

NUMBER VII.
PARISH OF SKENE.
(COUNTY OF ABERDEEN.)

By the Rev. Mr JAMES HOGG.

Name, Situation, Soil, &c.

ACCORDING to tradition one of the progenitors of the present laird of Skene is said to have killed a boar that endangered the King's life, Malcolm Kenmore, with a knife or dagger, called in Gaelic, a *Skian*, and received as reward the greater part of the lands in the parish. Hence the name of the family of Skene, and that of the parish. The parish is situated in the county of Aberdeen, and lies from 6 to 12 measured miles N. W. from the town. It is in the Synod and Presbytery of Aberdeen. Its extent in circumference is nearly from 20 to 24 measured miles. The form is nearly oval; the length is 6, and the breadth from 3 to 4 measured miles. It is bounded on the E. by the parishes of New-hills and Peterculter; on the S. by Peterculter; on the W. by Echt and Cluny; on the N. W. by Kemnay; and on the N. by Kintore and Kinellar. The appearance of the country is hilly and rocky. The nature of the soil is various; the predominant quality is that of gravel. Some spots are fertile enough, others very barren. The air is sufficiently dry and healthy. The most prevalent distempers are fevers. The parish abounds with mineral springs. These might be rendered serviceable in scorbutic

VOL. IV.

H

and

and scrophulous diseases; but they are rarely applied to for relief. The tendency which the lands have in general to minerals, operates to their disadvantage; being inimical to vegetation, and quickly consuming manure of every kind. There is a lake of considerable extent, the lake of Skene, about a measured mile in length, and something more than 3-4ths in breadth. It is visited, especially in winter, by duck, geese, and occasionally by swans; pike and eel in great abundance, and of considerable size are found in it. The pike is good, I believe, at all seasons, it can be caught. The eel is in greatest perfection towards the end of September, and beginning of October, when it quits its summer-quarters, and proceeds down the burn which flows from the loch. A canal from the lake to Aberdeen, fit for navigating boats of an ordinary size, has been projected. The scheme is certainly practicable, and would, if carried into execution, be of considerable advantage to this parish, and the country around it. A cut of about 16 measured miles in length, through a country sufficiently flat for the purpose, is all that would be required, without, I should think, the aid of almost a single lock. But the country must be farther advanced in cultivation, before such a scheme, I suspect, can or will be attempted. The hills are in general green and rocky. Moorstone and granite are to be found in abundance, and are used in building.

Population.—The population does not appear to be materially different from what it was 10 or 20 years ago. That it is on the increase, manifestly appears from the registers of marriages and baptisms, which have been accurately enough kept. The population, according to Dr Webster, was 1251. About the 1777, it was 1306. In 1787, it was 1256. The amount at present, is 1233, of which 572 are males, and 661 females. There are no towns nor villages

villages in the parish. The annual average of births from 1740 to 1750, was 39; from 1760 to 1770, 30; from 1780 to 1790, 19. The annual average of deaths from 1760 to 1770, 30; from 1780 to 1790, 25. The annual average of marriages from 1760 to 1770, 15; from 1780 to 1790, 9. The rule for ascertaining the population of any parish or district, (*vis.* by multiplying the number of births by 26, and the number of deaths by 35), does not appear to be at all accurate; nor has it nearly answered in any instance that I have heard of, where it has been tried. The number of souls under 10 years of age, amounts to 235; from 10 to 20, is 274; from 20 to 50, is 460; from 50 to 70, is 158; above 70, and below 100, is 106. There were formerly 51 farms, or rather ploughs, in the parish. The number is now diminished. A farmer's family, at an average, may consist of from 6 to 9 persons. There are 2 or 3 merchants, and 14 or 15 tradesmen. A very considerable proportion of the present inhabitants of the parish are natives of other parishes. The whole parish is of the Established Church, except 1 Seceder, and 9 Roman Catholics. The proportion of the annual births to the whole population is nearly as 1 to 65; of the annual marriages to the whole population as 1 to 137; of the annual deaths to the whole population nearly as 1 to 49. At an average, each marriage may be said to produce from 4 to 6 children.

