

PARISH OF ASHKIRK.

PRESBYTERY OF SELKIRK, SYNOD OF MERSE AND TEVIOTDALE.

THE REV. G. J. HAMILTON, MINISTER.*

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name, Boundaries, &c.—THE origin of the name of this parish is obviously Anglo-Saxon, and we find it, in the records of the twelfth century, spelt *Aschechyre* and *Aschechirk*; and in more modern times, we find Askirk, and Ashkirk, the present name. From the large quantity of ash trees with which the parish abounded, a considerable number of which still surround the churchyard, there can be no doubt regarding the origin of the name. Two-thirds of the parish lie in Roxburgh, and the other in Selkirkshire. It is about 7 miles in length, and about $3\frac{1}{2}$ in breadth. It is bounded on the north by Selkirk, west by Yarrow, south by Robertson and Wilton, east by Minto and Lilliesleaf.

Topographical Appearances.—This parish presents few features worthy of detail. It is entirely of a hilly character, though there are portions of level land on the banks of the Ale, in openings of the narrow valley through which that river flows.

Climate.—The climate must be regarded as rather damp and cold, from the great prevalence of W. and S. W. winds, and that a part of the parish is peculiarly exposed to the E. N. E., and S. E. winds. But the climate has been much improved by the extent to which draining and plantations have been carried, and both might yet be very much extended, with great advantage to both landlords and tenants. The health of the inhabitants may be stated as being fully equal to that of the surrounding district. There is a tombstone in the churchyard, bearing to be that a man of the name of Coltherd, and his wife, who both died at the advanced age of

* Drawn up by Walter Tod, Esq. Langhope. The minister, Mr Hamilton, died since this article was drawn up.

one hundred and two. At present there are several persons above eighty, and there are two men in their ninety-second year. The chief diseases that prevail in the parish are, fevers, consumption, rheumatism, catarrh, and that now universal complaint, termed dyspepsia, or indigestion, which attacks all ages, sexes, and conditions. Concerning the causes of this wide spread malady, this is not the place to speculate.*

Meteorology.—There has been no accurate register of the weather kept in the parish, even to shew the average range of the thermometer and barometer. But this is the less to be regretted, as there will be found some valuable tables and observations, with the various prognostics of the weather, in the very full and able report of the parish of Yarrow, by the Rev. James Russell. And as the parishes of Ashkirk and Yarrow lie contiguous, and are therefore subject to the operation of the same causes that determine the state of the weather, the results obtained in the one parish will, with very slight modifications, apply to the other.

Hydrography, Springs.—The greater number of the springs in the parish are perennial. Their general temperature is about 45°. Not a few of these springs are obviously impregnated with various mineral substances, and some of them are regarded by some of the inhabitants as possessing medicinal virtues, but none of them have ever been carefully analyzed.

Lochs.—There were formerly a great many lochs in this parish, but now only those of Essenside, Sheilswood, Headshaw, and Ashkirk are of any considerable extent. The first is the joint property of the Earl of Minto, and of Archibald Cochrane, Esq. of Ashkirk, measuring about 20 acres. The second and third belong to the Earl of Minto, and the last to Archibald Cochrane, Esq. of Ashkirk. All these lochs contain excellent marl, and some of them yield trout, perch, and pike. What is now called Synton moss was at one time a considerable lake, but has been completely drained, in order to obtain the marl and peat with which it abounds, both of which are of excellent quality. There are four marl mosses on the estate of Synton, which have all been drained by the present proprietor, the

* But would the dyspeptics of the age take an advice, which is here offered, without a fee, and which is, that they would find their stomachs very much relieved and improved by putting a great deal less in them. But there is not much good to be expected by advice,—and the thing will go on, unless some merciful Member of Parliament shall get the digestive organs placed under the same protection as the factory children,—viz. that they shall not be oppressed by their employers.

expense of which cost more than L. 400. One of these marl mosses, called Stonyford, measures about 40 acres, with peat above, and under which there is a seam of excellent marl, from 10 to 11 feet deep. Besides the lakes which have been drained for the objects just mentioned, there must have been formerly a very large one on the farm of Whitslade, the property of George Pott, Esq. of Todrig, as a rocky barrier crosses the river Ale, a little to the east of that farm, which has been worn down by the action of the water, in the course of ages, to the depth of more than 100 feet, and is now called the Leap Linns. Above these linns, on the banks of the river, the large meadow, and other lands, that had formed the lowest portions of the bottom of the lake, are still remarkable for their richness and fertility.

