

STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF BLACKFORD PARISH . - 1792.

No 23. (County of Perth ). By the Rev. John Stevenson.

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Situation, Surface etc. The Parish lies in the County of Berth, the presbytery of Auchterarder and the Synod of Perth & Stirling. The Church stands upon rising ground, and is nearly in the centre of the parish, which extends 3 or 4 miles around it. It was burnt in the year 1738, after dismissing the school in the evening. It was afterwards rebuilt on the same ground. The southerly part of the parish is occupied by a ridge of the Ochill Hills, which upon the South side, towards the Devon, is somewhat steep and in some places craggy, affording excellent pasture for sheep. Upon the North side the declivity is more gentle, and laid out in farms. The bottom of the country is dead flat, watered by the Allan. Part of it is arable and the rest of it is either deep moss or marshy ground, where the plough cannot go. Upon the North of the Allan, the ground rises and forms a group of sandy or gravelly hills, with a vast number of hollows, some of them round and others extended in length, forming little valleys, through which, for the most part, some small brook runs. These heights may be from 20 to 30 feet perpendicular, and make a very uncommon appearance. They contain no rock, but when dug into, discover nothing but strata of dead sand or coarse gravel. They are generally covered with a short heath or broom, having little or no soil upon the surface. North from these tumuli, the ground rises to a large moor, called the Muir of Tullibardine, the property of the Duke of Atholl. It is continued from the Grampian Hills in Muthill Parish, and descends gradually eastward to the Parish of Auchterarder, dividing Strathallan from Strathearn, and the South side of the Parish from the North. It is about 2 miles in breadth, is perfectly flat, and everywhere covered with heath. From this to the North boundary of the Parish, the ground rises and sinks alternately, according to the course of several rivulets which run through it from West to East till they fall into the river Earn.

Soil and Climate. The soil in the parish is not good. In general it is thin, with a coarse gravelly bottom, and may be divided into wet and dry extremes. A great part is soaked in water which issues from numberless springs or runs between the upper sward and the gravel below. What is dry is a light sharp mould, mixed with sand, and a vast number of small stones. In some places, the soil is deep, and consists of a cold wet sandy clay, with moss or dead sand below. Some few spots, that have been long cultivated are tolerably fertile when the season is good; but the far greater part of the ground in tillage has not the smallest pretensions to fertility. But bad as the soil is, the climate is still more unfavourable. Great part of the Parish lies very high above the level of the sea, and with the Ochills between it and the sun. The effects of the cold are sensibly felt in retarding and marring the growth of vegetables. Owing to the vicinity of the Ochills we are exposed to continual rain and to heavy and deep falls of snow, which for the most part lie very long and render the country impassable.

Disease. While the climate is so noxious to plants, it cannot be favourable to the bodies of animals: most of the diseases, which take their rise from the cold damp air, prevail here, such as rheums and pulmonary complaints; but the scurvy is the most predominant disease and is attended with violent symptoms, such as aching pains in the joints and limbs, and hard swellings. In some cases tumours are formed which suppurate and degenerate into scrophulous runnings; in some instances it affects the judgement and makes the unhappy sufferers put an end to their own existence. Nervous fevers are very frequent the inflammatory and intermitting fevers are little known, the putrid fever has appeared but once these last 20 years. Formerly the smallpox never appeared in the parish without proving fatal to one out of three whom they seized. But the country people have been taught to change their way of managing children in that disease; and some are so hardy as to inoculate their children with their own hand so that very few die of that distemper.

Rivers and Lakes. The rivers of Ruthven and Allan, both take their rise in the neighbourhood of Gleneagles: Baint Mungos Well is the source of the first, which passes the House of Gleneagles then takes its course eastward and falls into the Earn, to the N.E. of Auchterarder. The latter runs westward through Strathallan, passes Dunblane and falls into the Forth, about a mile above Stirling Bridge. Both these rivers abound in common ~~trout~~ red trout. The Allan, which is fed by a number of rivulets from the neighbouring Ochil's, is sometimes so swelled as to lay a great part of the flat ground, through which it runs, under water, but very seldom does any considerable damage, as the current is very gentle. There are two or three small lochs near the Church in which there are some perches: but the fish are not in such plenty as to make it worth while to carry them to market.

