

NUMBER III.

PARISH OF KIRKMAHOE.

(COUNTY OF DUMFRIES.)

*By the Rev. MR. LAWSON.**Name, Situation, &c.*

THIS parish is situated in the shire, presbytery, and synod of Dumfries. Any origin that can be assigned for the name is merely conjectural*. Its form is not easily described, its length and breadth being so various. It is surrounded by the parishes of Closeburn, Kirkmichael, Tinwald, Dumfries, Holywood, and Dunscore. — The northern and eastern parts are hilly, but there are no mountains of any note. Where this parish joins Tinwald, there are many little rising grounds interspersed with morassy grounds at the bottom, which, when out of tillage, are soon covered with furze and broom; but, when plowed (as they are of a light kindly soil) they produce pretty good crops of oats. Some of them were never plowed till within these few years past. The more hilly parts of the parish produce heath and coarse grafs, fit only for sheep. There are two considerable sheep farms in these hills, one of which

* It is supposed from some saint called *Mahoe*, or some such name, to whom the church was dedicated.

which maintains about sixty, and the other from twenty to thirty score. The wool is said to be uncommonly good, and usually sells at the best price of any in the neighbourhood.—The other high grounds, also, feed a considerable number of sheep; but being in many hands, the number cannot be so well ascertained. They probably, however, amount to, at least, twenty score more.

Progress of Improvement.—When the present incumbent was ordained, An. 1750, improvements were not commenced. There was not a cart in the parish but two; and these were merely for the purpose of supplying the families to whom they belonged, with water for domestic uses. About that time the estate of Carnfalloch was purchased by the late Mr Johnston. He was the first, in this part of the country, who made any considerable exertion in draining, inclosing, and planting; which soon altered the aspect, and increased the value of his estate. By his means, in a great measure, the use of carts was introduced; the number of which, increased so rapidly, that, in a short time, even the poorest tenants were provided with one, and many with two or more.—The neighbouring gentlemen soon followed Mr Johnston's example. Great improvements were made both in the low lands, and on the rising grounds; and thus the parish, instead of being almost in a state of nature, or, at least, comparatively unproductive, became remarkable for its cultivation. Planting also, became an object of attention, and there are several hundred acres covered with different sorts of trees, which greatly adds to the beauty of the country.

Husbandry.—Some years ago, it was a rare thing to see fewer than four horses in a plough. Three in a yoke, was a matter of wonder. But, for a great while past, two horses, generally

generally speaking, do the same work with equal facility. This, however, is greatly owing to the breed being improved.

Dalswinton.—The estate of Dalswinton is by far the largest in the parish. It was there where the Cumings in former times had one of their chief seats. It was a large Gothic building, reared on one of the highest eminences in the neighbourhood. In 1750, and for some time after, large portions of the old walls were standing; and, from these ruins it appeared to have been a large fabric, and of considerable strength. These stones were afterwards used for building a mansion-house and offices, immediately below the eminence. The mount where the castle stood, and the grounds adjacent were planted with fir and other trees to a considerable extent. A large orchard also was made, which, for many years, yielded a rent of 50 guineas *per annum*. Within these few years this estate was purchased by Patrick Miller, Esq. who has already with taste and much judgement, and with wonderful rapidity, improved great part of the estate, and has made Dalswinton one of the finest seats in the south of Scotland. He is in a likely way of preventing the river Nith from making such depredations upon the rich holm lands, as it had formerly done; and is effecting many other alterations and improvements of equal importance. He has now built, on the mount where the old castle stood (and as near to the old foundation as was consistent with the safety of the building) one of the best and most commodious dwelling houses, for its dimensions, of any in this part of the kingdom. From its top, there is one of the most extensive and pleasing prospects any where to be met with.

Population.—The inhabitants of the parish amount to about 1200. In 1755, according to Dr Webster, the number was
1098.

1098. Baptisms for some years past, have been upwards of 40. Marriages about six, seven, or eight, and seldom more. Deaths, much in the same proportion, as in the neighbouring parishes, according to the number of inhabitants. For upwards of 40 years back, there has been no epidemical disease, but the small-pox; excepting a fever, which, about 30 years ago, raged for some time; and got, from the village where it first appeared, the name of the *Duncow* fever. But only a few were cut off by it.

Villages.—Besides a new and regularly built village on the estate of *Dalswinton*, for the accommodation of 15 families, and upwards, there are four others; the smallest of which contains about 100 inhabitants, and the largest (*Duncow*) between 150 and 200.

Roads and Bridges.—There are, perhaps, few public roads kept in better repair, than those in this neighbourhood. By the surplus of the parish funds, also, some excellent cross-roads, little, if at all inferior to the principal ones, have been lately made. Besides three bridges upon the principal high-road, two of them over pretty rapid rivulets, there are four others in the parish, well executed, and of the greatest benefit to the inhabitants.

Manse, Stipend, and Glebe.—The manse is one of the oldest in this part of the country. It was built about 1723, but has had partial repairs at different times since. The church, which is an old one, has been for some time in a good condition. The stipend amounts to L. 83 : 6 : 8, communion elements included. But as a part of it is paid in victual, it has produced for some years rather more. The glebe is small : what

is properly glebeindeed, not exceeding four acres; but the grass and arable land united, may be from seven to eight acres.

Heritors.—There are four heritors who have considerable estates in the parish. Of the rest, to the number of fourteen, the greater part of them have only small properties; and are commonly distinguished by the name of portioners. They have of late got their lands, which formerly lay in runrig, divided and set apart, which has occasioned very great improvements.

Rent.—The valuation of the parish is 7234 $\frac{1}{4}$ merks Scots. The real rent cannot easily be ascertained. It probably amounts to about L. 3000. sterling. As lands are rising, and as there is a very great track of fine holm, and other ground of an excellent quality, and still capable of much improvement, it is not easy to conjecture to what sum the rental may soon rise. Some land now lets at from L. 1 : 10s to L. 2 per acre. Every sort of grain produced in the neighbourhood, also potatoes, turnips, &c. are raised to very great perfection.

Poor.—The poor, who, for 40 or 50 years back, have been about 20 in number, have always been maintained by the public collections in the church, together with some dues on particular occasions, and the interest of some mortified money. In this way, by distributions four times annually, and some small donations occasionally given amongst them, there have never been any complaints. Some of the poor, too, are pretty industrious, and endeavour, in a great measure, to maintain themselves; by which means, more can be given to others, who are old or infirm, and unable to do any thing.

Schools.

Schools.—There is one legal school and schoolmaster in the parish. His salary, together with some mortified money, amounts to L. 8 : 7 : 8 ; and by the common school wages for teaching, his income may rise to more than double that sum. There are other schools in some of the villages ; one in particular, on the estate of Dalwinton, to the support of which Mr. Miller generously contributes. There are few or none in the parish, any way advanced in life, who are not capable of reading English, and in general, who have not learned a little writing and arithmetic.

Ale-houses.—Within these few years the number of ale-houses has greatly diminished. By the additional taxes upon malt, and the more rigid exactions of excise-men, people do not find it worth their while to sell ale : There were at any rate, but few in the parish. Of late, selling whisky and other spirits, has chiefly prevailed. This must, at times, produce the common effects attending the use of spirituous liquors. The people, however, are in general sober and industrious,