

N U M B E R XXIII.

P A R I S H O F U R R A Y .

(Counties of Ross and Inverness.—Presbytery of Dingwall.—Synod of Ross.)

By the Reverend Mr JOHN DOWNIE.

Name, Situation, and Extent.

URRAY is composed of the united parishes of Urray and Kilchrist. The former seems to derive its name from its local situation. The church and burying-ground lie on a large plain, on the banks of the rapid river Orrin, near its conflux with the Connon. The Orrin has, in the course of ages, evidently shifted its bed, and its passable fords, through every part of that plain, and would repeat its ravages almost every season, were it not restrained by the annual exertions of the surrounding proprietors. Hence it is probable, the name is derived from *Ur-a*, the *new ford*. *Kilchrist* is evidently *Cella Christi*, a burying-ground consecrated to Christ.—It is situated chiefly in the county of Ross: A small part of it lies in Inverness-shire. It extends from the Frith of Beauly on the south, to the north side of the river Connon, about 7 English miles in a straight line, nearly from south to north. Its breadth on the banks of the Connon, from east to west, is about 6 English miles, but does not exceed 3 towards the southern boundary, along the Frith of Beauly. The intermediate space lines the foot of the great chain of mountains which

which extend from thence to the west coast of Scotland. There is a *davoch* of land belonging to this parish in the valley of Strathconnon, in the bosom of the western mountains, at the distance of 10 computed, or 18 English miles. It is surrounded by the parish of Contin, and forms a part of the mission in that parish.

Surface, Soil, and Climate.—The general face of the parish presents a picturesque view of corn-fields, intermixed with barren muir; clumps of natural wood *, rapid streams, large plantations around gentlemen's seats, with different views of the two beautiful Friths of Dingwall and Beaully, which, as canals formed by the hand of nature, and penetrating for upwards of 20 miles into a populous country, invite the merchant and manufacturer to settle on their banks.—The soil is as various as the general face of the ground; but, on the whole, is warm, dry, and productive. The fields on the slopes of the rising grounds are comparatively of a richer soil than the low ground, except a part of the estate of Lovat, which once belonged to the priory of Beaully, and is a deep, rich, carse ground. The plains abound with pebbles, from 4 to 6 or 8 pound weight, evidently rounded by friction, and intermixed with beds of dry sand and gravel. Hence a considerable part of the low ground is barren dry muir, producing only a short heath; and the arable land (with a few exceptions) of inferior quality to that on the high lands. On one estate there are several small hollows
surrounded

* Every little burn and meadow presents a bush of natural wood, consisting mostly of alder, interspersed with ash. There are a few bushes of birch, some oaks and willows. Around gentlemen's seats there are to be seen large plantations of firs, and other forest trees. They continue to plant every year, particularly Mr Mackenzie of Seaforth, who rears an extensive nursery for that purpose.

surrounded by this dry barren soil, which seem to have been once small lakes, but are now filled with peat moss. On the bottom of several of them some strata of shell marl have been found. These phenomena seem to prove the existence of a general deluge, by which these stones have been rounded, and the shells deposited. There are no lakes or swampy ground in the parish, except one large meadow on the banks of the Connon.—The air is dry, and free from noxious vapours, which conduces greatly to the healthfulness of the climate. No part of the common road, between the Frith of Beaully and the river Connon, (which is almost the whole length of the parish), seems to be above 50 feet higher than the surface of the sea. It is defended on the east from the storms of the German Ocean by a tract of country, upwards of 20 miles in extent, towards Tain and Cromarty, on the north by the hill of Weavas, and on the west by the great chain of mountains stretching to the west coast. It is worth remarking, that the western mountains make the weather alternately foul and fair on the east and west borders of them, in some measure similar to the monsoons on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts. The west and south-west winds blow most frequently, during which it generally rains on the west coast, and is fair weather on this side of the hills; or, at most, there are only slight occasional showers. On the other hand, the east wind uniformly brings rain or fleet on the east coast; but the storm dies away in the intermediate hills, and there is dry weather and sunshine on the west coast.

