

UNITED PARISHES OF SWINTON AND SIMPRIN.

PRESBYTERY OF CHIRNSIDE, SYNOD OF MERSE AND TIVIOTDALE.

THE REV. JAMES LOGAN, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, Boundaries, &c.—THE parishes of Swinton and Simprin were united by the annexation of Simprin in 1761. The word “Swinton” seems to have undergone no change since the earliest periods of Scottish history; and like *Swine-wood*, the ancient name of an adjacent tract of land, it may have been connected with the prevalence in this district of wild boars, with which the whole of the country is understood to have been formerly infested. Simprin, there is sufficient evidence, is not a modern name; but neither tradition nor any historical notice throw light upon its etymology.

The united parishes form a sort of trailing oblong figure, (the boundary lines of which are very irregularly indented) of about 4 miles in length from east to west, by 3 or 3½ miles in breadth. The surface, neither perfectly level, nor yet at all hilly, consists of a succession of low, parallel, wave-like ridges; ranging from east to west, with interjacent level spaces of considerable extent.

Climate.—The climate of Swinton may perhaps be characterized as rather humid; but scarcely, if at all, more so now, than that of the contiguous parishes. A considerable improvement in this respect seems to have taken place since the period of the last Statistical Account. Ague, which is mentioned by Mr Cupples as being a very prevalent disorder then, owing to the excessive dampness of both earth and air, is now almost unknown,—one instance only having occurred during the last seventeen years.

Hydrography.—There are no peculiar, and but few good, springs in the parish. They flow through a deep bed of tenacious clay, lying upon sandstone; and, as there is nowhere any considerable elevation, are apt to be impure, and, unless where sunk to a great depth, to fail in summer during a drought. A loch of considerable extent, called “*Swinton Loch*,” has been drained since 1700.

There is only one stream, and that inconsiderable,—the Leet, which rises in the neighbouring parish of Whitsome, and passes through Swinton in a westerly direction, to fall, after a course of ten or eleven miles, into the Tweed at Coldstream.

Geology and Mineralogy.—The whole parish forms part of the new red sandstone formation, which may be traced throughout a considerable portion of the Merse or lower district of Berwickshire. The rocks, disposed in strata which dip to the south, consist of white sandstone and a dark sandstone slate, with alternating beds of indurated marl. This arrangement appears to extend to the Tweed, and to rest immediately upon the coal formation of Northumberland; it is interrupted, however, on the eastern boundary, by rocks, apparently of the coal formation, white sandstone disposed in horizontal strata, and containing calamite with impressions of salices. A coarse red micaceous sandstone, accompanied with a white variety, is quarried in several parts of the parish. The lower surface of this rock has not been reached, though it has been bored to the depth of thirty fathoms.

The boulders, or loose minerals which occur in the fields, besides sandstone, are of greywacke and transition granite and greenstone, which appear to have been conveyed from the hills to the north of Dunse, a distance of about eight miles.

The soil is in general deep and very productive; but as it lies upon a strong impervious clay, it is liable, where drains do not prevent, to be wet or almost miry during long-continued rains in winter, and in dry summers it has sometimes suffered severely from want of moisture.

Botany.—Though not rich in a botanical sense, the parish possesses several interesting plants. Among the rarer and more beautiful are the *Senecio tenuifolius*,* the *Alisma ranunculoides*, the *Cerastium arvense*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Hyoscyamus niger*, *Lactuca virosa*, *Solanum dulcamara*, *Trollius Europæus*, *Typha latifolia*, *Cnidium solaris*, *Spergula nodosa*, *Arum maculatum*, *Berberis vulgaris*, *Rumex sanguineus*, *Tormentilla reptans*, *Plantago maritima*, *Ranunculus arvensis*, *Parnassia palustris*, *Leontodon palustre*, *Lysimachia vulgaris*, and *Galium boreale*.

Of the mosses the *Bryum ligulatum* has been collected on fine fruit, and the felices are the common *Aspidium felix mas*.

