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Parish of Burntisland (County of Fife) by the Rev Mr. James Wemyss.

Name, Situation & co.:-
It is difficult to ascertain the origin of the name. The traditional story is that it arose from the burning of a few fisherman's huts, upon a small island on the west side of the harbour, which induced them to take up their residence, where the town now stands. Originally, however, the parish was designated Kinghorn-Wester. It is situated in the county of Fife, on the firth of Forth, north and by west, from Leith, about 6 miles. It is in the presbytery of Kirkcaldy, the synod and county of Fife. From east to west it may extend about 3 miles, and nearly as far from south to north.

Town and climate:-
The town of Burntisland is pleasantly situated, upon a peninsula, surrounded by hills to the north, in the form of an amphitheatre. They lie at the distance of about half a mile, and happily occasion much warmth and shelter. The climate is very healthful. The air, dry and clear, rather sharp. Many of the inhabitants live to a good old age. They enjoy the benefit of fine dry walks of great extent, and can go abroad at all seasons, when it is fair. To those who are fond of the healthful and manly diversion of the golf, there is adjoining, one of the finest pieces of links, of its size, in Scotland. A great part of it is like velvet, with all the variety of hazards, necessary to employ the different clubs, used by the nicest players. A golfing club was instituted lately, by the gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood.

Burntisland was constituted a royal burgh, by James VI. The government of it is vested in 21 persons, of whom 14 are termed Guild-counsellors, consisting of merchants, tradesmen, skippers, seamen and land labourers; of whom 3 are chosen yearly at Michaelmas, by the old and new council, to be baillies; the other 7 are trades-counsellors, being one of each trade. There is also a provost chosen yearly at Michaelmas. If he is a nobleman, he is supernumerary; but if a burgher, he is included in the above number.

It appears, at some former period to have been fortified. On the south-east side of the harbour, part of the walls of a fort is still standing entire. And on the top of a small hill, immediately to the north of the town, there are to be seen, the remains of a trench. It is also said, that when Cromwell had an army in this country, it held out against him, till he was obliged to enter into a compromise, with the inhabitants, on certain conditions: part of which were, that he would repair the streets and the harbour. In consequence of this, the quays, as they presently stand, were built by him, and the streets have never been mended since, which their present state too clearly proves. There is, however, every reason to hope, that they will soon be put into better condition, as the gentlemen of the county have lately proposed, to make the public ferry from Burntisland to Leith, or rather to Newhaven, where it is intended, to build a pier, in order to secure a passage for travellers, at any time of tide.

Trade:-
Before the union, the trade of this place seems to have been considerable. A number of ships belonged to it. Large quantities of malt were made, and exported to England, and the north, which yielded great profits. Many of the shipmasters, and inhabitants appear to have been wealthy. But since that period, little business of any kind has been done, until within these few years, when trade has again begun to revive a little. Some branches of manufactures have been established. There is, at present, a sugar house, belonging to a Glasgow company, in a very thriving condition; and a vitriol work, upon a a small scale, but, having lately become the property of some gentlemen of much industry and spirit, it is to be extended, and most likely will do well. An attempt was also recently made, to establish a silk manufactory. This, however, did not answer the wishes of the projectors; which, perhaps, was more owing to the want of capital, and some other causes, than to the badness of the trade, or anything unfavourable in the situation of the place. Ship-building is carried on by a few hands, and might be increased to any extent. It is much to be regretted, that manufactures are not established here. Indeed, it is rather surprising they have not, as the town is doubtless equally, if not more, favourable for these, than many others on the coast of Fife, where they are carried on to a great extent. No place can be better situated for export and import; houses are low rented; fuel is reasonable; coals may be had by both sea and land; 18 stone, heavyweight, from 1s. to 1s3d. Many hands could easily be had, from among the young and the poor, particularly for the cotton branch, who are, in a great measure, lost, for want of employment. And though the water in the town is mostly hard, yet there are some wells of it

soft; and in the neighbourhood, there is a considerable run of soft water, with many copious springs, along the foot of the hills, by which bleaching might be carried on. Besides, the carriers will now have the benefit of good roads, and carriers to all parts of the country.

