

PARISH OF DUNROSSNESS.

PRESBYTERY OF LERWICK, SYNOD OF SHETLAND.

THE REV. DAVID THOMSON, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

THIS parish occupies the greater part of the southern peninsula of Shetland. It includes the parishes of Sandwick and Cunningsburgh, now annexed to it; also the Fair Isle.

Mineralogy.—There was an attempt made to work a mine of copper on Fitfill, some specimens of the ore having been sent to the southward, and having attracted the attention of a mining company. Some shafts were also sunk at Sand-lodge, in Sandwick parish. But these attempts, not proving successful, have been abandoned for many years.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

There was a temporary residence in this parish for the Earls of Orkney, when they came to the country; but the castle of Scalloway was their principal dwelling.

Parochial Registers.—Parochial registers are kept, of the baptisms and marriages of persons connected with the Established Church; but Dissenters do not register their baptisms; and only their marriages are proclaimed in the Established Church.

III.—POPULATION.

Amount in 1801,	-	3201
1811,	-	3498
1821,	-	3798
1831,	-	4405

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Dunrossness is fertile in the production of bear or big, and black oats; considerable quantities of both, and also of potatoes of good quality, are annually carried to Lerwick, and sold to the inhabitants there, at reasonable prices. The standard weight of the lispund, of Norwegian origin, is 32 lbs. English; but it is the custom to give 36 lbs. or more.

No natural crops of clover and rye-grass spring here, except on a small spot at Sumburgh.

The island of Colsay carries a good number of sheep of the English breed : and until the scab invaded the island of St Nianians, it carried a considerable number of sheep of a large kind. It is at present devoted to the grazing of cattle.

There has happened a very heavy loss in this parish, of a snug estate that belonged to Alexander Sinclair, Esq. of Brow, all the most valuable part thereof having been blown over with sand, and only some small patches, called outsets or pedicles, now remaining. A part of the estate of Sumburgh, which was surrounded with sand, like an oasis in a desert, and which carried a good flock of sheep, is now also so much overspread with sand, that it has not one upon it. And a small inlet, which could formerly admit small craft, is now filling up very fast by sand blowing from the waste.

Fishing.—Mr Bruce of Sumburgh's tenants are allowed to cure their own fish, which are delivered to him at a certain stipulated price, in their marketable state, and of course his lands are let at an advanced price. But other heritors who have the fish given them by their tenants in a green or uncured state, let their lands at an inferior price.

A herring-fishing has, for some years past, been carried on, partly in Dunrossness, but chiefly in the parishes of Sandwick and Cunningsburgh, where a number of large boats have been fitted out at great expense. This fishing was begun by the tenants of Mr Bruce of Sumburgh, under his patronage ; and by his residing at Sand Lodge, in the vicinity of the herring stations, he has given them great encouragement. Three or four brigs or sloops arrive annually at Levenwick bay, from Rothsay, and receive the herrings as they are caught, at a stipulated price per cran. Mr Bruce of Bigtown is, with his tenants, embarked in a similar enterprise.

Except at Quendale, Bigtown, and Sumburgh, where ploughs are used, the tenants, having but small portions of land, cultivate their ground with small spades. In Sandwick and Cunningsburgh, a few ploughs are used, drawn by small horses.

Very little kelp is manufactured in this parish.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Some years ago, there was a very handsome, substantial, and expensive light-house, erected on the summit of Sumburgh Head, the most southerly promontory in Shetland. The tower is ele-

gant, and the mansions of the keepers very neat. The expense, I believe, was about L. 40,000. It is visited annually by Robert Stevenson, Esq. civil-engineer; and a yacht comes twice in the year, with stores.

Ecclesiastical State.—There are some persons of the Baptist persuasion here, but immersion seems not to be generally attractive: and there are, also, a good number in both parishes, of Wesleyan Methodists.

The stipend, by decret of valuation, is L. 200, besides a sum for communion elements; and the glebe is reckoned good, the soil being of excellent quality: it contains 13 acres of arable ground, and 14 or 15 acres of meadow; but the pasture is not valuable.

Education.—This parish is much in want of proper schools for the education of the rising generation, there being, besides the parochial, only some private ones kept by young men, employed by the parents at their own expense, and that only for a part of the year,—they betaking themselves to the fishing in summer, as what they earn from teaching does not compensate them. The parochial school is stationed in the parish of Sandwick. In Cunningsburgh, there are a school appointed by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, and a Sabbath evening school. There are few or none of the people who cannot read.

Libraries.—There are two parochial libraries, instituted lately, one in Cunningsburgh, and the other in Sandwick parish. There is also one in Dunrossness.

Fuel.—No large tracks of moss are here. Had that been the case, peats would not have needed to be transported from a great distance to the southern extremity of the parish, a distance of four or five miles, upon small ponies, by which great expense is incurred.

Fair Island.—This island is about 3 miles long and 2 broad. It lies about midway betwixt Orkney and Shetland. On the north-east corner of the island, there is a small harbour; but vessels do not frequent it. There is a large peninsula called Bounness, which feeds a considerable flock of sheep of the south country breed, and is fenced with a high stone dike across the isthmus. The houses are all on the southern part of the island. To the north part of the cultivated ground, there is a fence of feal, which shuts it in and protects it from sheep. The names of the towns or hamlets are, Shirva, Leogh, Bousta, Gelah, Seutter, and Taing. By

the census taken this year, (1841,) there were 35 inhabited houses, occupied by about 35 families : and there were 119 males and 113 females,—in all 232. A number of years ago, a few families removed to Orkney,—the island being rather overstocked with inhabitants. There are 96 merks of land in the island, besides a few outsets not long occupied. The people had found the prosecution of the ling and tusk-fishing at a distance from the land, not profitable; and they now confine themselves to the catching of seath, that being not so dangerous and expensive an operation as the former. Of this about forty tons, in the dried state, have been generally transported to the Leith market; which, during the existence of the Government bounty, together with the oil produced, brought a good return. No fish is disposed of to straggling vessels that may appear on the coast, the fishermen being bound to deliver their products to the tacksman. What feu-duty is now paid from the island to Lord Dundas I am not aware; but, instead of L. 34 Scotch, formerly paid to the minister as teinds, L. 14, 0s. 10d. Sterling has been awarded by decree of the Court, as his proportion of L. 200, the stipend of the ministry at present. There remain some unexhausted teinds, which will raise the stipend to nearly L. 300 per annum, when a fresh augmentation shall take place.

The number of boats has considerably increased since the time of the last Statistical Account; and they all lie on the south side of the island, in a creek, where a good many of the cod-fishing sloops belonging to the mainland take shelter, when the weather is unfavourable.

The people are sober and industrious; and most vigorous and expert rowers. The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge has granted a salary to a schoolmaster for his exertions in conducting the Sabbath evening school in this island.

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