No natural wood is to be found in the parish; but the planted wood,

* This plant, gathered in this parish, was added to the British Flora, a few years ago, by the Rev. Mr Baird of Cockburnspath.

which is of oak, ash, or elm, with a few firs, appears to be well adapted to the soil. There are some fine trees near Swinton-House, but the great proportion of the wood over the parish is not more than fifty or sixty years old. At the Restoration the whole of this property, forfeited to the Crown, came into the possession of the Duke of Lauderdale by a grant of Charles II. and continued in his hands until the Revolution in 1688. Among other measures of spoliation he is said to have caused the whole of the wood upon the lands to be cut, excepting one tree, a beautiful and very large ash, which was blown down, between twenty and thirty years ago. As the most of the wood now growing has been planted along the hedge-rows, it shelters and adorns the fields, and gives a wooded appearance to the district greatly beyond the reality.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Brief notices respecting the parish are met with in the border histories; and from these, it would seem to have participated fully in the condition, both political and moral, of the tract of country in which it lies, during the long period of hostilities which extended with few interruptions from the time of its separation from the Saxon kingdom of Northumberland until its reunion with England.* The parish presents no natural impediment to an invading force, and it does not appear to have been ever protected by any considerable stronghold. † The inhabitants, afflicted, therefore, by the precariousness which such an exposure implies, would soon become unsettled in their habits, disinclined to, as well as prevented from, the avocations of regular industry, until they came, as a matter of course, to study not more retaliation than the means of support, in visiting upon their enemies evils which had blasted to themselves the hopes of autumn, or had otherwise deprived them of advantages to which they might feel that they had a rightful claim. ‡

* In one of the earliest notices which we have of Swinton, it seems to have lapsed from a state of culture, the condition probably in which it was under its last Northumbrian monarch into a waste and desert state,—for which Edgar, son of Malcolm Canmore, presents it to Coldingham Abbey. He presents along with it *twenty-four beasts to till it anew*.

† The remains of a fosse, which can still be traced in the church-yard, are the only vestige now extant, of a state of warlike operations.

‡ The last time that we hear of its having formed the scene of a hostile encounter was on Whitsunday of 1558. Sir Henry Percy, brother to the Earl of Northumberland, and the Marshal of Berwick, overran the Merse with 8000 foot, and 200 horse, burnt Dunse and Langton, and were overtaken at Swinton on their return by the Scottish forces under the Lord Keith, son of the Earl Mareschal and by the French troops, who were lying at Kelso and Eyemouth, for the defence of the marches. After an obstinate engagement, the English made good their retreat with all their plunder—the Scottish troops being almost wholly slain, or made prisoners.

Such habits, when fully formed among a people, do not pass away immediately upon the removal of their causes, and it was not, therefore, until long after the union of the crowns, that the productive energies of this fine portion of Scotland appear to have begun to be adequately cultivated by a skilful and settled husbandry.

Family of Swinton.—But the most interesting fact connected with the civil history of this parish is that of its having formed, with only two very brief interruptions, the *property of one family since the days of the Heptarchy, till the present time.* Authentic history furnishes us with no account of the origin of the family of Swinton of Swinton. It is found in this place, and appears to have been in prior possession of it shortly after the incorporation of this district with the kingdom of Scotland. About 1060, Edulf de Swinton, who had assisted Malcolm Canmore to recover the Scottish throne, obtained from that monarch a confirmation of the property of the whole parish of Swinton, by one of the first charters granted in Scotland, and which is still preserved in the Archives of Durham. The estate seems after this to have been alienated from the family during the period of the reigns of Edgar and Alexander, his sons, as each of these sovereigns present the lands of Swinton to Coldingham priory.* It was restored to them, however, by the youngest son of Malcolm—David, who grants two charters in their favour of the lands of Swinton, “to be held as freely as any baron held theirs.” †

Of the succeeding members of the family, several are mentioned with distinction by the English and Scottish chroniclers. To the valour of ‡ Sir John Swinton in particular, Fordun chiefly

* It may be regarded as a proof of the strong right which is founded upon long possession, that the church had to give up this property. They would seem indeed, never to have had undisturbed possession of it—for Alexander in 1107 along with his confirmation to St Cuthbert and his monks, of the whole lands of Swinton, forbids the prior and monks of Durham to answer in any place relating to these lands, unless in his presence and by his orders.—*Bede, Hist., Smith's Appendix 20.*

† Anderson's Inquiry, Chart. Durham. A stone statue of Allan Swinton, the fifth baron, lies in an arched open niche of the south wall of the parish church, on the right hand of the pulpit with this inscription: “Hic jacet Alanus Swinton miles de Eodem.” This Allan is witness to a deed by Patrick Earl of March, to Nisbet of Dirleton, and to several by William the Lion.

