

# PARISH OF MERTON.

PRESBYTERY OF LAUDER, SYNOD OF MERSE AND TIVIODALE.

REV. JAMES DUNCAN, MINISTER.

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## I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name, Boundaries, &c.*—IN the immediate vicinity where the old village stood there is a piece of marshy ground. Perhaps from this, both the village and parish may have been designated Mire-town or Mertoun. The parish is situated in the south-west corner of Berwickshire. It is bounded on the south by the river Tweed, on the north by Earlstoun, and on the east by Smailholm and Makerston. In length the parish may be about six miles, and in breadth from two to three.

*Topographical Appearances, &c.*—The western part of the parish stands high, and is extremely picturesque. From Bemersyde hill, the property of James Haig, Esq. over which one of the most public roads in the parish passes, the eye of the traveller is at once gratified with every thing beautiful and magnificent,—wood, water, hills, ruins, and fertile fields. The rest of the parish gradually declining to the south is also extremely pleasant, the prospect being agreeably diversified by excellent enclosures, beautiful hedges, and thriving plantations. The soil towards the Tweed, particularly the haughs, is sharp, with a gravelly bottom. Towards the north, and indeed through the rest of the parish, with very few exceptions, is a stiff clay with a till bottom.

There are no lakes in the parish, and very few springs; consequently, in very dry seasons, the farmers are sometimes at a loss for water to their cattle.

The rocks are all greenstone and other trap-rocks, except on the banks of the Tweed, where they are deposits of old red sandstone. This latter stone is very durable, and admits of the highest polish.

## II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

It may deserve notice, that Hugh Scott, Esq. of Harden, having purchased the library of his grandfather, the Right Honourable

the Earl of Marchmont, has in consequence of this, in his possession, a number of letters, papers, pictures, and other documents relative to Scottish history.

*Land-owners.*—The principal, and indeed the only land-owners in the parish, are Hugh Scott, Esq. of Harden; James Haig, Esq. of Bemersyde; Sir David Erskine of Dryburgh; Charles Riddell, Esq. of Musilee; and John Anderson, Esq. of Gladswood.

*Parochial Registers.*—The earliest date of our parochial registers is 1697. They have been very irregularly kept, and contain nothing of any importance.

*Antiquities.*—The Abbey of Dryburgh, so much admired by travellers, lies in the south-west corner of the parish; but, as an account of it, written by the late Right Honourable the Earl of Buchan, is published in Grose's Antiquities, it is unnecessary to say any thing about it.

*Modern Buildings.*—It may be proper to remark, that the late Earl of Buchan, with a liberality that does honour to his memory, erected a suspension bridge across the Tweed 261 feet. This bridge is a great accommodation to the public, as foot-passengers and single horses can pass at all times with safety. On a little eminence at this end of the bridge, he erected a circular building, which he designated the Temple of the Muses. The workmanship is well executed; and, taken in conjunction with the adjoining scenery, forms a beautiful object.

He also erected at a short distance, upon the brow of the conterminous hill, a colossal statue of Sir William Wallace. This is chiefly remarkable, as being the workmanship of a common stonemason who had never been taught sculpture. It is a conspicuous object from the turnpike road leading to Jedburgh.

### III.—POPULATION.

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Return to Dr Webster in 1755, | 502 |
| Census taken in 1791,         | 557 |
| Do. in 1811,                  | 614 |
| Do. in 1821,                  | 610 |
| Do. in 1831,                  | 664 |

In the last there are 312 males and 352 females. The increase arises from most of the proprietors and their families being resident at the time the census was taken, and also from several new cottages being built for the farmers' married servants.

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Number of families in the parish,                    | 128 |
| of families chiefly employed in agriculture,            | 86  |
| chiefly employed in trade, manufactures, or handicraft, | 18  |

|                |        |                  |     |
|----------------|--------|------------------|-----|
| Males under 5, | 38     | Females under 5, | 29  |
| 5 to 10,       | 37     | 5 to 10,         | 44  |
| 10 to 15,      | 35     | 10 to 15,        | 37  |
| 15 to 20,      | 46     | 15 to 20,        | 39  |
| 20 to 30,      | 43     | 20 to 30,        | 61  |
| 30 to 40,      | 44     | 30 to 40,        | 45  |
| 40 to 50,      | 33     | 40 to 50,        | 32  |
| 50 to 60,      | 15     | 50 to 60,        | 25  |
| 60 to 70,      | 17     | 60 to 70,        | 23  |
| 70 to 80,      | 8      | 70 to 80,        | 7   |
| 80 to 90,      | 1      |                  |     |
|                |        | Total,           | 342 |
|                | Total, |                  | 312 |

Average number of children in a family may be 5.

The baptisms, marriages and deaths in the parish have been as follows :

|       | Baptisms. | Marriages. | Deaths. |
|-------|-----------|------------|---------|
| 1824, | 12        | 5          | 4       |
| 1825, | 19        | 1          | 5       |
| 1826, | 10        | 5          | 3       |
| 1827, | 15        | 9          | 10      |
| 1828, | 10        | 3          | 4       |
| 1829, | 5         | 8          | 5       |
| 1830, | 11        | 3          | 9       |
| 1831, | 3         | 10         | 6       |

There has been one illegitimate birth in the parish during the last three years.

