

NUMBER XXII.

PARISH OF COULL.

*(County of Aberdeen.)**By the Rev. Mr ALEXANDER ROBERTSON.**Name, Situation, &c.*

THE name of this parish, (*Coull*) is of Gaelic extraction, as are the names of almost all the places in this country. By a very small variation in sound, it may mean either the *back* or the *corner*, the latter of which is its natural and proper import; as it is situated not so much on the back of any rising ground, as in the corner of a large strath called Cromar, in the east end of which Coull lies. It is in the presbytery of Kincardine-Oniel, county and synod of Aberdeen. The form of the parish is nearly triangular; its longest side may measure about five miles, and the other two about three miles and a half each. The strath or country of which Coull forms a part, is in general flat, but surrounded with hills on every side, which shelter it very much. The soil is of an excellent quality, deep and fertile, equally removed from clay and sand, and is consequently less apt to fail in its produce, either from violent drought on the one hand, or incessant rain on the other. The air is pure, dry, and healthy; and there are no diseases, as far as I have had access to hear, peculiar to the place. To the west of the manse, there is a large bog or marsh, called Bogmore, through

through the midst of which, a small rivulet runs, but so still as to be hardly perceptible, till you come near to Tarland, which is about two miles to the west. In consequence of so long a level, the bog often rises to an extraordinary height, forming a sheet of water, about a mile square, full of wild geese, and ducks; the last of which remain throughout the year; the former make their appearance about the middle of September, and continue till about the end of April. There are few fish, to be found in this bog except pike. There are no remarkable mountains here; the hills around are bleak and barren, affording pasturage only for sheep.

Population.—The number of inhabitants is from 460 to 470, men, women, and children, included. There are 205 males, and about 260 females. The number in Dr Webster's report is 751. In this parish there are no instances of extraordinary longevity, which are well authenticated. It would also be extremely difficult to fix the precise number of farmers here, for every man is a farmer in his own way. A man of some wealth and standing in the country, takes immediately from the proprietor 100 or 150 acres of arable land, and becomes accountable to him for the rent of this quantity: he will perhaps retain one third or one half of the best of it in his own hand, and let the remainder to the poor dependents in his neighbourhood. As there is no market for potatoes here, the farmer raises only as many as serves his own family.

Advantages and Disadvantages.—This parish enjoys no peculiar advantages, except a fine pure air, and a warm lively soil. Its disadvantages are: 1. It lies in an inland country, far from market, and the means of improvement. Aberdeen, the nearest sea-port, is 30 miles east. 2. This disadvantage might

might be surmounted, if proper encouragement were allowed or improvements; the soil would be very grateful with ordinary treatment, but there is scarcely room even for that; few farmers here can say with certainty, that the lands which they possess this year, will be their's the next; they hold their farms from year to year, and it totally depends on the will of the landlord, whether they shall continue or remove. What farmer holding his ground on such a precarious footing, would choose to lay out money in improving his farm? 3. Accordingly, there are few fences in this country; and on that account, though the people here begin to see the advantages of raising turnips, and would also very readily be brought in to improve by sowing grass-seeds, &c. yet it is hardly possible, without fences, to preserve either; for it is the custom here, and in the whole country round, as soon as harvest is over, to set cattle, sheep, and horses at liberty; by which means, grass, turnips, and every thing of the kind, are trampled under foot, or eaten up. 4. Another material disadvantage which this parish, and the whole district round, labours under at present, and if not speedily removed, must in a very few years complete the ruin of many farmers here, is the difficulty of procuring servants, and the enormous height at which their wages are arrived.

Church and Poor.—The glebe, &c. will amount to about L. 60 Sterling. The church was rebuilt last summer; the offices are to be rebuilt this year, and the manse repaired. There are three heritors in this parish, Sir William Forbes of Craigievar, and the Earls of Aberdeen and Aboyne. None of them reside in it. Mr Farquharson of Finzean, has also some property, and pays a small proportion of stipend. The poor in this parish are few in number, perhaps nine or ten at an average. The annual amount of the contributions, will

will be little better than L. 4 Sterling of money, and at interest about L. 40 Sterling.

Antiquities.— About a mile and a half west of the manor, are to be seen the remains of a Druidical temple. The place is called *Tamnavric*, which signifies the Hill of Worship; but there is nothing to be seen but a few large stones, some of them standing upright, others fallen down, without any appearance of figures or inscription. The most remarkable fragment of antiquity, in this parish, is the Castle of Coull; it is situated about one-fourth of an English mile south of the manse. Not many years ago, there was scarcely any thing to be seen at all, but a number of little green hills, and the remainder of an old wall, about 30 yards long, and 10 or 12 feet thick; the ruins were buried in the ground, and might have continued hid from mortal view, had not a scarcity of manure induced people to dig about the old wall for rubbish; in doing this, they came upon the remains of four gates and five turrets, of very extraordinary dimensions. These last, as nearly as can be guessed, for it is impossible to measure them exactly, on account of their broken state, will be about 18 or 20 feet diameter; the walls in those places which seem most entire, are 15 feet thick, built with lime and stone throughout; one of the gates, which is not so much demolished as the rest, is closed above with a Gothic arch of free stone; this gate is 9 feet wide, 12 feet high, and 15 feet thick. The whole work, as far as it can now be traced, appears to have been a square, measuring about 50 yards on each side. It is only a very small portion of it that is yet opened up; three sides of it, in a great measure, are still under ground. Among the rubbish dug up, were found several small pieces of silver coin, with this inscription: “*Alexander Rex Scotorum.*”

Miscellaneous Observations.—The roads in this parish are in tolerable repair, but many of them very ill contrived. The statute labour is exacted in kind. There are no turnpike roads here. From 10 s. to 15 s. is the average rent of arable ground *per acre*, good and bad included. Some of the farms may rent about L. 50 Sterling, and will include 200 acres of hill, arable, and pasture ground. There are in the parish, 708 horses, 360 black cattle, and about 1500 sheep.

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