Agriculture, Produce, and Cattle.—Barley, oats, and potatoes, are the principal crops *. Most of the gentlemen have inclosed

* In the district of which this is a part, from Inverness round by Beaully to Dingwall, grain sells higher than in any other

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inclosed their farms; and, by putting them into a rotation of fallow, corn, and green crops, give a laudable example in agriculture to their tenants. They use the English plough with two horses, without a driver, with most of the other instruments of husbandry used in the Lothians. The tenants, however, have not yet surmounted their prejudices in favour of old customs, and are satisfied with following the mode used by their grand-fires, except in the culture of potatoes, which has taken place only within the last 30 years. The lands are still open; nor do they shew any desire to have them inclosed. They use a plough peculiar to the country, drawn for the most part by six small oxen, or by two horses and four oxen. Almost every kind of carriage is performed with carts*. The wheels are timber tumblers, bought at about 2 s. the pair, on which are placed frames for the different purposes, made by the tenants themselves. Horses are the only

other place in the north of Scotland. The reason is, that it abounds with licenced stills, which consume the barley. It is the nearest corn country to a large extent of the west coast and Mid Highlands. The Highlanders are supplied from thence with oat-meal and whisky: Hence considerable quantities of barley and oat-meal are imported by the Friths of Dingwall and Beaully to a sure and ready market. Home-made barley of crops 1789 and 1790 sold at 18 s. *per* boll. At the same time, barley sold in Murray at 16 s. and 16 s. 6 d. Oat-meal of these crops sold at from 16 s. to 18 s. 9 stones barley of crop 1791, sells at from 18 s. 6 d. to 20 s. *per* boll. Potatoes generally sell at from 6 d. to 8 d. a peck; beef, from 2 d. to 4 d. a pound; mutton and pork at 2½ d.; a hen at 6 d.; chickens at 2 d. each; eggs at 1½ d. *per* dozen; a wedder of the country breed at 6 s.

* The great number of cottagers affords labourers, who are employed by the proprietors in improving their farms. The common hire is 6 d. a day. In harvest, men and women earn 6 d. and, in some places, their maintenance. Common men-servants are hired at 3 l. a year, women at 1 l. 10 s. Several young people of both sexes, and some married men, go to the south country to earn harvest wages, and return the beginning of winter.

ly cattle whose numbers can be ascertained with the greatest precision. The tenants (of whom there are 120) keep, at an average, 4 horses each. Some of the cottagers have from 1 to 3 horses. Hence they may be estimated at 600. They are small, but hardy, and are reared by the western Highlanders, and sold at our markets. The price, till lately, was from 3 l. to 4 l. Within the last two years, the south country drovers have raised the price from 15 s. to 20 s. a head. The average value may be computed at 3 l. It will not be far wide of the truth to estimate the number of black cattle at 10 head each tenant, including his oxen; and each mailer at 1, which will amount to 1448, worth 40 s. each at an average. Both horses and black cattle are sent to graze in the western hills, from May to Michaelmas, at about 1 s. 6 d. *per* head. Of late, since sheep-farming is become prevalent in the Highlands, the price of grazing low country cattle is raised to 2 s. Horses are returned in July to bring home fuel. If the weather admit of that service being soon performed, they are sent back. The residing heritors keep about 40 draught horses, worth 15 l. each, and 250 black cattle, worth 5 l. at an average, besides riding horses and wheel carriages.

Rivers and Fish.—The Beaully empties itself into the Frith of that name at the S. W. point of the parish, and cannot be said to belong to it. The Connon intersects the parish near the north end, and is composed of four great branches*.

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* There is a spring on the bank of the Connon, near the west end of the parish, strongly impregnated with sulphur. The water is as clear as any other spring, but smells like the scourgings of a fowl gun. It is said to partake of the nature of Harrowgate water, and to be useful in scorbutic complaints and rheumatism. It is of the same kind with the much frequented spring of Strathpeffer, in the neighbourhood.

