

PARISH OF AYTON

By the Rev. Mr George Home.

Name, Situation, &c The parish of Ayton seems to take its name from the water of Eye. It lies in the county of Berwick, presbytery of Chirnside, and synod of Merse and Tiviotdale. The parishes by which it is bounded are Eyemouth and Coldingham on the north, Chirnside on the west, Foulden and Mordington on the south, and by the sea on the east. The parish is about 45 miles long, and 4 broad: It was once of larger extent, when Lammerton, Ross, and Shiels belonged to it. The soil is in general fertile, and particularly adapted for the turnip husbandry. There is about 2 miles extent of sea coast. The shore is high and rocky. The hills in this parish lie chiefly in the southern extremity. The soil of some of them, especially of a ridge of no very considerable height, is in general well adapted for producing corn or grass.

Cultivation and Produce Agriculture has undergone a great change in the course of a very few years. Instead of five or six successive white crops, the farmers will seldom allow two to follow each other; for they derive considerable advantage from introducing a green one, and occasionally fallow, between the white crops. The experience of this neighbourhood has rather a tendency to prove, that money expended in the cultivation of moor lands has seldom turned to a good account, and that planting is the best mode of improvement; the effects of water, however, has not been tried. Lime operates at first, but loses its effect as a stimulus upon a second trial. Though the appearance of moor lands may be changed by culture and artificial grasses, they will not feed well; and, when wet or cold, are believed to lay the foundation of the rot in sheep, a distemper which proves extremely fatal.

Two horses only, are at present used in the plough here, instead of four oxen and two horses, which was formerly the practice. They will perform the same quantity of labour equally well, and in much shorter time. The English plough is chiefly used in this parish. The lands produce most of the common vegetables, plants, and trees. Artificial grasses are much used. Of late the farmers here directed their attention, and with great success, to stock. They find that the lands in grass make a profitable return. By feeding, too, the ground is enriched for future crops. The advantage of feeding sheep on the lands, in the proper season, with turnip, is sensibly felt; and this practice is supposed to be preferable to a summer fallowing; and is, at the same time, no loss to the farmer.

Plantations of all kinds of trees are much encouraged by the present proprietor of the estate of Ayton, which contributes greatly to enrich and beautify the country. His lands some years ago were all run-rig (*A common field, in which the different farmers had different ridges allotted them in different years, according to the nature of their crops*) as was very much the case, particularly upon the borders, with a view to engage the people to a mutual defence and protection of their property, in times of turbulence and hostility. They are now divided, have convenient farm-houses, and

are highly improved. Harvests are rather early here than late. The greatest part of the lands in this parish is inclosed with hedges. Fences of this kind are recommended both by their beauty and utility. The rise of rent seems to have operated here as a spur to exertion and improvement in agriculture. The farms have rather decreased in number. Some of them, though but few, extend to 500 or 600 acres.

Air and Distempers The air is dry and salubrious. The fogs arising from the sea seldom penetrate above a mile from the shore. The ague was very common prior to the improvements and inclosing of lands; but since that time this disorder has scarcely been known here, except during the last very open winter.

Horses, Sheep, &c. The horses bred and used here are slender; but they are very active, and able to undergo much fatigue: They have advanced much in value. The breed of sheep is both good and large-; their weight, at an average, is about 18 or 20 lbs. per quarter. Four of their fleeces yield a stone of wool. Five sheep may be maintained upon an acre of some of the best lands. The number of sheep in this parish, till within these ten or twelve years past, was small. Great advantage arises from the large breed lately introduced: Besides yielding more wool, they are fit for the market in two years time; while sheep of the smaller size require to be kept three years before they are ready for the market. The wool of the large sheep is, without doubt, of a coarser quality; but this disadvantage is more than compensated by the quantity. On rich land even the small kind of sheep would increase in size, and their wool become more plentiful, though of an inferior quality. The wool sells from 12 s. to 15 s. per stone. Oxen here are commonly fed till they weigh from 60 to 100 stone.

Fish The water of Eye contains good trouts, but not in any quantity. Cod, ling, haddocks, whittings, flounders, hollyback, mackrell, and other kinds of fish, are caught here in their seasons. Lobsters yield considerable profit; they are chiefly bought up for the London market. Herrings have been got in great quantities; but they, as well as the other kinds of white fish, have failed much for these two years past. The fishermen have lately discovered the method of catching turbot, which brings a good price.

