

NUMBER XXXV.

PARISH OF INVERCHAOLAIN,

(COUNTY OF ARGYLE.)

*By the Rev. Mr HUGH MACTAVISH, Minister.**Name, Situation and Extent.*

INVERCHAOLAIN is derived from the Gaelic language, *inver*, signifying fit for crop, or *inner*, (as it is sometimes spelt), fit for tillage, and *caolain*, or *caolambain*, a small water or rivulet. This etymology of Inverchaolain is very descriptive of the place, being a plain at the foot of a rivulet, fit for tillage or cultivation. It is situated in the district of Cowal*, and shire of Argyll. It is intersected by an arm of the sea, called Lochstreven, which runs about 8 miles

* It has been humorously observed, since flocks of *sheep* have expelled the droves of *cows*, which formerly were kept in this part of the country, that the district should be called *Sheep-all*, instead of *Cow-all*; but the word Cowal is derived from the Gaelic, and not from the English.

miles into the country, the two sides of which, with the channel that divides the island of Bute from this part of Cowal, present a sea-coast in this parish of above 3 miles.

Lake, Fish, Surface and Soil.—Lochstreven abounds with fish, viz. haddocks, whiting^s, small cod, flounders, seath, and salmon; and in some seasons there have been remarkable captures of herrings. In the years 1789 and 1790, the herrings caught in Lochstreven, might be valued at L. 3000 Sterling. The surface of this parish is for the most part rugged; a ridge of mountains rises with a steep ascent all along from the coast. In some places, there are small flat fields nigh the shore, but for the most part the ascent from the sea is immediate; and about half a mile above its level, the soil is thin and sandy, more calculated for grazing than tillage. All the mountains, some years ago, were covered with heath, but many of them now, by being pastured with sheep, are mostly green, and it is likely, (from the rapid change that has already taken place, in the appearance and value of these mountains, in this and the neighbouring parishes), that the heath will soon be entirely extirpated, and the value of the ground by that means considerably increased.—It may be proper here to add, that the extirpation of heath, and the production of grass in its room, very much depends on a proper system of burning the heath, which should always be done in the month of March or April; and if the ground burnt, is kept free from cattle, for 18 months afterwards, the improvement is very great indeed, many new grasses springing up, from the enriching quality of the ashes of the heath, which were never known before. But, if the land is too soon pastured on, the grasses are weak and tender, and the sheep or cattle pull them up root and all, by which the pasture is very materially injured.

Agriculture, Sheep-grazing, &c — Though the lands in this parish are better calculated for pasture than tillage, yet the few fields along the sea coast, might be turned to much better account. The people, however, are so prejudiced in favour of the ancient mode of farming, that they can hardly be persuaded to adopt any other; so that the same bad husbandry, that prevailed in this country 40 years ago, still obtains. Instead of a rotation of crops, suited to the soil, they have, for the most part, a succession of the same crop for two or three years. The crops, principally raised, are oats, bear and potatoes. After the first break they generally sow bear, then two crops of oats successively. Sea weed is used as manure for oats, and, where the land has rested for two or three years, produces good crops. The ground is manured for bear and potatoes, with the dung of their black cattle, housed in winter; and though there is limestone in the parish, the oppressive duty upon coals, and the distance of every other fuel, make the expence of burning lime so enormous, that the people cannot afford to lay it on their land.—The only person in this parish, who has paid particular attention to farming, is James Lamont, Esq; of Knockdow, a gentleman of considerable landed property; who, under many disadvantages of climate and soil, raises green crops, equal to any in the west of Scotland. He manures his ground strongly, sometimes with lime, and at other times with a mixture of lime and earth, as it suits his land. His returns of bear are from 8 to 10 bolls an acre; and of oats from 6 to 8. He has practised, with success, what was never known before in this country, however frequent in the southern parts of Scotland,—the plan of feeding sheep on turnips in the fields. In this manner, the sheep are fattened with little trouble, the land manured, and the necessity of summer fallow precluded.—The farmers, in his immediate neighbourhood,

bourhood, are so sensible of his superior mode of cultivation, that they have, (with great advantage to themselves), adopted it on a small scale; and it is hoped, in due time, his example will have more general influence over all this country.—There are 40 ploughs in the parish. Some plow with 2, some with 3, and some with 4 horses. The average produce of oats, on ground cultivated on the old plan, is from 3 to 4 bolls *per* acre; of bear from 4 to 5.—The prices of all our productions, are regulated by the Greenock market. The produce in grain being short of the consumption, an annual importation, of about 400 bolls of oat-meal, is necessary. Some poultry, butter and cheese are exported.