The Orrin, running from the S. W. falls into the Cannon at Urray, and intersects the parish from south to north. About two miles west from Urray, the Garve falls in on the north side, which running from W. N. W. rises on the confines of Lochbroom. Thence 5 miles farther west is the junction of the other two branches, the Meig and the Lichart. The former rises on the borders of Lochcarron to the W. S. W.; and the source of the latter is on the confines of Gairloch to the west.—The Cannon abounds in salmon and pike. It has few trouts, except sea-trout in the months of July and August. A Company from Berwick farms the salmon fishing, along with several other fishings in the neighbourhood. During the spring months, and beginning of summer, they send considerable quantities of kitted salmon to the London market; but are kind enough, (though against their own interest), to indulge the neighbouring families with a competency for their tables at 2 d. a pound. But the body of the people are more indebted for their support, to the shoals of herrings, which, for the most part, appear annually in the Frith of Beaully, at the ferry of Kessock. They visit us in the beginning of harvest, and sometimes continue till February. They are smaller and leaner than those caught on the west coast, and therefore unfit for the foreign market. From 14 to 22 score were sold for 6 d. in the year 1791. They serve the adjacent parts of the counties of Ross, Inverness, Nairn, and Moray. People from the braes of Banff, Aberdeen, and Perth shires, come to purchase them. It is said, that, in the beginning of the fishing, their entrails have produced oil equal in value to the prime cost.

Fuel, Roads, and Bridges.—Most of the estates have mosses on the adjacent hills, yet the proprietors, in general, use coals along with peats in their own houses. Except on one estate,

estate, the mosses are at such a distance, that only two draughts can be got home in a summer's day. The roads are steep. No part of a farmer's work exhausts his horses so much as the leading of his peats, and that at the time his horses ought to be at grass. Were that impolitic and oppressive duty at the Red-head taken off, it were cheaper for the poorest tenant in this parish to burn coals, than to wear out his horses leading peats. The poorer part of the cottagers must therefore satisfy themselves with sandy clods picked from the adjacent moors with the breast spade.—The great north road * leading to Sutherland and Caithness passes through this parish, and is kept in excellent repair. The county road, leading to the west Highlands, was made about 30 years ago, and is kept in tolerable repair as far as the parish extends. A road begins in this district leading to Fortrose, and another to Cromarty, both eastward, besides cross roads. The whole were made, and are kept in repair by the statute labour. The gentlemen of the county, availing themselves of the plenty of hands, are attentive to this branch of police.—There are two bridges; one of stone over a branch of the Orrin; another over the Orrin itself, of timber; both built at the expence of the county.

Manufactures.

* There are some stones standing on end, about 5 feet above the ground near Beauly, on the side of the great north road. Several cairns or barrows have been lately opened, where human bones were found; and the remains of offensive armour made of copper, which the gentleman who found them sent to the Society of Antiquaries at Edinburgh. In a barrow opened at Brahan Castle, an urn was found containing small pieces of bones, but was unluckily broken by the inattention of the labourers. It was made of burnt clay, and beautifully varnished over both within and without. The tower of Fairburn reminds one of that barbarous period, when every great man found it necessary to live in a fortress.