Rivers.—The only river is the Ale, which takes its rise from the lakes of Alemoor and Shaws, and runs nearly through the centre of the parish from west to east. This river abounds with excellent trout. But in summer it is in general too small for angling. A few sea trout and small salmon occasionally reach this length, at certain seasons of the year, after the river has been flooded.

Geology and Mineralogy.—The general direction of the stratification of this parish lies from south-west to north-east. The rocks belong to the transition series, and consist almost entirely of greywacke with a basis of clay-slate. The general dip may be stated at 45° , though it varies in different places from the perpendicular to the horizontal. The stratification of the Leap Linns, already mentioned, the rocks cut through by the action of the water, seems to be nearly in a horizontal position. No limestone has yet been discovered in the parish.

The skulls of various species of animals not now to be found, have been dug from the marl mosses. The writer of these pages has seen a large and beautiful specimen of the horns of the stag, in the possession of John C. Scott, Esq. of Synton, which was found imbedded in a marl moss, the property of the same gentleman. The soil is in general light, from the decomposition of the rocks of which it is formed, but in some places the soil is of a clayey description mixed with gravel, and some of the haughs on the banks of the Ale are alluvial. Though there are good crops of various kinds, both green and white, raised in the parish; yet, from the character of the soil, and the nature of the climate, neither can be regarded as of the best quality. The pasture lands rear excellent Cheviot sheep, which yield wool of a fine quality. But the stock

on the farms in the upper part of the parish are subject to a disease known by the name of "the louping-ill," which in a cold and barren spring often causes very severe loss both of ewes and lambs.

Zoology.—That this parish was formerly inhabited by animals that have long since disappeared is proved by the best of all evidence,—the bones of the animals themselves found in various marl mosses. Besides the horns of the stag already mentioned, the horns of the urus were dug from the same moss. There are now no birds or animals that can be regarded as peculiar to the parish, but such as are common to the surrounding district. There are still a few foxes, and plenty of hares, rabbits, black and red grouse, and partridges.

Botany.—In the bog lands, the *orchis* may be found in many of its beautiful varieties; and in moss lands the *Eriophorum vaginatum* in great abundance, and the *Trollius Europæus* are also to be seen in various meadow lands. The natural grasses found in this parish are the *Scirpus cæspitosus*; it grows on thin mossy soil, mixed with heath, but as it soon fades, it is of no value for winter pasture. The *Nardus stricta* and *Aira cærulea* being short lived are also less valuable. But the *Juncus squarrosus* being an evergreen, and a hardy perennial, is of considerable importance. But the most valuable spring grass for sheep is the *Eriophorum vaginatum*; and *Sesleria cærulea*, as it remains green during the spring months, is highly valuable; and the *Juncus acutiflorus* is of great value, both for pasture and hay for cattle during the winter.

That a great quantity and variety of natural wood, once existed in the parish is proved by the large quantity of decayed wood found in various mosses; but both the quantity and variety of natural wood which now remain are inconsiderable. But, on a few estates, their place has been well supplied by large and thriving plantations. Archibald Cochrane, Esq. of Ashkirk, has planted upon his estate above 40 acres, consisting of the various species of fir, and with a proper mixture of ash, elm, and oak. And John C. Scott, Esq. of Synton, has planted upon his estate 230 acres, laid out with great judgment and taste, both for shelter and ornament; and, with the exception of a few old trees, around the house, the whole has been planted by the present spirited proprietor. There is a very fine old tree near the house, which measures 15½ feet in circumference; and what is very remarkable, there is an oak measuring 5½ feet in circumference, which was planted by the hands of

the present proprietor.—Charles B. Scott, Esq. of Woll, has about 70 acres of very fine plantation, including the policy. There are two large and beautiful hollies, near the house, the one measuring at one foot from the ground, and at five feet from the ground, $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet in circumference. The other measures at one foot from the ground $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet in circumference, and at eight feet from the ground, 5 feet in circumference. The policy has been much improved, and the wood judiciously thinned by the present proprietor, which has added much to the natural beauty of the commanding situation on which the house stands. There are about thirty acres of plantation on North Synton, the property of Robert Pringle, Esq. of Clifton; and on Drydean, the property of the Earl of Minto, about six acres; and on Burnfoot, the property of Elliot Lockhart, Esq. of Borthwickbrae, there are from 8 to 10 acres, which in all make of plantation in the parish about 386 acres.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

There are no ancient records or MSS. that refer solely to this parish, but it is frequently mentioned in general descriptions of the county, one of which, a very able article, was furnished to the Edinburgh Encyclopædia, by Mr William Laidlaw, author of Lucy's Flittin and many valuable essays.