The Harbour:-

What next merits particular notice, in this place, is, the harbour, which certainly is one of the best in Scotland. By way of excellence it is called, in some of the town's charters, *Portus Gratiae and Portus Salutis*. It is here, where ships generally take shelter, when driven up by storms, and hard gales of easterly wind. It is easily entered, and affords the greatest safety, let the wind blow from any quarter. It is very capacious, and of great depth of water. The Champion frigate came in lately, with all her stores, and got as conveniently cleaned, as in a dock. Much improvement might still be made upon it. Were the quays extended (which easily be done at no great expense) small ships could come in, and go out, at any time of tide. In the opinion of professional men, docks ought to be established here, capable of receiving the largest ships of war. This is surely an object, well deserving the attention of government. It might be done at a small expense. And, in the event of our ever being at war, with our northern neighbours, would be a vast saving and conveniency; as the ships that happened to want cleaning and repair, would not need to return to England for that purpose; which they must always do at present. Even for the ships that are stationed in this Firth, and such as may occasionally come into it, an establishment of this kind would be a great saving of time and money. Here too, houses and yards for the King's stores might be had, much more conveniently, and at far less expense, than at Leith. They could be had, at the very entrance of the harbour, or along the quays. And as the houses would be cheap, and the access easy, an annual saving of some hundreds of pounds might reasonably be expected. There is another thing, respecting this harbour, which deserves to be pointed out to Government, and may at last merit their consideration. It is this; that it might be made one of the safest and most convenient watering-places possible, for his Majesty's ships in this Firth. At no great expense, a run of the finest water might be introduced, by a pipe, and carried to any of the quays, thought most proper, where the king's boats might receive it, without the least trouble or danger. This may be thought the more worthy of notice, as, it is well known, that the present mode of watering the King's ships, either by going to Leith, or Harley burn, a place on the north shore, about a mile to the westward of Burntisland, is often attended with danger, and sometimes with loss. And, it is to be hoped, it would be no small inducement to adopt this plan, were it to be properly stated to Government, that the same pipe, that supplied his Majesty's ships, could easily furnish the town of Burntisland, with soft water, of which it stands in much need. It would be just, or at least, it would be generous, to accommodate a place, at present unable to help itself; a place, especially, that, upon every occasion, has furnished a very large proportion of brave men, for the navy; and, where many of the lame, and the wounded, and many of the widows and the fatherless, of those who have suffered in the service of their country, now reside.

It is surprising, that the advantages of this harbour, should have so long been overlooked by the public; and no less so, that in the present enterprising mercantile age, they have not been laid hold of, and improven. It is doubtless equal, if not preferable to any in Scotland, for dry docks. Its vicinity to Edinburgh, the capital of the kingdom, and its ready access, by sea, to every quarter of the globe, certainly renders it eligible for every sort of mercantile pursuit.

Shores:-

To the westward of the town, towards Aberdour, the shore is all rocky; and, from a quarter of a mile eastward, it is all sandy, till it joins the Pettycur harbour, near Kinghorn. Opposite this sandy beach, the sea has made great incroachments, within these hundred years, and still continues to gain ground. Near the town, however, the rocks are a perfect defence. From these rocks, there is much seaweed cut, every two years, as produces about 12 or 15 ton of kelp. After gales of easterly or southerly winds, there frequently come on shore, large quantities of tangles and seaweed, which are used as manure, and answer well for a season.

It might be mentioned here, how beneficial the rocks and shores are to the inhabitants of this place, particularly the poor, from the large quantities of shell-fish, that may be gathered, of one kind or another, at all seasons; especially cockles, which abound in the extensive lands between Burntisland and Kinghorn. A boy or girl may gather to the value of, perhaps, of 3d. or 4d. in a few hours. Excellent oysters are also to be had near the town. The bed belongs partly to the borough, and partly to the Earl of Morton.

Hills:-
The most remarkable hill, is that which lies about half a mile north of the town. It is very steep, and elevated between 500 and 600 feet above the level of the sea. It yields most excellent pasture in any season; is well watered and sheltered, and, withal, very extensive. It would make one of the finest inclosures in Scotland, particularly for sheep. From its appearance, one would almost be induced to believe, it had undergone some violent commotion, and that the rocks on each end were incrusted with something like volcanic matter.

In the same line, to the eastward, there is another very high hill, called Dunearn, remarkable for having a small loch, or lake, upon its top, which never dries in any season. On the north side it is very steep and rugged; - the appearance frightful, from the projection of the stones,, and the immense number that have tumbled down. The stones, of which this hill is composed, seem to be of the Basaltic kind. They are mostly of a regular figure, stand upon end, and are generally from 2 to 4 feet long: all this makes it probable, that it has once been the seat of a volcano, and the loch might be the crater. There is also, on the very summit of this hill, a flat piece of ground, surrounded with an immense number of loose stones, called Agricola's camp, or garrison. The stones appear once to have been built, but not with mortar, or cement of any kind. It is highly probable that this tradition is true: if we may believe Tacitus, it is certain, that the Romans explored the north coast of the Forth with their ships. It is no less so, that some of the legions were garrisoned during the winter, near the coast. Dunearn hill, from its situation, would most naturally invite them, to take up their residence on it. Besides, the country from this, all the way to Bennartie-hill, near the Lommonds, exactly answers the description which that historian gives of it, in his account of the Roman expedition on the north of Bodotria, i.e. Forth. It was full, he says, of hills, rocks, marshes, woods, and lakes.

A little way to the north-east, is the hill of Orrock, of considerable extent, but not so steep as the two former. It affords also excellent pasture. It is said diamonds have been found on it, and that it produces capillary herbs. There is also a vitriolic spring upon it. Next to Orrock is the farm of Babie; most of which is hilly and high ground, but yields good crops, both of corn and grass. On these hills of Orrock and Babie, several barrows or tumuli are to be seen, but too large to be easily removed. Some of them have, however, been dug up, and discovered the bones of those ancient warriors over whom, they had been raised.