Sheep.—Our mountains, which were of old pastured with black cattle and horses, are now covered with sheep, which has not only made a pleasant change on the surface, but has also increased the rents considerably, and enables the graziers to live better, and make money. There may be about 14,000 sheep in the parish; the Crawford muir black-faced sheep, are the kind that are thought to suit best; but many of the graziers here, are liberal minded gentlemen, fond of making experiments, and of improving their breed of sheep. Some of the Cheviot, or long-faced white sheep, have lately been brought to this parish. Some of them are pastured in our mountains, and others on our low ground. Those on the mountains seem to thrive equally well with those in the low lands, which is a proof of their hardiness and fitness for the climate. The prices of sheep and wool have increased of late; three-year-old widders are sold at from 10 s. to 14 s.; ewes, (commonly called old or draught ewes), from 6 s. to 8 s.; lambs, from 3 s. to 5 s.; wool laid with tar, from 5 s. to 6 s. a stone, (Trone weight, 24 English ounces to the

the pound); white, from 7 s. to 8 s. The Society for extending Fisheries and Improvements, have been the means of improving the sheep of this country considerably, by the premiums, which they have been in the use of giving, of L. 14 Sterling, to the person who grazed the three best parcels of tups, 6 to each parcel.—This has raised an emulation among the graziers; and as the flock of the person, who gets the premiums, is esteemed the best, he consequently obtains a higher price for his sheep, in addition to his premium. The judges, appointed to determine the qualities of the tups, presented for a competition, are at a loss, whether to give it in favour of those whose wool is of the best quality, or in favour of the strongest and best made rams, not knowing which of these points the Society have principally in view; but they generally determine, in favour of those of the greatest strength and beauty, in preference to those who have a greater quantity of wool, or of superiority in quality, but an inferior shape or carcase. Besides the *braxy*, (a disease common to sheep of the first year, or hogs, as they are commonly called), by which nearly a fourth are cut off, there is another disease fatal to sheep of all ages, during the summer months, called the *sturdy*, or dizziness in the head. The symptoms of this disease are watery tumours in the fore or back part of the head; and the only cure, that has been tried, is cutting away these tumours, by which sometimes the animal's life is preserved; though many die immediately after the operation is performed. The cause of this disease has never been ascertained, nor any preventative discovered.

Black Cattle and Horses.—The rage for sheep stocks has banished the practice of rearing many black cattle; though some judicious farmers think, a few on the hills, in summer, along with the sheep, would pasture on those grasses
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which the sheep do not like, and which are otherwise entirely lost. There may be about 400 cattle in the parish, and 140 horses. Aged black cattle are sold at from L. 4 to L. 5 Sterling; horses, from L. 10 to L. 12.

Antiquities.—At the S. E. extremity of this parish, upon a farm called *Ardein*, there stands an artificial hill, on which the ancient judges of the country held their courts, and administered justice. On a dry heath, near the shore of the same farm, and also at *Achavuillin* in that neighbourhood, there are many vestiges of graves, some marked by cairns of stones, others by a single stone at each grave. A few of them were opened, and found to contain human bones.—It is probable, that all these, either buried under the cairns, or whose graves are marked, by the more simple monument of a single stone at each grave, were men either of rank and figure, or who had distinguished themselves by their warlike exploits; and that these monuments were meant to point out, that the bodies of people of eminence were deposited under them.—About the year 1226, Olave, King of the Isles, invaded Bute, and having besieged the castle of *Rothefay*, he took it, with the loss of nearly 300 of his men. Four of his ships were driven from their anchors by a storm, and all the people on board perished. It is supposed, that the graves along the *Ardein* and *Achavuillin* coast, (being opposite to the bay of *Rothefay*), are the dormitories of those dead bodies, who were driven upon that shore, after the loss of their ships. By tradition we are told, that *Ardein* was the scene of a very bloody conflict, which took place between the people of that neighbourhood, and a party of young courtiers, who attended the palace of Robert III. at *Rothefay*. The gallant courtiers, coming on a hunting excursion to this part of the country, were so enamoured with the charms of the young women they met with, that they
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wished to become rather too familiar with them. This roused the resentment of their lovers, who, assembling all the males of the district, drove these intruders to the shore; where, an engagement taking place, many of them atoned for their gallantry with their blood*.

Climate and Diseases.—Being furrounded with hills, whose tops intercept the clouds, we have great and frequent falls of rain. This, and not sowing our oats, before the middle of April, make the harvest late, and our crops are, consequently, much hurt by the equinoctial rains and winds. Though the air is rather moist, there are many instances of longevity; there are two men now living, in the parish, above 90 years of age. A man died lately that was said to be 100, and there are several between 70 and 80. The people are, in general, healthy, living mostly near the sea; those farthest from it, not being above three miles distant.