Productions Agriculture, &c.—On the lands belonging to Skene only have trees been hitherto raised. No plantations have till of late been made, and even that to no great extent, nor improvements indeed of any kind, owing to invincible obstructions. Considering the great quantity of waste land in the parish, fit only for bearing trees, the neglect of cultivating them is much to be regretted. Trees of all kinds

tend greatly to beautify a country, and prove ultimately highly useful and profitable. Ash, plane, pine, common fir, willow, larix, are the kinds of trees which are principally produced. The larix is only of late introduced; and it seems to thrive better, and advance faster than any other tree. It is attended with this singular advantage too, that it thrives almost in any soil, and in any situation. Horses, black cattle, and sheep, are the animals which the parish produces. The number of cattle amounts to 1185; of sheep to 1205; of horses, to 199. The number of acres may possibly be, at an average, above 8000: Of these, about 2300 are called infield; about 3056 outfield; about 1640 pasture-ground; 534 mofs, and about 520 moor-ground. The greater part of the arable ground is employed in raising oats and bear. A middling farm will sow about 36 or 40 bolls of oats, and from 4 to 6 bolls of bear. Wheat, rye, hemp, flax, are not cultivated in this corner. About 64 acres only are employed in raising turnip and potatoes. The artificial grasses occupy about 490 acres. The parish for the most part supplies itself with articles of provision, and rarely imports or exports. Oats in general are sown towards the middle and end of April, and reaped in October. Bear is sown about the beginning of May, and reaped in general in September. Turnip are sown towards the end of June. About 135 or 140 acres are employed in raising forest-trees. The valued rent of the parish is L. 2500 : 16 : 8 Scots. — The neighbourhood of Aberdeen is advantageous to the parish, where it finds a ready market for every article of produce; and has but a moderate distance to carry lime, &c. in return, for manuring its fields. Among its disadvantages, are to be numbered its difficulty of improvement, (being in general full
of

of both rocks and stones, and a considerable part of it wet and spongy), the small progress which agriculture hath hitherto made, and I may add the quantity of moss in the parish. The last assertion may appear paradoxical. It is nevertheless true: For till the lands belonging to the town of Aberdeen were feued, the greater number of the subtenants, and many even of the tenants upon these lands, employed a great part of their time in digging and driving peat to Aberdeen, to the almost total neglect of the cultivation of their fields, without deriving in return any proportionable compensation.

Stipend, Church, Poor, &c.—The stipend, including the glebe, is from L. 70 to L. 80 Sterling. Mr Skene of Skene is patron. When the church was built nobody knows. It is very old, and has not been repaired for a long time past. The manse was built in the year 1779. There are 4 heritors in the parish, two of whom only reside, and one of these but occasionally. The number of poor receiving alms is at present 24. The annual amount of the contributions for their relief is about L. 11, 10 s. Sterling. The produce of legacies is L. 6, 10 s. Sterling.

Wages, Fuel, &c.—The wages of a day-labourer, in husbandry and other work, are from 8 d. to 1 s.; a carpenter's from 1 s. to 1 s. 2 d.; a mason's about 1 s. 6 d.; a taylor's about 8 d. or 9 d.; a smith's about 1 s. 1 d. or 1 s. 2 d. The only fuel used in the parish is peat: The mosses in this country, in general, are full of the roots of trees; an evident proof, that it has been formerly much more covered with wood than it is at present. The trees commonly found in our mosses are oak, aller, elm, hazel

zel and common fir; the oak predominates. The usual wages of male-servants are from L. 4 to L. 6 a-year, and of female-servants from L. 2 to L. 3 Sterling. The kind of plough, generally made use of, is the common Scotch plough. There are 140 carts; only 1 chaise.

Antiquities.—Besides 2 Druidical temples, pretty entire, and a number of barrows or tumuli, there are; on a moor covered with barrows, about an English mile S. of the church, evident traces of an encampment; near which is a very large collection of stones or a cairn. About 3-4ths of a mile N. E. of the church, on the top of a hill, are the remains of a wall, which appear to have been formerly resorted to as a place of strength.

Miscellaneous Observations.—The spirit for industry seems at last to be rousing. Improvements of every kind are progressive in their nature, and require time and encouragement to bring them to any degree of perfection. They are on their progress northward; and he who shall accelerate it, well deserves to be accounted by his country a public benefactor. The state of the roads is only tolerable; there are no turnpikes, and the opinion of the country seems, in general, to be against them. Several bridges, that were very much wanted, have been erected. Inclosing of land is going on fast; the rent of infield land, in general, may, at an average, be 14s. or 16s. the acre; outfield about 2s. 6d. pasture 6d. The rent of a middling farm may be, at an average, from L. 25 to L. 30 Sterling. The number of farms in the parish is diminishing. The improvements carrying on by one heritor, and the feuing, of late, of the lands belonging to the town of
Aberdeen,

of Skene.

Aberdeen, may be assigned as the cause; by which last, 31 ploughs have been reduced to 14; but the rents have considerably encreased, and a spirit of improvement has been excited. The situation of the parish in 1782 and 1783 was, as I have been informed, very wretched; and had not the peace, at that critical period, taken place, a famine, it is believed, must, in this country in general, have inevitably ensued. The peace, which had been bought up for the use of the fleet, were imported in great quantities into Scotland; and this supply, along with the laudable exertions of communities and individuals, proved, under Providence, the means of saving the country.

NUM-