Quarries & Stone. The stone in this parish is very hard in quality. There is a large quarry wrought in Abercairney's lands, at the foot of the Ochils, which for many years furnished fine mill stones to all the mills many miles around: it is still working, though the demand for mill-stones is not now so great. It also produces stones for building and takes a tolerably good polish: but where it is exposed much to weather it is apt to waste and fall to pieces. Of this stone very good rollers are made. Besides the quarry stones there are vast quantities of large stones scattered upon the ground, some of which lie on the surface and others are buried in the ground, to the hindrance of the plough. They are generally a hard blue whin, which cannot be broken without the aid of gunpowder. The people begin now to remove them in that way and build dykes with them.

Quadrupeds. The quadrupeds of a domestic kind are the same here as are found in every part of Scotland. Our country breed of horses and cows are generally of a smaller size, than those in the low country. The sheep ~~were~~ were formerly small, but since great numbers of young sheep for breeding have been annually imported from the south the species is greatly improved in size.

Population. In the year 1787 the number of souls amounted to 1360, of which 650 were males and 710 females, all of whom reside in the country, as there are no towns or villages in the parish. In Doctor



Webster's Report, the number is 1681. Of late several people have died between 70 and 100, two men past 90 and not a few past 80. One woman of the name of Seton, died a few years ago at Blackford, who, from historical facts which she remembered, was supposed to be 4 or 5 years above 100. She retained her faculties perfectly entire to the last. Within the bounds of the parish there are 90 farmers, each of whom keeps a plough and whose families amount in whole to 432 old and young, and including servants, male and female, to 559. But besides these, there are 92 families, whose number amount to 359, who live upon small pendicles of land.

Productions. This parish produces most of the vegetables that are common in other parts of Scotland. No wheat is sown, except a little which Mr. Haldane sows for the use of his family, and it is but lately that the tenants have begun to raise pease, as they are apt to be destroyed by our early hoar frosts, while they are green, and if the harvest is rainy it is difficult to save them. Barley is more or less the produce of every farm: the kind generally sown is Chester or Rough Barley: but oats are what the tenants principally cultivate. In some farms they grow a good deal of what goes by the name of gray oats, which are only valuable, because they yield a pretty good crop upon thin channelly ground, where hardly any other grain will grow. Turnips when they are sown in drills and properly managed, grow a very considerable size. Clover and grass seeds also produce tolerable good crops. Flax is raised in great plenty, and is for the most part, of a very good quality. A peck of lint seed in a favourable year will produce between 4 & 5 stones of flax. Potatoes thrive very well here and constitute a great part of the food of the lower class of people. Fruit trees do not succeed, owing to the thinness of the soil and the coldness of the climate. Barren trees of all kinds grow here: but what seems most adapted to the soil is the fir, which thrives very well in our worst soil. In the wood of Gleneagles there are a dozen or twenty fir trees, of the common kind, concerning which there is no tradition, when, or by whom, they were planted: they are exceedingly beautiful and straight in the trunk and of considerable length. One of them is ten feet in circumference at about 4 ft. above the ground. The parish in general, supplies itself with the necessary articles of provision and grain is frequently exported to Stirling and other Towns.

Fuel=. The fuel commonly used in this parish is peat or turf of which there is a great plenty. Since a good road was made through Gleneagles and Glendevon, which opens a passage to the south side of the Ochils, a considerable quantity of pit coal is annually imported and is used even by the common people. They are bought at the coallery of Blaingone (?), belonging to the Duke of Athole, about 9 or 10 miles from this and cost the purchaser 10d. for every stone upon the spot: an ordinary one-horse cart will bring home 30 or 40 stone.

The peats cost the people in the parish nothing but the trouble of casting them and leading them home.

ancestors of the Duke of Montrose had their ordinary residence, at the Castle of Kinnairdine, which was burnt at the time of the Civil Wars, and has never been rebuilt: the ruins remain, and show it to have been a

Church. The value of the living, by the interim decree of the Court of Session, obtained by the minister, Mr. Archibald Moncrieff in the year 1727, is £43:17:11½ in money, including £5 for Communion Elements. The stipend paid in victual is 1½ Chalders of bear, and the same quantity of oatmeal, with a glebe and pasture land, consisting of 17 or 18 acres. Charles Moray of Abercairny is Patron. The Heritors of this parish are Seven in number: The Duke of Athole, Charles Moray Colonel Drummond of Machany, George Haldane of Gleneagles, Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine, David Drummond of Duchally, and William Graham of Orchil. None of these except Colonel Drummond, Mr. Haldane and Mr. Drummond, have mansionhouses in the parish.

