

NUMBER XVI.

PARISH OF DUIRINISH,
(ISLE OF SKY, COUNTY OF INVERNESS.)

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Name, Situation, Surface, Soil, &c.

THE name of this parish seems to be of foreign origin, as are almost all the names of farms, places and parishes in the western islands. The places whose names terminate in Nefs, or Nish; as Hunish, Troternish, Vaternish, &c. signify promontories, or head lands, projecting into the sea; yet these names have no affinity to the Gaelic language, in sound or meaning; nor any relation, as far as can be known, to the local situation or appearance of the places, and may be words of the Pictish, or more probably of the Danish language, as would appear from a well known cape in Norway being called the *Nese*. Duirinish is situated in the county of Inverness, in the presbytery of Sky, and Synod of Glenelg. Its extent from N. to S. W. namely, from the point of Vaternish to the point of Idrigil, is 17 computed miles. Its breadth from Lindale to the western shore, 13 miles. It is bounded on the E. by the parish of Sniford, on the S. E. by the parish of Bracadale, on the N. W. and S. W. by the sea or Channel, which separates this country from the Long Island,

Island, and which is about 18 miles broad. The ground about the lochs or branches of the sea, which run far into the country, descends in some places with a quick, and in other places with an easy slope towards the sea. The promontories or head-lands are rocks of immense height; the moors in most places are deep and wet. The soil in some parts is a light black loam, in some places of a reddish gravelly appearance; and though mostly thin and stony, it is on the whole fertile and productive. The air is very moist and foggy; the west and southwest winds bring floods of rain, owing probably to, the vicinity of the Atlantic Ocean. The most common distempers are rheumatisms, sciaticks, colds, nervous fevers and dysenteries, owing, it is presumed, to the wet and rainy climate. The extent of the sea-coast of this parish would measure upwards of 60 miles; the shore is in general stony, and in many parts very high and rocky.

Fish, Kelp, Harbours, &c.—The fish which frequent the coast are herrings, ling, cod, skate, mackerel, haddocks, flounders, syc and cuddies. Herrings and ling are exported; and when sold in the country, a barrel of salt herrings brings about 16s. and ling L. 13 the ton. The parish exports about 20 tons of ling yearly at an average. There are likewise some seals, otters; and whales of a large size are often seen in the Chammel, between this and the Long Island. Every species of sea weed is reckoned most excellent manure, though it is thought to burn and waste the soil, when it is not mixed with earth, and it is reckoned more profitable to convert it into kelp, than into manure. There are some kelp-shores, and the parish makes about an hundred tons annually. The tide of flood in this channel runs north and by east, and off the heads flows with great rapidity, perhaps at the rate of 5 miles an hour in spring tides.

tides. One light-house has been erected lately in the island of Scalpa in Harris, which is reckoned of great utility to the numerous shipping that frequent this channel, in their voyages to and from the Baltic. The harbours of the parish are Loch Arniford, Loch Bay, Pottech, Dunvigan Loch, and Loch Harlosh. As the coast is very bold and high, with a great depth of water, it seldom happens, that any vessel is wrecked upon it. About 30 years ago, a vessel belonging to Aberdeen, laden with staves, was cast away upon the coast of Ramfaig, in this parish, and two of the hands were drowned. The surviving part of the crew were treated by the people with the greatest humanity, and the cargo was preserved with the utmost care, for the benefit of the underwriters. This forbearance, however, may be rather ascribed to the attention and authority of the gentlemen, than to the humanity of the common people.

Hills.—The most remarkable mountains in the parish, are the two Hallivails, situated within a mile of each other, of an equal height, being about 3 quarters of a mile high, the top of each is a flat or a table land, and, like twins, they exactly resemble each other; so that they are such sure land-marks, as no seaman can mistake. The hills are all covered with heath, with a few green spots here and there.

Population.—The population of this parish, and of the whole island, is increasing, and has been increasing for at least 80 years back. The old people affirm, that they remember lands which lay waste in several districts, not only of this parish, but in several parts of the island, for want of inhabitants to occupy them. Of late, the inhabitants have multiplied so much, that from August 1771, to October 1790, eight large transports have sailed from this island with emigrants, to seek settlements in America; the last

last of these transports failed on the 6th of this month (October 1790) from Loch Bracadale. These 8 ships have, at a very moderate computation, carried away from this island 2400 souls, and L. 24,000 Sterling, ship-freights included. From the year 1772 to 1775, 204 males, and 207 females, emigrated from this parish to America, exclusive of those who have gone in the two last ships; yet the population appears to be as great as in 1772. This increase of population may be attributed to a more judicious and rational treatment of children and women in child-bed, than was formerly observed; and above all, to the inoculation of the small-pox, which has been universally practised in this island for 30 years past, and has been the means of preserving many lives. The number of souls in this parish at present, amounts to fully 3000. The return to Dr Webster, about 40 years ago, was only 2568. Though there are no extraordinary instances of longevity, yet severals in this parish arrive at a good old age. There are at present two men, one of them 88, the other 95, and two women, one of them 93, and the other 97 years. In every district of the parish, there are some weavers, male and female, a few tailors, a blacksmith in every barony, some boat-builders and house-carpenters. Every farm keeps boats, and the people go a-fishing for their own use, or when they see an appearance of herrings. There are very few bred seamen, but all expert rowers, good hardy watermen, and skilled in making a boat with fails. There are 4 students from this parish who attend the Universities of Aberdeen. There are 7 established clergymen in this island, viz. 5 on Lord Macdonald's estates, and 2 on Colonel Macleod's. All the inhabitants of Sky are Protestants, of the established Church of Scotland, a very few excepted, who are of the Church of England; yet these persons are endued with such liberality of sentiments, and so free from bigotry, that they frequent

frequent the established Church, and communicate at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Marriages here produce, in general, from 5 to 12 children, and upwards. The cottages are full of inhabitants.

