

Statistical Account
PARISH OF DURRIS.
(County of Aberdeen.)
By the Rev. Mr WILLIAM STRACHAN.

Name and Situation.- The ancient name of the parish, as appears by some old manuscripts in my possession, is *Duires*. The modern name is *Durris* or *Dores*. The word *Duires*, signifies, in the Gaelic language, the *Mouth of the Highlands*. The parish of Durris lies in the county of the Mearns, and in the presbytery and synod of Aberdeen. Its form is nearly that of an oblong square. It is about four or five Scots miles long and two and a half broad. The appearance of the country is, in some parts, flat, and in others mountainous. Part of the Grampian hills run along the south side of the parish. The soil, near the river side, is generally thin and sandy. There are, however, two pieces of flat ground, viz. those of Durris and Balbridie, of a deep soil. That of Durris is mostly enclosed and subdivided. A good part of it has, of late, been improved; and now produces excellent crops. In the midland, and towards the hills, the soil is deeper and blacker.

Mineral Waters.- There are several mineral springs in this parish, mostly of the chalybeate kind. There is one on the top of mount Gower, called *Red Beard's Well*, which is reckoned good for stomachic complaints. There is another strongly impregnated with sulphur. The taste of the water is disagreeable; but it sits very light on the stomach.

River.- The river Dee bounds the parish on the north. It is not navigable, but at Aberdeen, by means of the tides. The salmon fishings on the Dee, for some years past, have not been profitable; because the fish do not come up the river in such numbers as formerly. From the month of January, till the middle of May, salmon sells at 6d. *per* pound. During the rest of the season, they are sold at 3d. *per* pound. They are in perfection from the beginning of January to the middle of September.

Hills.- The hills in the parish are Hawk's Nest, Mount Gower, Cragg-beg, Mon-dernel and Cairn Monearn. The most remarkable of these hills is Cairn Monearn; according to Mr. Garden's map of the county, it is 340 yards high. It has a very large cairn of stones on top of it. All these hills are covered with moss and heath. There are a good many rocks at the foot of Cragg-beg. Among these rocks is a cavern. A road to Stonehaven, called the *Stag-road*, is near this cave. Robbers, headed by one Red-Beard, are said formerly to have sheltered themselves in it; and to have committed many depredations. Red-Beard's Well received its name from this robber.

Population.- In the year 1769, as appears by a roll of the former incumbent, the population was 777. The present population is 651 (decreased since 1769 by 126). The number of males is 299. The number of females is 352. In Dr Webster's report, the number is 889.

Productions, etc.- The produce is barley, oats, pease, turnips, potatoes and cabbages. Lord Peterborough, nine years ago, planted a large field near the house of Durris, with Scots fir, larix, etc. This plantation is thriving very well. He has lately enclosed a great deal of moor ground near the House of Durris. Part of these enclosures is already planted. There is a very romantic den at the back of the house of Durris, planted with ash, elm, horse-chestnut, beech, larix, birch, and oak. The number of cattle may be about 5 or 600, of horses 123, and of sheep 2275.

Church.- The stipend of Durris is L.50 Sterling. No victual is paid to the minister. The Earl of Peterborough is both patron and proprietor. It brings him in L. 1,200 Sterling, *per annum*. The manse, and most of the office-houses are new. They were built in the years 1773 and 1774.

Poor.- The number of poor, receiving alms, is from 30 to 40 yearly. The total sum of annual collections, and of annual rents, for the use of the poor, is L. 35, Of which L. 1 Sterling, and upwards, is appropriated to the infirmary of Aberdeen.

Fuel.- The fuel commonly used here, is peat and turf. The peat is procured from excellent mosses, in different parts of the parish; and the turf from the grounds near the mosses.

Miscellaneous Observations.- The number of farms is 42. There are no manufacturers, strictly speaking, in the parish. The women and children make great many hose, but are not fond of spinning lint. There is one Roman Catholic, one Episcopalian; all the rest are of the established church. There is no map of the parish; but there is one of the county by Mr Garden. He makes the number of acres in this parish 13,309 Scots, 16,912 English

About a quarter of a mile below the church, on the North side of the Aberdeen road, there is a little hill, called the *Castle-Hill*. It has formerly been a place of some strength. Places on the top, where cannon have been planted, are very visible. There is a pretty deep ditch round the foot of it, on the east, south and west. A stream of water, coming from the neighbouring hill, can easily be brought to fill the ditch.

APPENDIX.

Erection.- This parish was formerly a parsonage, in the presbytery of Fordoun, and diocese of Brechin. As the minister found it, at all times, very inconvenient, and in winter often impossible, on account of the deep snow on the hills, to attend the diets of presbytery, the General Assembly, therefore, in the year 1717, annexed Derris to the presbytery of Aberdeen.

Agriculture.- The Norfolk plough is used for saughing, or ribbing the ground, and ploughing light soil. The drill and wheel ploughs are used on the haugh; but the old Scotch plough, with low stilts, is most in use. The farmers constantly employ hired servants; but most of them have sub-tenants, who are bound to cut down their master's crops, cast and lead his peats, and build his sauld dykes. They are usually allowed Saturday, in time of harvest, to reap their own corn.

Poor.- Mr Alexander Hogg, a native of this parish, died at Turkenham, in the beginning of the year 1787, and bequeathed to this parish L., in old 4 *per cent* Bank annuities reduced, to be applied to the following purposes:

1mo, To a charity schoolmaster, for instructing 10 poor children, boys or girls, whose ages shall not be under 9 years nor exceed 11, in reading English, writing, and accounts, *per annum* L. 5 0 0

2do, To the herds round Cairn-Shee, for their mid-summer fee, (on which occasion the farmers give their herds bread and cheese, and sometimes they have music and dancing), L. 0 10 0

3tio, For a dinner to the members of the kirk-session, when they distribute the interest of his mortification, L. 1 0 0

4to, The remainder of the interest of the said 500 L. (for which only 3 *per cent.* is now received) to be distributed among the poor house keepers, who are not on the poor's roll

NB. The interest of this 500 L. makes a part of the account formerly communicated of the poor's funds of this parish.

School.- Mr John Gerard, the present schoolmaster, gives the following particular account of his salary and perquisites:

The salary, (of which Lord Peterborough pays the one half, and the tenants the other), is, *per annum*, L. 8 6 8

Ditto as session clerk, 1 10 0

Ditto as clerk to Mr Hogg's mortification, 0 10 0

Dues of baptisms, 6½ d. each, amount on an average, to 0 9 6

Ditto of marriages, 6½ d. each, amount on an average, to 0 3 0

Ditto for extracts from the register of baptisms, 3d. each, 0 1 6

School fees, *communibus annis*, about 4 0 0

He has also a small garden, worth about 0 5 0

Total amount of salary and perquisites *per ann.* L. 15 5 8

The number of Scholars is from 30 to 40 in winter, and between 20 and 30 in summer.