‡ There is in Rymer, (1400) a safe conduct to this Sir John and his retinue for coming to the presence of Henry II., then in the north. He seems to have been disgusted at the undue power which Douglas enjoyed, and to have intended to join in the defection of the Earl of March, who had transferred his allegiance to the English king, in consequence of the breaking off of the match between his daughter and the Duke of Rothsay, in order to prefer the daughter of his rival, Douglas. Sir J. Swinton had either not effected this journey, or he had speedily withdrawn his homage—for his death at Hamilton took place two years after.

attributes the victory at Otterburn; and his heroic death at the battle of Hamildon, after having vainly endeavoured to restore order among the Scottish troops, has furnished Sir W. Scott, (himself a relation of the family,) with the subject of his dramatic sketch of "*Halidon Hill*." This Sir John married a daughter of King Robert II., and his son by that lady appears to have signalized his prowess in the wars of France. He is mentioned as having unhorsed the Duke of Clarence, brother to Henry V. at the battle of Berranger.

In Rymer, there is the bond of a Sir John Swinton, who, with many others, engages at Edinburgh to assist the king (James VI.) against the Earls of Bothwell and Hume, and all who aided and abetted their rebellion.

During the reign of Charles I., the proprietor of Swinton supported the side of the Parliament, and enjoyed subsequently the favour and confidence of Cromwell, having been appointed by him, upon the arrangement of Scottish affairs, a privy-councillor and a commissioner for the administration of justice. At the restoration, he was accused of having borne arms against the king in the battle of Worcester, and on this charge, though unsupported by evidence, his estate was forfeited, and he was driven, with his family, into exile. His son returned at the Revolution in 1688, and obtained shortly afterwards an act of Parliament rescinding his forfeiture, and restoring to him the lands of Swinton "*per modum justitiæ*,"—of which his descendants have since enjoyed the undisturbed possession.

Among the modern proprietors of the estate of Swinton, we are called upon to notice particularly the grandfather of the late possessor, John Swinton, Esq. for some time sheriff of Perthshire, and afterwards one of the Senators of the College of Justice. The country is indebted to Lord Swinton's suggestion for the division of the Court of Session into two separate chambers. He was a zealous and influential advocate for the introduction into Scotland of trial by jury in civil causes; he was the originator of the small debt court; he gave to the world an accurate and useful abridgement of British statutes since the Union; and it is the curious and valuable information on weights and measures, which he published in his elaborate treatise upon that subject, which forms the basis of the late act of Parliament for effecting their uniformity throughout the kingdom. To his professional and literary attain-

ments, Lord Swinton added a thorough knowledge of country business, and was distinguished by activity and benevolence of character.

It is a remarkable fact, especially when we keep in mind the insecure state of this portion of the country for many ages, that the estate of Swinton has descended *lineally* from father to son for not less than 27 generations, comprising a period of almost 800 years.

It is now in the possession of Samuel Swinton, Esq. a nephew of the late Lord Swinton, who, by draining to a large extent, and other judicious measures, has greatly improved the property, while he has shown himself most solicitous to promote the comfort and well-being of the labouring poor.

Other Land-owners.—The parish of Simprin also appears, until very lately, to have been in the possession of an old and powerful family, Cockburn of Langton; but as they do not seem ever to have had a place of residence within its bounds, it may be improper to enter upon their history in this statement. The lands of Simprin were sold, in consequence of their affairs having fallen into disorder, in 1755, to Lord Elibank, and are now the property of Patrick Murray, Esq. of Simprin. There are two other proprietors in the parish, Henry Seymour, Esq. of Handford, and Admiral Halket of Delgaddo.

Parochial Registers.—Simprin was, from 1699, until his translation to Etterick in 1707, under the ministerial charge of the Rev. Thomas Boston,—a name deservedly dear to the people of Scotland.*

The session register of Simprin, commencing 21st September 1699, (the day of Mr Boston's ordination,) and continued during Mr Boston's incumbency, is still in preservation, and is wholly in Mr Boston's own handwriting: that of Swinton commences on the 29th April 1696, and extends, in respect to the records of sessional business, to 1711, and in respect to baptisms, to the present day, excepting the short space of ten months in 1760. No regular register of marriages and deaths appears to have been kept until about seventeen years ago.

III.—POPULATION.

Mr Boston found 88 examinable persons in Simprin upon his induction to that parish in 1699. In 1751, the population of the

* (*Vide Etterick.*) The manse, which was built for Boston after his induction, was still standing a few years ago; but the church, which appears to have been very small, has long been in ruins. Simprin *large barn*, mentioned in the former Statistical Account, appears, from his session record, to have been used regularly by Mr Boston upon sacramental and other extraordinary occasions.

among the young men form the only portion of their out-door diversions which seems entitled to be regarded with any interest; but it is an important fact, that much of the time which used to be spent formerly by our peasantry in such, or in far less commendable pastimes, is now regularly, or at least chiefly, devoted to reading. The people are generally sober, industrious, and frugal.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture and Rural Economy.—The parish contains about 5383 acres under a regular system of cultivation, and 65 or 70 acres which still lie waste, or are in pasture, but which might be added to the cultivated land with a profitable application of capital. There is no land unappropriated, and only about 25 acres under wood, which has been planted.