Population In 1741 the village of Ayton seems to have contained about 320 souls, and the country part of the parish about the same number. In 1773 the village contained about 360 souls: The numbers in the country part were also increased. In 1780 the number of the inhabitants amounted to 1146 of which 420 were in the village, and 726 in the country part of the parish. In the present year, 1790, the number amounted to 1245. The village contains 147 families; there are 202 males and 229 females above ten years of age, and 31 males and 47 females below 10 years of age. The country part of the parish contains 136 families, which consist of 263 males and 310 females above 10, and 53 males and 90 females below 10. From this statement it may be remarked, that during the last ten years the population of the village has received an addition of 109, while the country part of the parish has suffered the decrease of 10 in its numbers. On the whole, the increase of inhabitants within the last 50 years, may be stated at above 600.

Village of Ayton The village of Ayton is situated on the banks of the Eye. About 30 new houses have been feued in it within these 15 years; they consist of two or three stories, and are covered with tyles. The village has been improved by ranging these new buildings upon a pleasant sloping bank fronting the south.

Manufactures A paper-mill was lately erected here at considerable expence. It employs about 70 or 80 work people, and circulates about L.15 per week. The wages earned by the paper-makers are high. This manufacture gives employment to a number of young persons, who are taken in at eight years of age. There is a wind-mill here, which was a pretty extensive work. It manufactured a good deal of flour during the American war, but has done little or no business since. There are four water-mills in this parish; one brewery, which does not carry on an extensive trade; a bleachfield, which was established many years ago, and succeeds: It employs about 7 or 8 hands.

Church and Stipend The parish church appears to be an old edifice, and has lately received several improvements, which its former state rendered extremely necessary. The stipend, including a late augmentation, and the value of the glebe, is about L.135 per annum. The Crown is patron.

Poor The number of the poor belonging to this parish is variable. The heritors and tenants are assessed to the extent of L.30 or L.40 per annum for their support. To this fund is added one half of the contributions at the church, which, at an average, is about 1s. 1d. weekly. The other half is distributed under the inspection of the kirk-session in occasional charities. Part of it, together with the money arising from marriages and the use of the pall (mort-cloth) is applied to educate poor children and pay church officers. The expence incurred for the maintenance of the parochial poor has increased near two thirds during the incumbency of the present minister. The people in general, however, cannot bear the idea of being put on the poor's roll, even when they are in distress. During a late period of scarcity meal was purchased for the use of poor householders, and sold at a very moderate price; but few applied for the benefit of this aid, except those who were accustomed to receive charity.

Price of Provisions The price of butcher meat is from- 3 1/2d. to 4d. per lb. English weight; it has advanced about 1d. per lb. within these 6 or 8 years. The price of pork is variable. Haddocks, which sold formerly at 4d or 6d. per score, now often bring as much a piece. A goose is sold here for 2s. a pair of ducks for 1s 3d. ; a pair of hens for 1s 0d.; a turkey for 2s. 6d.; butter sells for 7d. and cheese for 4d per lb. The prices of grain may be ascertained from the fiars of the county.

Wages The wages of a labourer are 1s. a day; a carpenter's and mason's, 1s.4d; a taylor's, 1s. Threshing of corn is usually paid by what is termed *lot*, i.e. 1 boll is allowed for every 25 bolls that are threshed. The wages of a mason and his labourer, &c are generally settled at so much a rood, A hind receives 2 bolls of barley, 1 boll of pease, and 10.bolls of oats; he has a cow's grass, a house and yard, and as much ground as will serve to plant a firlot of potatoes. He is likewise allowed what coals he may have occasion for in his family, paying only the prime cost, which is about 2s. 8d per cart load, including the tolls; the carriage is equal to 4s. per load. The hind's wife reaps in harvest for the house. He has also L.1 allowed for sheep's grass. A man

servant receives from L.5 to L.7 per annum, with bed and board; a maid servant from L.2 to 4 per annum.