Productions, &c.—The utmost that the whole island can do in the very best seasons, is to serve the inhabitants with meal. In unfavourable seasons they buy large quantities of imported meal. Oats and potatoes are planted in March and April, barley is sown in the beginning of May, and reaped in August. In wet seasons the oats are not cut down till October. The rent of the parish may be about L. 1700 yearly.

Church, Stipend, Poor, &c.—The church was lately repaired. The stipend is L. 50, with L. 10 yearly compensation for manse and glebe. There is no manse in this parish, nor were there ever any manses in Sky, till of late two manses have been built. As there are no markets for provisions in the island, were the ministers confined to a manse and glebe, they could not procure the necessaries of life; therefore they thought it more eligible to possess farms, and to accommodate themselves as to houses in the best manner they could. The Laird of Macleod is patron of the parish.—The number of poor on the list, who are relieved in times of scarcity, is 63. Many of these do not go about for alms, but reside mostly in the house of some relation. There are no other funds for the support of the poor, but the Sunday collections, and the fines of delinquents, so that they are chiefly supported by the charity of the parishioners. In a year of scarcity, however, the session make a shift to buy 20 bolls of meal for their relief. In summer 1773, Government generously sent a cargo of meal to the Western Islands, of which this parish got 44
bolls

bolts and 3 firlots, which was a most seasonable relief to the poorest sort of people.

Price of Provisions and Labour, &c.—As there are no flesh-markets, if a person is disposed to eat beef, he must buy a whole cow; if he would wish to have mutton, he must buy a sheep. A cow costs from L. 2, 10s. to L. 3, 10s. a sheep 6s. Butter, when it can be procured, from 10s. to 12s. cheese 4s. the stone weight. Domestic men-servants yearly wages are from L. 2, 10s. to L. 3, exclusive of 4 pair of shoes to each. A grieve (or overseer) has from L. 4 to L. 7, besides his shoes. Women-servants have from 8s. to 20s. besides 3 pair of shoes. When a man-servant marries, and engages in service for a year, he has for wages as much ground as he can labour, grafs for 2 milk-cows, a dozen of sheep and 2 horses, and 2 days in the week to do his own work, besides his victuals every day he works to his master. Every married labourer in this country has a small portion of land, he raises a little flax, and has a few sheep, so that his wife furnishes him with his whole wearing apparel. Were he to buy yearly, as he would require, a bonnet at 1s. 6d. $3\frac{1}{2}$ yards of coarse cloth for a great coat, at 2s. 6d. the yard, 5 yards of the same for a jacket, waist-coat and 2 pair of breeches, 4 pair of shoes at 2s. 6d. each, 3 pair of hose, and so in proportion for his wife and children; also 12 bolts of meal for himself, wife and children, at 17s. the boll, $\frac{1}{2}$ barrel of salt, at 5s. $\frac{1}{2}$ stone of iron at 2s. together with some other unavoidable little charges, it would be found that the yearly expence of a labourer and his family in the Isle of Sky, could not be much less than L. 20 Sterling.

Antiquities.—There are the remains of 2 Roman Catholic chapels, one in Trumpar in Vaternish, and another in Glendale.

dale. There are also the ruins of several towers, reported by tradition to have been built by the Danes. These towers seem not to have ever exceeded 20 feet in height. They are circular in their form, and were built in a very substantial manner, with large stones, without any cement. They had an inner wall, very neatly built, with an empty space of about 5 feet in breadth, between the two walls, with openings through the inner wall, into the void space or interval between the two walls. They do not appear to have been ever roofed; but the two walls were joined to each other at the top, by long flag-stones laid across between the two walls, and covered with earth. The void spaces between the walls, probably were intended for places of shelter and repose, and for preserving arms and provisions from the weather; and as every one of these towers is built in sight of one or more of the same, it is natural to think that they were intended for places to make signals from by smoke and fire, upon an alarm, or the sight of an enemy, and likewise for defence; for as they are all built upon eminences, a few men could defend one of them against a thousand, before the invention of cannon and gunpowder. There are two tombs in the parish. In one of them, about 70 years since, an urn was found, containing some ashes.

Miscellaneous Observations.—As to the size of the people, they are of a low stature, the men in general from 5 feet 4 inches, to 5 feet 8. There are very few men who are 6 feet high; they are however active and lively. The common people of Sky are blessed with excellent parts; a liberal share of strong natural sense, and great acuteness of understanding. They are peaceable and gentle in their dispositions, and are very industrious when they work for themselves; but when they work for hire or wages, they
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are inclined to be lazy and indifferent; they are rather too fond of changes and emigrations; and though they are brave and very loyal, they are averse to the naval and military services, and are extremely disgusted with the idea of being pressed.—The language commonly spoken is Gaelic.— There are in this parish, 2 vessels with decks, one of 80 tons, the other of 30 tons burden.—Some indications of coal have lately been discovered.—In August 1785, two families were banished from this country for cow-stealing.