Manufactures.—Small spots of lint are to be seen on every farm. Most of the inhabitants rear sheep, for their wool. They manufacture both the wool and the lint for their own use, or for home sale; but neither in sufficient quantity for their own consumpt. A great deal of English cloth is every Sunday seen at church. The only article in this and the neighbouring parishes, that can be called a manufacture, is distilling of aquavitaæ. There are 9 licenced stills in the parish, at 30 gallons each. Highlanders from Lochaber, the extensive west coast of Ross-shire, and the Isle of Sky, buy the spirits at between 10 s. and 14 s. *per* Scotch gallon. One man only in the parish occupies a still without partners. From 5 to 10 or 12 tenants join about one of these stills, by which means each has an opportunity of manufacturing his own growth of barley; and where that falls short of making up his proportion, he buys from his neighbours. The whole barley in the parish is distilled. Though no seed is left for the ensuing season, yet the whole growth is not equal to the quantity manufactured into spirits by 9 stills. They say, that no barley answers so well as the growth of the parish, which they attribute to the warmth and dryness of the soil. The barley crop is generally allotted for paying the rents. The principal or only profit resulting from the distillery is keeping up the price of grain, and converting it speedily into money. The profits otherwise are next to nothing, except the draff or grains. The only other resource they have is from black cattle; but grass being scanty, the increase of cattle seems hardly sufficient to supply the waste of horses, few of which are reared in the parish.

Church, School, and Poor.—The church was built about 12 years ago. It cost 900 l. Sterling, and was then the most elegant and substantial building of the kind in the county.
Since

Since that period, some neighbouring parishes affirm they have equalled it at less expence. The manse was built about 42 years ago, and was then the best in the synod. Several others have now outstripped it in elegance and convenience. Captain Kenneth M'Kenzie of Cromarty, representative of the Earls of that name, is patron. This, with several other patronages, was forfeited in 1747, but restored, along with the estate, to the late Lord Macleod, son to the last Earl.—The amount of the stipend depends on the price of victual. It consists of 10 chalders of barley. This, together with the glebe, may be estimated at 140 l. The decret of modification and locality is dated in 1719.—A clergyman of the Episcopal Church of Scotland resides in this parish. About a fourth part of the people attend his meeting. He has two other places of worship in the neighbouring parishes. When he is absent, his ordinary hearers attend the parish church as punctually as the other parishioners. There are no dissenters of any other denomination.—A parochial school is established, and well attended. The Society for propagating Christian Knowledge support a charity school and spinning mistress, both of which are useful.—The poor's roll contains 62. There are no funds in the parish for their support, except the weekly collection, and another more general collection made on the first Sunday of every quarter, when every individual is supposed to contribute his mite. The whole amounts to about 10 l. Sterling, and is distributed by the session.

Population.—From a roll made up in 1791, there are in the parish 1860 persons, of whom 420 are under 10 years of age. The average of births for the last 3 years, while the present incumbent has officiated, is 40. Of these the Episcopal clergyman baptised 10. The average of marriages is 11. There is no register of burials kept in the parish. The
great

great body of the people is divided into two classes, tenants and cottagers; or, as the latter are called here, *mailers*. The former amount to 120, who rent from 5 l. to 20 l. a year. Not above two or three pay 30 l. The mailers are those poor people who build huts on barren ground, and improve spots around them, for which they pay nothing for a stipulated number of years. The proprietor frequently indulges them with tools and feed for the first season. After the first period is expired, these crofts are rented at from 3 s. to 40 s. a year. Every year produces one or more of these new settlers. At present they consist of 248 families, of whom 148 have settled within the last 40 years. From this increase of the cottagers, and the great quantity of improved ground, an increase of the population has undoubtedly taken place within these 20 or 30 years; although there appears to be a decrease upon the whole since 1755, the return made to Dr Webster at that period having been 2456. This decrease can only be accounted for, by the annual emigrations to the south country in harvest, and by the great numbers enlisted into the Highland regiments, at the commencement of the two last wars.—The new settlers are not all natives of the parish. Several come down from the Hebrides, from the west coast, and mid Highlands, when a severe season has destroyed their cattle. This is the reason, why the number below 10 years of age is so high in proportion to the births. All the tradesmen in the parish are included among the mailers. They consist of 20 weavers, 1 house-carpenter, 3 millers, 15 tailors, 2 masons, 21 *brogue* or shoemakers. All of them work for the parishioners and immediate neighbourhood. No article is manufactured for exportation. There are also included in the above number 82 widows, 40 of whom are on the poor's roll. But, though these last have separate huts, they are not included in the above number of families. One excise

excise officer resides in the parish, but no physician, surgeon *, or man of the law.—There are no instances of uncommon longevity. There are many vigorous men of 70, and a very few turned of 80, but none who have reached 90.