The

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history
Vp 294*

* At the mouth of Lochlidden, there is a small island called *Eallangheirrig* the property of Mr Campbell of South-Hall, (who is the principal landholder in this parish), memorable in the annals of last century. In the year 1685, the unfortunate Archibald Earl of Argyll, having, in concert with the Duke of Monmouth attempted an invasion of the kingdom, brought with him three frigates, and a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition. He landed at Dunstaffnage, on the N. W. coast of Argyllshire; and having collected an army of about 3000 men, he ordered his ships from Dunstaffnage to Eallangheirrig, which he caused fortify in the best manner he could; there he deposited his spare arms and ammunition, under protection of his ships, and a garrison of 180 men. But soon after, three ships of war and some frigates arrived in the frith of Clyde, and proceeded towards Eallangheirrig, to whom the Earl's frigates and garrison immediately surrendered. In the castle of Eallangheirrig were found 5000 stand of arms, 500 barrels of gunpowder, several cannon and other implements of war. The captains of the frigates, after removing these stores, blew up the castle, which put an end to any farther hostile operations, on the part of that unfortunate nobleman, who, with his party, found means to escape; but he was soon afterwards taken, and met with a fate he little merited from his country.

The only epidemical diseases, by which we are infested, are fevers, (which cut off many); the small pox, in the natural way, and the measles, which prove fatal to numbers of children.—Inoculation for the small pox, though not universal, is becoming more general among the lower classes of people. The few, that die of inoculation, in comparison with those by the natural infection, has, in some measure, reconciled them to a practice, which they long held in abhorrence.

Church, Poor and School.—The Earl of Bute is patron. The stipend is mostly paid in victual, and may amount, including the glebe, (*communibus annis*), to L. 110 Sterling, yearly. The inhabitants are of the Established Church, excepting two Seceders. The manse was built in the year 1736, with offices of stone and lime, and slated in the 1791; and the church in the year 1745. The manse is in very good repair, and the church is in as good order, as most country churches.—The poor are supported by the collections at the church upon Sundays; the interest of a fund saved out of former collections; the dues of marriages and christenings, and fines exacted from delinquents. There is an established schoolmaster, with a salary of L. 7 Sterling, besides a small allowance, as precentor and session-clerk.—He professes teaching of English, Arithmetic, and Book-keeping. The number, who attend him, are about 12 in summer, and 20 in winter. In the summer months, many of them are employed in herding, as some of their parents cannot afford to hire people; besides, if their children can read English, write, and understand a little of arithmetic, they think them sufficiently well educated.

Farmer Society.—A society has been lately established in this, and the neighbouring parish of Dunoan, called the
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Farmer Society, which, it is hoped, will in time supersede the necessity of making any provision for the poor. Every member, at his admission, has the option either to pay L. 1, 1 s. Sterling, and be exempted from any future payment, or 6 s. at entry, and 1 s. yearly. This money is lent upon proper security; and when it amounts to L. 100 Sterling, the interest is to be applied to the relief of the indigent, and the widows and children of the members; and, if there are none of this description, to any other necessitous persons in the parishes in which the members reside. The office bearers and managers are appointed yearly, to take charge of the business. This society is only as yet in its infancy, but many of the gentlemen of the country, sensible of its being founded upon good principles, have joined them; and, it is hoped, it will soon be put upon such a footing, as to afford an ample provision for the poor, and preclude the necessity of poor's rates, which have been much and justly complained of, as prejudicial to industry and virtue.

Population.—The return made to Dr Webster of the population of this parish, in the year 1755, was 944 souls. From the register of baptisms, of that and later dates, there is evidently a considerable decrease. This has been owing to a practice, that has become general for some years past, of letting large tracts of ground, to one or two individuals for sheep-grazing, which were formerly occupied by 8 or 10 different tenants. The landholders found it their advantage to let their lands in this manner, as one or two people, who had money to flock the land with sheep, and understood how to manage them, could afford to pay a higher rent, than many of the former possessors, who neither understood grazing nor tillage, and could hardly, by their poor unskilled efforts, gain a miserable subsistence,

subsistence for themselves and families. Happily for them, they were mostly removed to the neighbouring towns, where they found sufficient employment, and where many of their children, by the advantages of education, (which they could not enjoy in their own country), have raised themselves to independence, become useful members of the community, and a support and comfort to their parents in their old age. The number of families, at present, is 83, of souls, 504. The annual average of marriages is 4, and of births, 12. There is no register of burials kept.

Proprietors and Rent.—Seven heritors have property in this parish, one of whom, (Mr Campbell of South-hall), has nearly the one half. Not influenced by the general taste for dissipation and extravagance, so prevalent among most young men of fortune, he passes the greatest part of his time upon his own estate, ornamenting his delightful place of residence, which commands a beautiful prospect of the Frith of Clyde, island of Bute, and village of Largs, with that much admired place belonging to Lord Glasgow, called *Kelburn*. He, and Mr Lamont of Knockdow, are the only residing heritors. The valued rent of the parish is L. 204 : 8 : 5 Sterling, and the real rent may be about L. 1500 Sterling.

Miscellaneous Observations.—Natural woods, such as oak, ash, hazle, birch, &c. are a considerable article of sale. They are cut down at 20 years old. The only planting is about Mr Campbell of South-hall's mansion house, and Mr Lamont of Knockdow's. There are grouse in the hills, and black cocks in the woods, a few partridges in the low grounds, and plenty of hares. The manners of the people, dress, prices of labour, and language, are the same with those of the neighbouring parishes, which have been already communicated to the public.