With respect to the hills above mentioned, it may be observed, that they are peculiarly adapted for sheep; being verdant the greater part of the year. The proprietors turn them to good account, by the rearing and feeding of black cattle; but doubtless, turning them into sheep walks, would render them more beneficial to themselves, and useful to the country. The Bin mostly belongs to Roger Ayton, Esq. of Inch-Dairny; Dunearn to Dr Charles Stuart of Edinburgh; Orrock to the Earl of Morton; and Babie to William Ferguson, Esq. of Raith.

Soil:-
Between the hills and the sea, the soil is mostly very rich, and when properly cultivated, produces excellent crops. The rent is generally from 4 to 4-1/2 bolls of barley, or from L.3 to L.3:3 per acre. Wheat, barley, and beans are most cultivated. The grain is of the best quality, from the warmness of the climate, owing to the surrounding hills. The grounds, in the higher part of the parish, are of a much inferior value, as may be supposed, from the lightness of the soil, and their more elevated situation; notwithstanding which, they bring a good rent to the proprietor. Few of the tenants have regular tacks, and extensive farms. They, in general, follow the new mode of farming. The burdensome and injurious effects of the feudal system are totally abolished among them.

Ecclesiastical State of the Parish:-
The place of worship for the parish, was formerly, about half a mile north of the town. The remains of it are still to be seen, with the old manse, and burial ground. It evidently appears to have been originally a Popish chapel, but when built, is not known. In 1592, the parish growing more numerous, and, it may be supposed, the inhabitants of the town, more wealthy, they built a new church within the borough, asking nothing from the heritors but their consent. And, at the same time, as an inducement, granted them proper seats, with certain privileges, taking the whole burden of building and repairing upon themselves. It is a stately square structure, with a pavilion roof; and, with a little more finishing, would be a most handsome place of worship. That it is capacious, will appear from a fact well known in this place, that it once held within its walls, between 3000 and 4000 Hessians, that were lying encamped near the town, in the year 1746. There is also a meeting-house for the Antiburgher Seceders.

The king is patron. The stipend consists of a chalders of barley, 2 of oats; L.60 in money, with a manse and glebe; and L.5 for communion elements. An augmentation was obtained within these 20 years. The free teind is still very considerable.

Population:-
The number of souls, in the parish, may be about 1100. In the report made to Dr Webster, An. 1755, they are called 1390. The inhabitants of the borough are often shifting. No register of burials has ever been kept.

State of the Poor:-
The poor, within the borough, are rather numerous. None of them, however, beg. There being no funds, they are supplied by weekly, and extraordinary collections at the church-doors. Such of them, as have their names put on, what is called, the poors roll, get from 6d. to 1s a week. Their support must be small, considering from whence it arises. Most of the heritors are non-residenters, which makes the burden fall heavy upon such as are any way able, or rather well-disposed, to relieve the necessities of the poor. Such a general assessment should certainly take place in this, and in every other parish, as would affect the landlord and his tenant, in some just proportion, according to their ability, whether inclined to be charitable or not, and whether of the established church or dissenters: and, until this takes place, there is little doubt, but that both the uncharitable and the Seceder, will take but small share in the support of the poor.

Quarries:-
There is a very fine quarry of free stone, a small distance north of the town, on the Grange estate. Most of the new buildings along the coast, to a considerable distance, are furnished with hewn work from that quarry. About a mile to the eastward, and also to the westward, there are inexhaustible quarries of lime stone, which is sent off in great quantities to the works at Carron, and other places. There is also upon the shore, near the town, excellent quarries of hard stone, which is used for oven soles, and chimney grates; as they endure the greatest heat, and will last for many years. There is also, on the estate of Grange, a sort of marble, which has been wrought, and takes a very fine polish.

Coal:-
At one period, it is certain, coal has been wrought in this parish; but how, or on what account it was given up, is not now known. Of late, some attempts have been made, by Mr Wemyss of Cuttlehill and others, to find coal; but these have been so feeble, as by no means to be reckoned a sufficient trial. But it is to be hoped, the proprietors will be induced to renew their attempts, with more spirit, and success.

Miscellaneous Observations:-
There are two mills close to the town, employed in making flour, meal, and barley. One of them is erected upon the sea, which comes into a bay, on the north side of the estate of Rossend. At an average it works the year round, about 14 hours per day. On the same water, other profitable works might be erected.

There is also a distillery in the vicinity of the town, in high repute for making good whisky. But however profitable this, and other works of the same kind, may be, to the manufacturer, the landlord, and the farmer, there can be little doubt of their being most pernicious to the health, the morals, and the industry of the people at large.

There are, at present 3 large stout boats, with a small one, that goes at half tide. They cross every day, when passengers cast up. And when once the quays are extended, as now resolved on, there will be passage at all times, wind and weather serving.

It is also proper to mention, that about 5 years ago, an ingenious foreign gentleman, in his researches about this country, discovered in this parish, a fort of mould, (which appears to be rocks reduced by time to earth); of which he afterwards sent to France two ship loads. He was very tenacious of making any discoveries respecting its quality. It is now known, however, that the court of France prohibited the importation of it. It is thought this stuff was used either in the porcelain manufactory, or for making crucibles. The ships were loaded from the earth, on the top of a small hill, immediately to the north of the town.