Heritors and Rent.—There are 11 proprietors in the parish, of whom 3 have their seats in other parishes, and 8 in this. Of these last, 4 only reside constantly, and 4 occasionally. Brahan Castle is in this parish, the principal residence of Mr Mackenzie of Seaforth.—The valued rent is 2574 l. 8 s. Scotch. The real rent approaches to 2000 l. Sterling. Few of the estates have been measured. From a gross computation from the quantity of seed sown, the average rent will be about 10 s. an acre. The greater part of the rent is reckoned in barley and oat-meal. Few, however, choose to pay in kind. Hence the rent varies as the price of victual rises or falls. Some proprietors, of late, have passed from payment in kind for a fixed rent in money. The proprietors who live in the parish occupy land of the annual value of 500 l. Sterling. Their families, including servants and labourers, do not exceed 80 persons. Hence there are about 1800 persons to be maintained on the produce of 1500 l.'s worth of land, besides paying that sum as rent.

Disadvantages

* There being no villages, and few mechanics who follow sedentary employments, the people work in the open air, and are, in general, lively and healthy; except when infectious distempers occur, as happened in the year 1789, when a putrid fever was introduced into a poor family; whence, as from a centre, it spread through this and the neighbouring parishes, thence to the west coast, and at last to the Hebrides, marking its progress with dreadful havoc. The gentry inoculate their children for the small-pox with success, but the great body of the people have not surmounted their religious prejudices against that innovation. The gout and gravel are not known. Rheumatism is frequent, for which they apply strong spirits to the part affected.

Disadvantages and Proposed Improvements.—This parish is too narrow a field for industry in its present situation. Hence the people are idle for a considerable part of the year, especially in winter. The proprietors are sensible of the various disadvantages arising from this source, and that the establishment of a manufacture would be the only remedy. But no person has as yet been hardy enough to engage in such an enterprise. It is, indeed, an object only for a Company, endowed with the spirit of adventure, who would lay their account with loss for some time, till the people had learned the business, and become sensible of its benefit. But, if local situation, and numbers of hands, would induce such a Company to establish a manufacture, perhaps there is no station in Scotland more inviting for a settlement of that kind. There are 9 or 10 parishes, among which this occupies a central position round the heads of the Friths of Dingwall and Beaully, within sight of each other, containing, at a moderate computation, 15,000 inhabitants, with a well peopled country for upwards of 20 miles eastward, towards Cromarty and Tain. The borough of Dingwall, and village of Beaully, at the head of their respective friths, are at the distance of 9 miles only from each other, either of which, or both, would be convenient stations. The communication is easy, and the roads good in every direction. The rich corn country of Moray and East Ross are within a few hours sailing by either Frith. Were such a manufacture established, numbers of poor people from the Highlands and Western Isles would flock to it, rather than attempt crossing the Atlantic. This is not a matter of conjecture or mere probability. There is a daily intercourse between this country and the west coast. Several from that quarter come down annually to settle on the waste grounds. They feel themselves within reach of their relations and the sepulchres of their fathers. But they
would

