

NUMBER VI.

PARISH OF DRUMBLADE.

(COUNTY OF ABERDEEN.)

*By the Rev. Mr GEORGE ABEL.**Name, Situation, &c.*

THE ancient name of this parish was *Drumblait*, the modern is *Drumblade*, which signifies in Gaelic, "hills covered with corn," of which there are several in the parish. Drumblade lies in the county and Synod of Aberdeen and the Presbytery of Turriff. Its form somewhat resembles the body of a fiddle; the length from N. to S. is from 5 to 6, the breadth from E. to W. from 4 to 5, and the circumference about 18 miles. It is bounded by the parishes of Forgue, Inch, Gartly and Huntly; by the two last of which, it is intersected in some places. The surface is composed of small hills and vallies, some of the former are covered with fir, but most are arable. The vallies produce excellent crops where properly cultivated. The soil of the last is a deep loam, and that of the higher ground is thin, but fertile; the air tolerably salubrious, and the people generally healthy.

Animals.—The quadrupeds are horses, black cattle, sheep, hogs, foxes, hares, polecats and badgers. Birds are grouse, partridges, plovers, a few wood cocks, &c. The cattle are not of an uncommon size, though they are very hardy and serviceable. Some cows bred here have sold at L. 8,
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and oxen at L. 16; but the common prices are greatly below these sums, ordinary cows selling from L. 4 to L. 5, and oxen from L. 6 to L. 10.

Minerals.—There is plenty of coarse lime-stone, of free-stone, (called here paissy-whin,) of moorstone, and indications of slate; there being inexhaustible quarries of that article in the neighbourhood. Some few chalybeate springs are to be met with, but weak and little used.

Population.—According to the returns made from hence to Dr Webster, the number of inhabitants in this parish about 1750, was 1125; this has since diminished, as in 1790 there were only 886 individuals, of whom 427 were males, and 459 were females. Of the total number, 812 belonged to the Established Church; 40 were Seceders; 30 of the Episcopal persuasion, and 4 Papists. The annual average of births is $23\frac{1}{2}$; of deaths $20\frac{5}{6}$; and of marriages $4\frac{1}{2}$. The population in 1782, was 876; in 1783, 892; in 1784, 887; in 1786, 914; in 1787, 903; in 1788, 874. The causes of these alterations are young men, such as masons, shoemakers, wrights, flaters, &c. going abroad to improve themselves in their respective crafts; and to the enlisting of some in the army, particularly in the artillery. There are 200 inhabited houses; the property of which is divided among four heritors, only one of whom resides.

Productions, &c.—The parish produces all the ordinary kinds of vegetables in the fields and gardens; supplies itself with provisions, and exports meal, bear, and oats. Sowing and reaping depend much upon the seasons. Pease and oats are sown (if the ground be dry and fit for the seed) from the 1st of March to the middle of April; barley and
common

common bear from the last period till Whitsunday. Barley, bear, and Peebles, or early oats, are reaped from the end of August to the middle of September, common oats to the end of October; and sometimes in very late seasons, and backward weather, the harvest continues till the beginning, nay middle of December, as in 1782. There may be about 400 acres in plantations. Each farm has a proportion of pasture-ground set apart for the cattle and sheep; and it must be acknowledged there is too much waste ground. There are some inclosures in the parish; but the greatest part of it is uninclosed, as the people, though sensible of the benefits of inclosing, cannot afford the outlay of money necessary for that purpose.

Rent, Wages, &c.—Best arable or meadow ground lets in general at 14 s. or 15 s. the acre; inferior, from 5 s. to 10 s. The rent of the whole parish is above L. 1622. Landed property is not often changing. The daily wages of a labourer in husbandry are 9 d.; in harvest from 1 s. to 1 s. 3 d.; of a carpenter 1 s.; of a mason 1 s. 3 d.; of a flater 1 s. 2 d.; of a tailor 10 d. When men and women are employed for the whole year in husbandry, the wages of the former are from L. 4 to L. 6, and of the latter, from L. 2 to L. 2, 10 s. exclusive of victuals and lodging, with which they are also supplied by their masters. None have been obliged to leave the parish for want of employment. The fuel commonly used is peat, turf, heath, broom, whins, (all found in the parish), and English coal, landed at Banff or Portfroy. There is a very fine clay, of a yellowish brown colour, (called here clay-marl), to be got in great quantities, in which very little sand appears. It is only used as a compost for manure, or is laid upon grass-ground with little propriety or judgment.

Church,

Church, Stipend, Poor, &c.—The church was rebuilt in 1773. The former church had been built in the year 1110, as appears from raised figures upon one of the keep stones of the east end; and the appearance of the work seemed to confirm its antiquity. The value of the living, including the glebe, is L. 67 : 15 : 8. The Earl of Kintore is patron. The number of poor receiving support from the funds, on an average of 5 years, is 12. The last year's amount of the contributions, and the produce of alms, legacies, and all the other funds destined to their use, was L. 24 : 10 : 5.

Miscellaneous Observations.—The general size of the people is from 5 feet 5 inches, to 5 feet 10 inches. They are not remarkably indolent; but with regard to industry, there is room for improvement. They are economical, live soberly, and rather poorly, but seem tolerably contented with their condition; are humane, and discover their humanity on every occasion. The having a little more the command of money at first setting out in the world, might greatly meliorate their condition. The roads in this parish are not in good repair, on account of the clay soil, the want of gravel, the great length of highway, and the small number of people to look after it. The statute-labour is, however, exacted, and but in very few instances commuted. There are no turnpikes; the general opinion seeming to be against them.

Antiquities.—There are three *tumuli* in this parish; the largest, Meet-hillock, is near Slioch, where King Robert Bruce encamped, when he came N. in pursuit of some of the adherents of Cummine Earl of Badenoch, after defeating that nobleman at Inverurie. A small hill above that tumulus is called to this day Robin's Height, and had on the
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top large stones, with inscriptions on them, now all broken down and carried away; at least none are at present to be seen above the ground. Tradition reports, that these three tumuli were raised by Bruce's army, as posts of communication for his soldiers; and the orders were given by the King at Meet-hillock. None of them have been opened.

Famine in 1782.—The crop in 1782 almost totally failed; of course the year 1783 would have proved calamitous in the highest degree, had there not been a very large supply of pease procured from Norfolk, which was sold out twice a-week, at prime cost, in the smallest quantities called for. There was also barley brought from Aberdeen, and retailed in meal by private adventurers. During this period none died of want; the people were more healthy than usual; and the women in general exerted themselves so much in spinning, and sitting up at their work every other night, as to produce double the usual quantity of linen yarn, thus contributing more to the support of their families than the men.

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