births, for the same period, 19; of deaths there is no register.

Of

\* The boll of lime here consists of 2 firlots only.

† The mode of farming, and the prices of the various kinds of provisions, are the same here as in the neighbouring parishes.

Of the inhabitants 1067 are of the Established Church ; 25 are Episcopalians ; 27 Seceders ; and 6 Roman Catholics. The occupations of part of them, with other particulars which shew the state of the parish, will appear from the following table :

Clergyman,	-	1	Tailors,	-	-	6
Schoolmaster,	-	1	Shopkeepers,	-	-	7
Masons,	-	6	Innkeepers,	-	-	3
Dikers,	-	4	Butchers,	-	-	2
Wrights,	-	10	Meal-mills,	-	-	2
Turners,	-	4	Meal-millers,	-	-	3
Coopers,	-	3	Lint-mill,	-	-	1
Smiths,	-	4	Lint-millers,	-	-	3
Slaters,	-	2	Wauk-mills,	-	-	2
Flax-dressers,	-	3	Ferry-boats,	-	-	2
Weavers,	-	27	Horses,	-	-	260
Dyers,	-	3	Sheep,	-	-	500
Shoemakers,	-	13	Black-cattle,	-	-	1208

All the men who are not tradesmen and mechanics, are employed in agriculture ; and tradesmen and mechanics, who are housekeepers, likewise cultivate a few acres for the accommodation of their families. The women, when they are not employed in the moss in summer, or the field in harvest, sometimes knit stockings, but commonly spin linen-yarn for the merchant, who buys it, by commission, for the manufacturer in Glasgow, Paisley, or some other distant part of the kingdom. Beside maintenance, a farm-servant's yearly wages are from L. 7 to L. 9 ; a maid-servant's L. 2, 10 s. or L. 3. A day-labourer's wages vary with the kind of his labour ; viz. for moss-labour, a man's 8 d. a woman's 6 d. with victuals ; for harvest-labour, a man's 10 d. a woman's 6 d. with victuals ; for hay-cutting,

1 s. ;

1 s.; and for common labour, such as delving, 9 d. without victuals. A mason's day's wages are 1 s. 6 d.; a wright's, 1 s. both without victuals; a tailor's, 8 d. with victuals; a dicker's work is hired by the piece. By spinning linen-yarn, a woman earns 3½ d. at most 4 d. a-day! A poor pittance, indeed! and till manufactures be established here, (a thing more to be desired than expected), there is little reason to hope that female labour will find a better, at least an adequate reward.

*Church, School, &c.*—The parish-church, built about 40 years ago, is commodious and well lighted. The Earl of Fife is patron. By a late decree of the Court of Teinds, the minister's stipend is “106 bolls 3 firlots of victual, half meal half bear, and L. 533:6:8 Scotch, with L. 60 money forepaid for furnishing the communion-elements.” The schoolmaster's salary, which is 200 merks Scotch\*, and the school-fees, with precenter's and session-clerk's fees and perquisites, do not exceed L. 20 or L. 21 a-year. The  
parochial

\* Till within these two years, it was only 100 merks Scotch. The late Rev Mr Bruce of Dunbar, who received the principles of his education at this school, generously proposed to augment it by a donation of L. 100 Sterling, on the following terms: 1<sup>st</sup>, That the heritors should become trustees of his donation, paying to the schoolmaster the legal interest of it; and, 2<sup>dly</sup>, That they should augment the salary to the *maximum*, or 200 merks Scotch. Though the heritors complied with these terms as soon as proposed, and though afterwards Mr Bruce, informed of this, promised that his donation should *be forthcoming* at a time mentioned, yet, not long after, he died, without having fulfilled his benevolent purpose, and (so far as I have yet been able to discover) without leaving the fulfilment of it in trust to his heirs or testamentary executors. It is hoped, however, that sufficient vouchers of his purpose and promise being produced, his heirs (who are happily in sufficient circumstances) will, from due respect to his memory, esteem his will, respecting this matter, as sacred as if it had been expressed with all the circumstances of legal formality.

parochial poor (24 \* at an average of the last twelve years) are affixed from the interest of L. 160, the rents of one of the church-galleries, the weekly collections, fines for misdemeanors, &c.; the whole forming a yearly fund of L. 25 or L. 26 Sterling.

*Antiquity, an Eminent Character.*—About a furlong north from the house of Rothiemay is a Druidical temple, which, though situated in the middle of a beautiful and fertile field, a veneration for antiquity has hitherto preserved entire. Mr James Fergusson, well known, among men of science, for his publications on astronomy, was a native of this parish †.

*Character.*—The inhabitants are, in person, slender rather than robust; in mind, acute and sensible. They excel their forefathers less in the luxuries of the table than elegance of dress; are generally very healthy; and live  
many

\* In 1783 and 1784, the number of poor was 45. In 1783, the kirk-session expended L. 70 of the poor's fund in purchasing foreign grain.

† To certify this, it may be proper to subjoin, that my information of Mr Fergusson's being a native of this parish I received from his brother, John Fergusson, who was an elder of this parish, and died very lately. He told me, that his father's name was John Fergusson, his mother's Elspet Lobban; that they dwelt at the Core of Mayen; that both he and his brother James were born there; that he himself was born in 1708; and that his brother James was two years younger. Accordingly the session-record, which is now before me, confirms this information in every particular. James Fergusson was born April 25. 1710.

I do not recollect every particular related in the Memoirs of Mr Fergusson, prefixed to his works, not having seen them for several years; but John, his brother, who had read these Memoirs, said, that, though generally agreeable to fact, they were not equally correct in every particular.

many of them 80, and some 90, years. Devoted to agriculture and the mechanical arts, they are very little inclined either to a military or a sea-faring life. They are sober and industrious, respectful to superiors, obedient to the laws, charitable to the poor, and practise, among themselves, the virtues of integrity and friendship. Of the form of godliness they are strictly observant; and justice, as well as candour, forbids me to believe that they are destitute of its power.

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