would come much more readily, if to these considerations were added the prospect of living more comfortably by their industry. The only local obstacle to an establishment of this kind, is the scarcity of fuel. Here one cannot help again execrating the partial (and it may even be added, *iniquitous*) tax on coals imported to the north; which operates as a dead weight on every attempt towards improvement. It is hoped, however, that this grievance will be soon alleviated, by the extensive plantations of firs laid out within these last 30 years, and every year enlarged.—It has been already observed, that the mode of farming amongst the common people is far from being improved; and it may be farther remarked, that there seem to be local obstacles to improvement, which manufactures only can remove, by introducing riches. The tenants alledge, that they cannot afford the expence of inclosing their lands, or of paying interest for inclosing them; and, even if they were inclosed, they say, they cannot lie out of their ordinary crops so long as would be necessary to put their farms in the modern rotation.—Again, foreign manure cannot be had for improvement, at such a price as the tenant can afford. Gentlemen who use lime for building, and manure, find it cheaper to bring it from Sunderland, than from any part of Scotland; yet it costs them from 10d. to 1s. *per* boll, at the ship's side. Neither is there any marl within reach.—*Thirlage* * is also complained of as a bar to improvement.

* **THIRLAGE** is an obligation over the possessors of lands, to manufacture all their corns at a certain mill; and seems to have originated with the great barons, with a view of exacting, for their own use, a stipulated portion of the produce of the soil, whether it was possessed by their own immediate tenants, or given away in feu to their vassals. The exaction is called *multure*, and is a real rent, reserved to himself by the superior. This rent, on some estates, amounts to the 12th, on others to the 16th, 20th, or 24th part of the unground corn; besides

ment. When estates are thirled to the mill of another heritor, the proprietors of the thirled estates growl at another man's reaping a certain part of the produce of their improvements, without contributing to the expence. One mill only of this description is in this parish. There are two others, belonging to two different heritors, to which their own estates only are thirled. It seems to be a general wish, that an equivalent were projected, under the eye of the legislature, for abolishing this species of vassalage.

Character.—A sense of religion and decency prevails among the people in general. One man only, within the memory of tradition, was convicted of a capital crime, and suffered for it about 50 years ago. No doubt, such a number engaged in distilling spirits, has a tendency to corrupt the morals; but the bad effects of this trade are less discernible than might be feared. Were the effects worse than they are, there is a fatal necessity of continuing the distillery, until some other manufacture be established in its stead, whereby the people will be enabled to find money to pay their rents. The worst effect of the great plenty of spirits is, that dram shops are set up almost in every village for retail, where young and idle people

about the 48th part of the meal after grinding. Mills and multure have been conveyed like other property. The conveyance includes *grana crescentia*; sometimes are included *invelta et illata*, and whatever *tholes* fire and water on the estate. *Use and wont* is also said to constitute a right, without any written document.

The miller's dues, or the wages for labour, are a separate article, consisting of a certain quantity of meal instantly paid out of every boll, (as formerly measured in ascertaining the multure), both to the head miller and his substitute. For this payment, the millers not only grind the corn, but support the machinery. Often the head miller pays a rent to his landlord for his place. The multure and miller's dues are so heavy, that, on some estates, they amount nearly to the value of the land rent.

people convene and get drunk. These tipling huts are kept by such only as are not able to pay a fine, or procure a licence. They are the greatest nuisance in the parish. It is a pity that no effectual mode has as yet been projected for suppressing them.

Language.—Gaelic is the vernacular language of the whole parish, except in gentlemen's families. Several of the inhabitants read the English Bible, and can transact business in that language; but they, as well as the bulk of the people, prefer religious instruction in Gaelic; and therefore are at pains to read the Gaelic New Testament, and Psalm Book, &c. The names of the places are uniformly Gaelic, expressive of their situation, or of some circumstance which struck the fancy of the original inhabitants. Some names of places recall to view the family economy of the great Barons, while the feudal government subsisted in its full vigour. The wages of their menial servants and tradesmen seem to have been paid in land. Hence we find the *Smith's Croft*, the *Arrow-maker's*, the *Bow-maker's*, the *Waulker's*, the *Cook's*, the *Baker's*, the *Piper's*, the *Fiddler's Croft*, &c. Of these there are, in this parish, *Belnagown*, the town of the smiths; *Teanafle*, the residence of the fiddle; and *Cruitach*, the field of the harp, or harper's field. All the above names, and more from the same origin, are to be found near ancient seats.