#### IV.—INDUSTRY.

*Agriculture and Rural Economy.*—The total number of acres in the parish is about 5550. The number of acres annually sown, and the average return per acre, may be nearly as follows :—

|          | Acres. | Average return in bushels per acre. |
|----------|--------|-------------------------------------|
| Wheat,   | 434    | 21                                  |
| Oats,    | 951    | 34                                  |
| Barley,  | 1561   | 29                                  |
| Pease,   | 139    | 22                                  |
| Beans,   | 16     | 30                                  |
| Turnips, | 359    |                                     |
|          | 3460   |                                     |

Perhaps there are 300 acres capable of being cultivated with a profitable application of capital; and there are about 500 acres under wood. There is no land in undivided common.

*Husbandry.*—The land sown with wheat and barley is generally sown down with grass seeds, and this is either pastured or cut for hay, as circumstances may require. Much improvement has taken place within the last twenty years in every department of farming, though much yet remains to be performed. A good deal of ground has been drained, and a considerable quantity of lime used; the expense, however, of the latter is so great,—from 10s. 6d. to 13s. per single cart,—that an adequate remuneration is seldom obtained. But this evil might be remedied in some degree by the use of shell-marl, of which an abundant supply can be got in the

parish. But the price of this, 1s. 2d. per single cart, and the expense of driving the quantity requisite, preclude the farmers in a great measure from using it. Would the proprietor, Hugh Scott, Esq. of Harden, charge no more than the mere expense of taking it out of the pit, both he and his tenants would find their advantage in it, especially if the latter were obliged to lay it upon the grass sward, and submit it to the action of frost; for, being of an adhesive quality till it is pulverized by frost, it can have little or no effect upon the soil. Besides, this could be done at less expense than spreading it in its natural state upon fallow, and the beneficial effects either as to grass or corn would be sooner felt. This marl was carefully analyzed by the late Dr Kennedy of Edinburgh, and found to contain about 73 per cent. of carbonate of lime.

Though spouts or springs are not frequent, yet surface water is not drained off so completely as it ought to be. Except at the commencement of a lease, the ditches are seldom scoured or kept clean, and, of course, the surface-water cannot be drained off. Were a person accustomed to the use of the spade mutually employed by landlord and tenant, this evil might be easily remedied; and, what would be no inconsiderable advantage, if this person could cut and clean hedges, the fences would be kept in better order.

It would be uncandid not to acknowledge that the landlords have been extremely liberal in giving their tenants good houses, and every accommodation necessary in point of offices and curtains or courts for their different kinds of stock. Much also has been done in the improvement of roads, so that, with few exceptions, there is now easy access from every part of the parish to the neighbouring turnpikes; and last, though not least, a mill upon a large scale has been erected. The machinery is of the most approved kind, and fitted to manufacture every kind of grain, and has at all times an abundant supply of water. A tenant of skill and enterprise might carry on an extensive and lucrative business.

A great improvement has taken place since the introduction of bone dust, as by this excellent turnips are raised, and the farmer is enabled to give a greater quantity of dung for the production of wheat.

*Breeds of Live-Stock.*—The greatest attention is paid to the rearing of stock. The cattle, with few exceptions, are of the short-horned breed, and these are kept up or improved by buying annually at high prices, from the best breeders in the south, bulls and cows of that kind. The sheep are of the best Leicester kind. Some years ago, Hugh Scott, Esq. of Harden, pur-

chased a stock of these, which were selected from the best flocks in England; and to keep up this stock, and still further to improve it, he annually either hires or buys the best tups that can be got; and, in order to accommodate his tenants and benefit the neighbourhood, he rears from his carefully selected stock, a considerable number of tups, which are regularly sold by auction towards the end of September. Much attention is also paid to the rearing of horses, both for the draught and saddle.

The following is the amount of the different kinds of stock kept, bred, and fed in the parish.

|                                      |     |                                     |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Draught horses,                      | 108 | mersyde in parks annually let by    |     |
| Do. bred annually,                   | 18  | auction,                            | 150 |
| Young horses from 1 to 3 years old,  | 42  | Ewes,                               | 870 |
| Kept for saddle, hunting, carriages, |     | Lambs produced from these,          | 940 |
| &c.                                  | 23  | Lambs sold annually,                | 494 |
| Cows,                                | 146 | Lambs bought in for hogging,        | 280 |
| Calves reared annually, a part of    |     | Sheep annually fed for the butcher, |     |
| which are bought in,                 | 174 | a part of which are bought in,      | 640 |
| Cattle fed for the butcher,          | 108 | Sheep sold lean,                    | 190 |
| Do. sold lean,                       | 72  | Swine annually fed,                 | 150 |
| Cattle grazed at Dryburgh and Be-    |     |                                     |     |

*Rent of Land.*—A considerable quantity of ground, well enclosed, sheltered, and watered, is annually let by auction for grazing; the rent varies from L. 1, 10s. to L. 2, 10s. per acre. The average rent of land upon a lease of 19 or 21 years may be from 15s. to 20s. per acre. The real rent of the parish is betwixt L. 5000 and L. 6000 per annum.