Poor. It appears, by the register and books of accounts from the Revolution to the present time, that, in the Parish of Blackford, the ordinary funds have answered the ends of public charity. At first very few applied to be taken upon the funds of the parish; and until the Secession began, the parish being much united; all except a few Episcopalians, came to Church and contributed to the support of the poor. Thus more money was actually collected than was expended in the course of the year. Hence the stock rose and being laid out at interest and that interest allowed to accumulate, the poor in the year 1769, were possessed of £280 of stock. About the year 1778 a farmer in the parish bequeathed £50 to the poor. From the year 1780 to the present year, the average annual sum received has been £33 and the annual distribution at an average amounted to £28.

Antiquities. It does not appear that there ever was any monastery in this parish. But there were several chapels, some of which are still standing; and before the year 1745 public worship was occasionally performed in two of them. One is situated at the house of Gleneagles which is the burial place of the family; and the other near the Castle of Tullibardine which was built in the form of a Cross, in the 15th century, by one of the Earls of Tullibardine. In the choir of this chapel the Dukes of Athole formerly buried their dead. Besides these there are vestiges of two chapels in the ground of Machany, at one of which there is still a burying ground, used by the people of the neighbourhood. There is the vestige of a small camp upon an eminence fronting Gleneagles, which has a commanding prospect to the East and was probably an outpost where a small party of Romans kept watch, while the army was encamped at Ardoch, 5 miles to the West. The course which the Romans pursued in their marches from Stirling, east through Strath-earn, lies to the North of this parish, where there are the remains of a Roman Causeway, called the 'street road'. There is one barrow, a little to the east from the manse but it has never been examined. The common notion concerning it, is, that it is the burial place of some great man: perhaps it is of druidical origin, and was one of those places where they kindled their sacred fire. In different places of the parish there are circles of stones; one in the parks of Gleneagles one in the glebe and another in the heights of Sheriffmuir. These are supposed to have been places of Druidical worship. In this parish the ancestors of the Duke of Montrose had their ordinary residence, at the Castle of Kincardine, which was burnt at the time of the Civil Wars, and has never been rebuilt: the ruins remain, and show it to have been a



very large and strong Gothic building. It stands upon an eminence, overlooking a deep glen, through which the Ruthven runs. In Tullibardine stands the remains of a castle of that name, the seat in former times, of the Earls of Tullibardine: and for a long time after that family came to the titles of Athol, by marrying the heiress, they resided there some part of the year. At the Rebellion 1715, it was garrisoned by a party of Mar's Army and taken by Argyle. Before 1745 Lord George Murray and his family resided in it. Since that time it has been suffered to go to ruin.

Miscellaneous Observations. There are no mountains in the parish, except the small ridge of the Ochils. It is not so high as the ridge to the south of it, which is seen from Edinburgh. It is covered for the most part with fine pasture.

We have frequent thunder & lightning but no remarkable accident has ever happened by it. We are exposed to very violent gales of wind from the west and southwest, which sometimes unroof houses, blow down trees and in harvest cause a prodigious shaking in the standing corn. About two years ago a hurricane of this kind began about the west of the parish and continued in a direction north east, for about 12 miles and little more than 3 miles breadth. The greatest part of the flax was at the time spread upon the ground, and within the limits mentioned it swept the whole before it.

The parish has no peculiar advantages or disadvantages. The names of places in it are for the most part English, but a few are evidently Gaelic.

The people have nothing remarkable in their size, strength or features: they are of the middle size, of a dusky complexion, have a serious turn, and are very zealous in religious matters.

The women are the only manufacturers in this parish. From the flax that is raised in it, they spin a good deal of linen yarn, and make many pieces of coarse linen cloth for sale: and by their industry, raise a part of the rent that is paid to the landlord.

The roads in the district are naturally good, owing to the gravelly soil. They are easily kept up, and till lately, this was done by the statute labour, which was very ill performed. They have now fallen into the method of commuting the statute labour for money, at the rate of eight shillings to twelve shillings each plough: the little tenants and cottagers are charged such small sums as they are able to pay. Within these few years, bridges have been thrown over several ravulets which come from the Ochils, and in floods were very troublesome to travellers. These were mostly built at the expense of the County. The late Sir William Moncrieff received £30 from the County funds, with which he built three very necessary bridges at Blackford.