Rent of Land.—The average rent of arable land per acre is 31s., and the average rent of grazing is at the rate of L. 3, 10s. for an ox or cow, and 10s. 6d. for a Leicester ewe or full-grown sheep. The real rent of the parish is about L. 8000.

Rate of Wages.—The rate of wages, winter and summer, for farm-labourers, may be stated at 10s., and for country artisans, about 14s. for the week.

Husbandry.—The husbandry pursued in the parish is of the most liberal and enlightened description. Draining has, for a considerable time, met with the attention which, owing to the nature of the soil, it requires; but this important improvement may still in several places be carried profitably to a greater extent. The farm-buildings and enclosures are generally in good order, and suitable to the extent of the farms.

The only improvement of any general importance which has recently been effected, is the deepening and widening of the bed of the *Leet*, which used to overflow its banks occasionally, to the great injury of the contiguous grounds, as, from its being almost quite level, the water became stagnant upon it in many places.

Produce.—The average gross amount of raw produce raised in the parish, as nearly as can be ascertained, is stated under the following heads:

Produce of grain of all kinds, whether cultivated for food of man or the domestic animals.*

* Flax has been little cultivated in this parish for several years past. It is the custom in most parts of the country to allow every married farm-servant or hind the tenth part of an acre, to be sowed with flax-seed. The flax, with the exception of the weaving, was all manufactured at home for the use of their families. Now, owing to the low price of linen, they generally plant potatoes on that ground.

Acres.		Bolls.				
781	wheat,	3272	at L. 1, 19s. 10 ³ / ₄ d.	-	-	L. 6520 2 10
319	barley,	1918	— 1, 3s. 10 ³ / ₄ d.	-	-	2288 5 7
1066	oats,	6445	— 0, 18s. 8 ³ / ₄ d.	-	-	6019 16 2 ¹ / ₂
225	pease,	955	— 1, 7s. 6 ¹ / ₂ d.	-	-	1514 2 4 ¹ / ₂
<u>2390</u>		<u>12590</u>				<u>L. 16142 7 0</u>

Note.—The above estimate is by the boll of six imperial bushels for all descriptions of grain. The prices are the average fiars prices of the last ten years, proportioned to the imperial measure, the fiars of Berwickshire having only been struck for the last four years by that standard.

As there is little hay raised for sale, the value is included in the estimated produce of grass land.

Produce of potatoes and turnips.

64	acres of potatoes, from L. 7, 7s. to L. 9 per acre,	L. 546 6 0
253	do. turnips,	1255 0 0

1801 6 0

Produce of land in pasture, rating it at L. 3, 10s. per cow, or full-grown ox grazed, or that may be grazed for the season, and at 10s. 6d. per full-grown sheep pastured for the year. There are about 1928 acres of old and new grass, including the quantity made annually into hay, and consumed on the different farms,

3313 11 0

Produce of gardens and orchards, &c. There is not a market-garden in the parish. On one estate there is an orchard of about three acres, which is let along with the farm in which it lies; the trees are very old, and not productive, but it may be worth, annually,

10 0 0

Produce of the annual thinning and periodical felling of woods, coppes, plantations, &c.

15 0 0

Total yearly value of raw produce raised, L. 21282 4 0

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—There are about eight miles of turnpike road in the parish, but not travelled by any public carriages; and there are three bridges. The roads are excellent, and completely fenced, and the bridges, (one of which has been lately built,) are in a good condition.

Ecclesiastical State.—From the small extent of the parish, the church, though placed rather too near to its north-east corner, is quite convenient for the whole of the inhabitants. It was built in 1729,—an aisle was added to it by the feuars of the village, for their own accommodation, in 1782,—and it is still in tolerable repair. It is seated to accommodate 400 persons, and there are no free sittings. It holds, however, considerably more than that number, and from fifty to seventy persons are regularly supplied with seats in the passage.

The manse was built in 1771, and has been several times repaired. In 1815, when it was last repaired, a considerable addition also was made to it.

The united glebe of Swinton and Simprin extends to twenty-one acres, of the annual value of L. 63, or thereby.—The stipend of the parish amounts to sixteen chalders, half barley and half oats.