*Price of Labour.*—A hind receives per annum 5 loads of oatmeal; 15 bushels of barley; 6 bushels of pease; 1000 yards of potatoes planted; 5 single carts of coals drawn, but he pays the price at the coal-hill; a cow kept summer and winter; L. 3 in money; he furnishes a shearer for his house, and provides his master with a worker, who is paid 10d. and 8d. in winter per day. Single men who live in the farmer's house receive from L. 7 to L. 8 per annum and their victuals: women from L. 5, 10s. to L. 6, 10s. per annum and their victuals: day-labourers from 1s. 6d. to 2s. per day without victuals: men in harvest from 12s. to 13s. 6d. per week with victuals: women in do. from 11s. to 12s. 6d. per week with victuals: smiths are paid by the year for a pair of farm horses from L. 2, 15s. to L. 3; joiners per day, 2s.; masons, 2s. 6d.

*Quarries.*—Though sandstone or freestone abounds on the banks and in the bed of the river, no quarry has been wrought for many years. This is no small inconvenience, nor can it be remedied without a greater expense than the proprietors are willing to incur.

*Fisheries.*—We have three salmon fisheries; but they are not

very productive, and, consequently, the rent derived from them is but trifling. The fishers follow the practices of their forefathers, in angling, setting small nets in cairns when the river is in flood, and killing the salmon with listers when the river is small and the evening serene: and this they call burning the water, because they are obliged to carry a lighted torch in the boat. Long nets, such as are used near Berwick, and upon the Tay and Tummel in the north, might certainly be employed in many places with great safety and advantage.

There is a large orchard belonging to Sir David Erskine at Dryburgh, which yields from L. 100 to L. 150 per annum.

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Means of Communication.*—There are three small villages in the parish. The means of communication are very scanty, and not a little inconveniently placed. We have no turnpike roads, no coaches nor carriers. In the village of Lessudden there is a daily post; and though in a direct line it is not above two miles distant; yet the Tweed intervening, it is at all times inconvenient, and sometimes impracticable of access, unless we go nearly double the distance, by Dryburgh, where there is a Suspension Bridge.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The situation of the church is extremely beautiful, being placed in the midst of a grove close to the patron's house and policy; it is, however, extremely inconveniently placed both for the minister and people, being about a mile from the manse, and about the same distance from the centre of the parish. It was built in the year 1658, and repaired in the year 1820. It is remarkably well fitted up, and in the most complete repair; all the sittings are free, every tenant has a pew assigned to him, and there is a gallery appropriated in common to cottagers and farm-servants.—The manse was built in the year 1767, and has undergone various repairs.—The glebe is 14 acres, and may be worth L. 14 per annum.—The stipend is 16 chalders, with L. 10 for communion elements.—There are no chapels of ease nor dissenting meeting-houses in the parish. The average number of communicants may be about 240. The collections in the church are from L. 16 to L. 18 per annum. The church will accommodate about 380; and is generally well attended. It is difficult to estimate the number of dissenting families in the parish,—as they are chiefly those of married servants, whose residences fluctuate.

*Education.*—The only seminary in the parish is the parochial school, at which the average number of scholars may be from thirty

to forty. English, writing, arithmetic, practical mathematics, Greek, and Latin, are taught. The salary is L. 30; and the school wages may amount to L. 10 per annum. Besides the above emoluments, the teacher has L. 4, 4s. for precenting in church and officiating as session-clerk. He has also every legal accommodation in respect of a house and garden. When parents are very poor, the heritors make no difficulty in paying for the education of their children.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—Poors' rates were established in the year 1771; they may amount to about L. 30 or L. 40 per annum. This, with the annual collections in the church, is generally sufficient. The heritors, however, by no means restrict themselves to this, but cheerfully assess themselves to the full amount of what the minister and session deem necessary. The landlords and tenants pay in equal proportions; and though the latter are not consulted when the assessment is made, they have never been known to grudge their share. The average number of poor upon the roll is about 8. They receive from 1s. to 2s. 6d. per week, according to circumstances. It deserves notice, that the poor in this parish are provided for at less expense than in any parish of the same extent in the south of Scotland. This arises chiefly from the custom of giving temporary supply in cases of distress, and also from the extreme liberality and attention of the patron's family.

*Inns.*—There are no inns in the parish, nor is any person allowed to sell spirituous liquors.

#### MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The greatest inconvenience experienced by this parish is the distance from coal and lime, 25 miles. Every cwt. of the former costs 1s. 3d., and every single cart of the latter, from 10s. 6d. to 13s. Another great inconvenience is, the want of an easy and ready communication with the south side of the river, unless by the suspension bridge at Dryburgh, which is useful only for foot-passengers or single horses. There is no bridge nearer than Kelso, which is nine miles, or Drygrange bridge, which is four miles. A suspension bridge for carriages, &c. if erected in this immediate neighbourhood, would be of immense use; it would not only benefit this and the conterminous parishes, but would continue the road from Selkirk and St Boswell's Green to Berwick.

June 1834.