Land-owners.—The land-owners in the parish are, in the order of their valuation as follows: John C. Scott, Esq. of Synton; The Earl of Minto; Archibald Cochrane, Esq. of Ashkirk; Elliot Lockhart, Esq. of Borthwickbrae; Charles B. Scott, Esq. of Woll; Robert Pringle, Esq. of Clifton; George Pott, Esq. of Todrig; Mark Sprot, Esq. of Riddell.

Parochial Registers.—There are some very old and curious entries in the registers of this parish, but unfortunately the books are far from being entire. In looking over the registers, you may find them for a few years here and there pretty regularly kept, but, upon the whole, they are still far from being an accurate record of what they were intended to preserve.

Historical Events.—The greater portion of the parish at one time formed part of the see of Glasgow. The Bishop of Glasgow had a palace, which stood on a field now forming part of the present glebe-lands. Some old men in the parish remember to have seen part of the walls, and the field at this day retains the name of Palace Walls; and the greater number of the present proprietors still hold of the College of Glasgow.

Eminent Characters.—It is a curious fact that at one time al-

most the whole parish belonged to gentlemen of the name of Scott. In the following lines from Satchel's poems, we find almost all the properties in the parish mentioned by name.

“ And John of Middlestead together came ;
 Robert of Huntly he did not fail,
 He came with the Scotts of the Water of Ail ;
 So did Walter of Todrig that well could ride,
 And Robert Scot, brother to Whitlade,
 Andrew of Sallinside he was one,
 With James of Kirkhouse, and Askirk's John ;
 Robert of Headshaw himself would gang,
 He was his honour's cousin-german ;
 Sinton and Wall, they stay'd at home,
 Kirkhouse and Askirk went in their room ;
 Because it was my Lord's decree,*
 But younger brethern they all should be.”

In the Lyon Office of Scotland, there are some curious and interesting particulars of the Scotts of this parish, many of whom were celebrated in the border wars of the time. It is stated in the pedigrees compiled by Dr William Scott, that a younger son of the then Baron of Buccleuch (1288) named John, was sent to St Mungo's, Glasgow, for his education, being lame, and hence unfit for the then border service. Walter, the grandson of the said John, became a chamberlain to the then Archbishop of Glasgow, who had a large interest in the parish, as we have already seen, and recommended him to his cousin of Buccleuch, when the said Walter, acting for the bishop in the capacity just mentioned, settled at Burnfoot, on the water of Ale. This Walter, called by the cant name of Watt the Ratton, from his fellness and activity, married a daughter of Mr Shortread, of Headshaw, by whom he had four sons ; the eldest, George, his heir, of Synton ; the second, Scott of Headshaw ; the third, Scott of Glack ; and the fourth, Scott of Ashkirk in Roxburghshire.

It is recorded by the same authority, that George, the seventh from Buccleuch, and fifth of Synton, married a daughter of Thomas Scott of Robertson, in Roxburghshire, by whom he had two sons, Walter and William ; Walter, the eldest, was designed of Synton ; and William, the younger, of Harden. It is from this William Scott of Harden that the present Scott of Gala, Selkirkshire, Scott of Woll, Scott of Synton, Scott of Raeburn, &c. are descended.†

* The “ Lord's decree” here mentioned, was the then Lord Buccleuch, who chose thirty-three of his kinsmen to take Armstrong from the Castle of Carlisle.

† See Captain W. Scott's Genealogical Essays, part ii. p. 13, 17, 19, 20, 66, &c. See also Baronage of Scotland, and Nisbet's Extracts from the Lyon Office, printed in his Heraldry.

John Scott, the last of Whitslade, sold that estate, which then consisted of Whitslade, Castleside, the Readforgreens, Ashkirk, Ashkirk-mill, Salanside, Bradley, &c. only about the year 1722. And Thomas Scott, the last of Todrig, who had been a brave warrior, both by sea and land, only sold Todrig in 1748, having sold the estate of Wester Essenside a few years before. He died in 1753, and was buried at Ashkirk in an isle now removed. His arms were cut in wood on his seat in the old church, bearing the date 1622. It will be seen from the list of land-owners already given, that Synton and Woll are the only properties that now remain in the possession of the illustrious name of Scott.