Sectaries There are several sectaries in this parish. The first was a society of Antiburghers. Their number is very small. Their minister is provided with a very good house and receives from them, perhaps, about L 40 per annum. There is also a Burgher meeting-house in the village, rather of a better appearance than the other; the sect of Seceders who attend it are more numerous than the former, and of principles more accommodating to the times. They also provide a house for their minister, and allow him, probably, L.60 or L70 per annum. Both these houses have been built since the 1773. Though a considerable number have attached themselves to the different sectaries, yet, being composed of the inferior ranks of the people, their detection has not diminished the contribution for the parochial poor. Little is allotted by them to the maintenance of their own poor; yet they contribute with zeal, many of them with liberality ill suited to their circumstances, for the support of their ecclesiastical establishment.

Roads The roads in the parish are getting into good repair. The post road is now made, and supported by two turnpikes, which were lately erected; one at the extremity of the county towards East Lothian, and the other at Berwick bounds. When they were first proposed, they met with keen opposition; but they have since been universally acknowledged to be of signal benefit to the country. The statute labour is commuted. Putting up the roads to auction, has been the mean of getting them made much cheaper than formerly.

Improvements suggested It would be an advantage to this parish, as well as to Eyemouth, if the mail-coach would drop a bag, containing such letters as are addressed to the inhabitants of each, which would relieve them from the expence of sending to Berwick or Press. If the woollen or cotton manufacture were introduced and encouraged here, the condition of the people might be greatly improved. To take the duty off coals carried coast-ways to Eyemouth, as is done at Dunbar (to which port Eyemouth belongs) would greatly promote the establishment of manufactures. This duty yields but a mere trifle to government, and subjects the people here to a state of entire dependence on Northumberland for fuel. As the coal hills adjoining to this part of the country are almost entirely engrossed by one person, it would be rather surprising if he did not avail himself of this advantage, by keeping up the price of so important an article.

Miscellaneous Observations The kelp made here is supposed to be about 15 or 20 tons annually. There are some quarries in this parish, the stones of which answer for building, and are supposed to be impregnated with an iron ore. Free stone is confined to a small part of the shore. The free-stone must be transported to the harbour of Eyemouth, and then carried by land. Corn is carried to market in carts, which have been used here for the space of 40 or 50 years. On the hills on the south side of the parish are the remains of two camps, supposed to be Roman or Saxon. Several urns, and broken pieces of armour, have been found here. In the low grounds towards the north-west, are the vestiges of three encampments, thought to have been Danish or Pictish. History mentions the castle of Ayton, but scarcely any

vestiges of it now remain. The names of places seem to be derived chiefly from the Saxon. There is one public, and two private schools in the parish. The established schoolmaster, as is too generally the case, has not a provision adequate to the importance of such a charge. There are two white threadmakers in the parish. There are two or three bridges; one of them was built by aid from government: They are of great utility. Two boats crews only belong to Ayton.

In 1673, there appears to have been 24 heritors, including portioners and feuers, in this parish: In 1790, there are about 14. At the former period, they were more distinguished by family and rank. There were 6 of the name of Home, each of some distinction; now there is only one of that name; their lands having been disposed of by the great heritors. There are, however, several descendants of portioners who still retain their possessions.

The people, in general, are disposed to industry. Since the induction of the present minister there is a very visible change in their mode of living and dress. Though the farms are much higher rented than formerly, yet the tenants are, in every respect, much more expensive than they were 15 years ago. Tradesmen and labourers in the village are addicted to the pernicious habit of using tea. Of late, also, from the low price of whisky, the execrable custom of *dram drinking* is gaining ground, even among the women of the lower class. Habits so inimical to health, industry, and morals, ought to be checked if possible. Two persons belonging to this parish have been banished from Scotland since the incumbent was settled. He knows only of one person who has been guilty of suicide. There is no want of employment for the people. They seem contented with their situation and circumstances, and are not strangers to the comforts of life.

This parish has several advantages. It is near markets, for disposing of grain, cattle, or stock on the farms, being 7 miles from Berwick and 2 from Eyemouth. It is at no great distance from coal: The price, however, considering that distance, is certainly high. The post road to London goes through the parish: And the vicinity of the sea affords a good supply of most kinds of fish. The parish of Ayton does much more than supply itself with provisions.