There are no Dissenting, or Seceding, or Episcopalian, or Roman Catholic chapels in this parish.

A very few families, twenty-five in number, are connected with the Secession; but the great body of the parishioners attend the Established church,—the number of communicants at which varies from 440 to 470.

Education.—There are two schools in the parish,—the one the parochial school, and the other unendowed.* The usual branches of education may be obtained at the parochial school; and it may be noticed, that the teacher is Mr Strahan, the joint editor, with Mr Dickinson and Dr Smith, of Sleusner's Greek Lexicon. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and mathematics are taught at the unendowed schools.

The schoolmaster of the parochial school has the maximum salary, and his school-fees may amount to L. 20 or L. 30. He is in the enjoyment of all the legal accommodations.

The charge for education per month is,—English reading, 1s.; reading and writing, 1s. 4d.; arithmetic, 2s.; Latin, 2s. 10d.; Greek and Latin, 3s. 8d.; book-keeping, 3 sets, L. 1, 10s.; Navigation, L. 1, 10s.; Algebra, L. 2, 2s. None of the children who have reached the age of 15 are unable to write. Parents, in general, are sensible of the advantages of education; and as there are no parts of the parish so distant from the school as to prevent the attendance of healthy children at any season of the year, the young are, as a matter of course, instructed regularly to read and write, and commonly also in arithmetic.

Friendly Societies.—There is one male friendly society. It has existed forty years, and has been attended with the best effects. By protecting and encouraging habits of sobriety and industry, and fostering, therefore, a spirit of independence, as well as by the direct relief which it occasionally affords, it has contributed more than any thing else to keep down the amount of paupers on our poor's roll. For the last five years, the income of this society has considerably exceeded its expenditure, the former being L. 45, 12s. 0½d., and the latter only L. 30, 17s. 8½d. The entry

* There are two Sabbath evening schools also, connected with the Sabbath School Union. One, which meets in the church, is attended by 100 children, and conducted by five teachers. The other is attended by 20 children, and is under the superintendence of one teacher.

money, upon becoming a member is 5s.,* and the contribution 1s. 6d. per quarter. The sick or lame, if they have been four years in the society, draw 5s. per week for the first three months,—2s. 6d. for the second three months, and afterwards, while they may need support, 1s. 6d. Upon the death of a member, L. 3 are allowed for funeral expenses, and upon his wife's decease, if she has remained a widow, L. 2. If sickness &c. can be proved to have originated in irregular conduct, the individual is excluded from the benefit of the society.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of persons receiving parochial aid is 38, and the average sum per week allotted to each is about 2s. It varies, according to their circumstances, from 1s. to 2s. 6d., and in a few instances to 3s. The average annual amount of regular church collections is L. 34, and the only other means of providing for the poor is by a regular assessment, which has long obtained in this, as in all the contiguous parishes. The amount of the assessment for the last year in this parish was greater than usual,—being L. 227, 18s. 4½d.

There is an unwillingness manifested by some of the poor to make application for parochial relief; but this is not the common feeling. As in other places, when there has long been a compulsory provision for paupers, this resource has ceased to be regarded generally as degrading.

Fairs.—There are two fairs held annually in the village of Swinton,—the one in June, and the other in October. Originally these fairs formed a market for cattle and agricultural produce, but they do not now answer that end.

Inn.—There is only one inn in the parish. It is in the village. The accommodations are superior, and it is required as a place of stay and refreshment on the public road from Berwick, which passes through the village.

Fuel.—Coal is almost the only description of fuel used. It is procured in Northumberland, from a distance of ten miles, and sells in Swinton at the rate of about 18s. per ton.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

Though no important improvement, not then commenced, seems to have been effected in this parish since the period of the last Statistical Account, there are perhaps few parishes which have

* This entry money after 25 years of age increases 2s.,—after 30, 3s., till 40, when admission ceases.

experienced in so short a time a more complete or more gratifying change. The subdivision of the land, indeed, was completed by that time, and the population located as at present; but the science of husbandry, then only in its infancy, has now been matured,—the fences and the trees planted along them have grown up, and are highly ornamental,—drains have rendered the land firm and productive in places where they were then only beginning to take effect,—the roads, which are mentioned in the last Account as being “deep, miry, and almost impassable,” are now of the very best description. To no class of individuals could the warm terms in which the intelligence and general worth of the farmers of that day are mentioned, be applied with greater justice than to those who now occupy their places. Nor is there any where to be found a more intelligent, moral, and well ordered peasantry than our own agricultural population.

Revised August 1834.