The details now given may be regarded by some of the mere utilitarians of the age, as fit only to amuse the idle hours of the antiquary, but they will appear in a different light to the philosopher and historian, who are anxious to unfold the laws that regulate the distribution of wealth and property among the great family of mankind.

Antiquities and Traditions.—Besides the ruins of the Palace of the Bishop of Glasgow, already mentioned, there are two Danish encampments on the farm of Castleside,—the one entire, but the other much effaced by the plough. There was formerly a very strong tower or keep on the lands of Salanside, but now the ruins are scarcely visible. There are also in various other places vestiges of encampments, but their origin cannot be very accurately ascertained.

III.—POPULATION.

In 1755, the amount of population, according to the report of Dr Webster, was 629.

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|----------------|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| In 1801, males | 252 | Females, | 259 | 511 |
| 1811, do. | 284 | do. | 290 | 574 |
| 1821, do. | 260 | do. | 264 | 544 |
| 1831, | - | - | - | 565 |

By a census taken in 1835, the number of Dissenters in the parish was 93; and those that belong to the Established Church amount to 173.

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|---|-----|
| The number of children under 12 years of age, | 177 |
| Number of communicants, | 125 |
| inhabited houses, | 173 |
| families, | 102 |
| Average number of children in each family, | 78 |
| of deaths for the last seven years, | 5 |
| births, | 4 |
| marriages, | 10 |
| | 4 |

The number of resident proprietors 3, who at least reside for the summer months. There are 5 masons, 2 carpenters, 2 tailors,

1 smith, and a respectable farrier. The number of agricultural labourers has not been accurately ascertained.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture and Rural Economy.—Land cultivated, 2804 acres. The number of acres of pasture land has not been ascertained. Land capable of cultivation with a profitable application of capital, inconsiderable. Land planted about 386 acres.

Rent of Land.—The average rent of arable land in the parish is from 14s. to 15s. per acre; for grazing, per cow, L. 4, for wintering L. 1, 10s.; of pasturing from 5s. to 6s. per sheep. The rental of the parish is about L. 4479, 7s.

Wages.—Farm-servants with families, have in lieu of board, 3 loads of meal, the produce of a cow, and a certain quantity of potatoes planted. The average wages of such servants is from L. 9 to L. 10. Shepherds have for wages the keeping of forty-five sheep. The yearly wages of female servants vary from L. 5 to L. 7, exclusive of board. The artisans of the parish, such as masons, carpenters, and smiths, make, per day, from 2s. to 2s. 4d.; common labourers, such as roadmen, from 1s. 8d. to 2s.

Prices.—The average price of wool and sheep from 1826 to 1831 inclusive, has been accurately ascertained, which is as follows: Cheviot wool laid with tar and butter, per stone of 24 lbs. English, 10s. 7d.; ditto laid with turpentine, 14s. 2d.; ditto pure white 17s. 1d.; stock wethers hogs unclipt, 12s. 9d.; ditto ewe hogs unclipt, 14s. 2d.; ewe hogs sold at market, 11s. 3d.; top wether lambs, 6s. 6d.; second ewe and wether lambs, 5s. 3d.; draft ewes, 12s. 8d.; wethers unclipt, 19s. 9d.; wethers for turnip feeding, L. 1, 0s. 6d.

Breeds of Live-Stock.—The Cheviot is now the only breed of sheep in the parish; the black-faced have entirely disappeared. On a few farms the Cheviot ewes are crossed with the Leicester breed, and produce what are termed half-bred lambs, which yield a much higher price than Cheviot lambs; but this advantage is gained with many drawbacks of another description, which render the ultimate results doubtful, except on a few farms peculiarly situated. The present breed of cattle in the parish is what is termed the short-horned, being found upon the whole to be the most profitable. A few Highland cattle are wintered in the parish, on farms that have a sufficient command of bog hay. The dairy is in a great measure supplanted by the rearing of young cattle, but what butter is made in the parish is of the very best quality,—our housewives being great adepts in this department.

Husbandry and Produce.—The quantity of land under cultivation in this parish must at one time have been very great, as traces of the plough are still visible upon hills now covered with heath. That any extent of this land could be reclaimed to yield a profit is very doubtful, from the great distance and consequent very high price of lime. Draining has been carried to a considerable extent, and might be yet farther extended with advantage. The average return of white crops in the parish may be stated from 4 to 5 bolls per English acre; cultivated hay, 150 stones of 22 lb. per acre; turnips L. 4 per acre; and potatoes L. 8. The land in the parish is in general very well farmed, both the four and five shift rotation being in practice.

The length of leases may be stated from nine to fifteen years; very few nineteen.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Means of Communication.—There is no market or post-office in the parish, the distance from Selkirk being five, and from Hawick six miles. There are a few houses at Ashkirk, but nothing that deserves the name of a village. There are two stone and one wooden bridge across the Ale within the limits of the parish, all of which are in good repair, with the exception of the one on the Edinburgh road, which is a great deal too narrow. The parochial roads are but indifferently kept, though the expense to both landlord and tenant is very considerable.

Ecclesiastical State.—The present church was built in 1791, is in good repair, and is seated for 202 persons, allowing 18 inches to each person. The seats are all free. The church is conveniently situated, being nearly in the centre of the parish. The present manse was built in 1784. Some additions have since been made, and it is at present comfortable and commodious. It stands on an eminence, fronting the south, and commands a fine view of a beautiful opening of the valley, through which the river Ale runs. The glebe consists of nearly 14 acres, worth about L. 1, 10s. per acre. The glebe has been greatly improved by the present incumbent, being judiciously subdivided by hedges, with small plots of trees, at the corners of each field. The stipend is 14 chalders, consisting of meal and barley, the average of which in money for the last seven years is L. 216, 6s.; allowance for communion elements, L. 8, 6s. 8d. It deserves to be here mentioned, that the heritors of the parish, with a generosity which does them great honour, allow the assistant clergyman L. 30 per annum, and have

done so for the last five years during the severe indisposition of the present incumbent. Divine service is in general well attended, and the deportment of the congregation highly decorous. The Earl of Minto is patron of the parish.

The number of families in the parish attending the chapels of Dissenters or Seceders is 25.

Education and Literature.—There is only one parochial school. The branches taught are, reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, land-surveying and mensuration. The average number of scholars may be stated at 40. The schoolmaster's salary is L. 30, and the average amount of fees may be stated at from L. 16 to L. 17 per annum. He has a garden consisting of 1 rood 28 poles imperial measure.

There is a large and handsome new school-house nearly ready for being opened, measuring 31 by 20½ feet within the walls.

Libraries.—There is a very well managed parochial library, containing a very good selection of books; and James Douglas, Esq. of Cavers, with a beneficence as honourable to him as beneficial to the parish, has sent a large number of volumes, which, after being read, he withdraws, and replaces by others.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The poor are chiefly supported by legal assessments, which amount from L. 48 to L. 56 per annum. The number of paupers upon the roll at present is 8, and three families receive temporary supply. It does not appear that pauperism has been on the increase for a considerable number of years, from the data which the register affords; but the direct tendency of the system of assessments is to weaken the ties of kindred, to lower the moral tone of the people, to relax industry, and to diminish independence, unless met by powerful checks, from the peculiar situation of the parish. The yearly average collections at church amount to L. 6, 18s. 3d.

Inns.—There are no inns in the parish, and the character of the inhabitants may be regarded as sober and industrious.

Fuel.—The principal fuel used in the parish is peat and coal. But coal, being distant more than thirty miles, can never be rated under 1s. 3d. per cwt.; and often it is much higher, which makes the expense of coal so great as to place that article beyond the reach of the poor. But not only this parish, but the whole surrounding district, suffer the pressure of this great evil, which admits of no effectual cure, but a rail-road through the Carter Fell.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

Since the date of the last Statistical Account of this parish, the condition of the people has been highly improved in three essential elements of human happiness. The great mass of the inhabitants are better fed, clad, and educated, than their fathers were at the period to which we have referred. Farming is much better understood and practised in every department; a much larger quantity of produce is raised from the same surface; and the breeding and management of stock have been carried to a high state of perfection. Both the new farm-houses and cottages have in general been improved, in accommodation and in comfort. And the new offices that have been built, are more ample and convenient. But, with all these great improvements, still much remains to be done. Draining might be farther extended with great advantage, and, were landlords to afford their tenants liberal assistance in liming various parts of the parish, the crops would be much earlier, safer, and more productive.

And on the stock farms, in the higher parts of the parish, there is a great want of plantation for shelter. The writer of these remarks is not unaware, that there are farmers who demur to this species of shelter as inducing sheep to too much repose and inactivity in seeking food; but the objection has the misfortune of being directly opposed to some of the best established physical conditions, on which the health and productiveness of ruminating animals are known to depend.

March 1837.