

Clyde, and other places ; for ordinarily, when there is no scarcity or dearth, the meal is sold here at three or four or at most five merks per boll. The cattle and fish also are to be had very cheap, as good kine often in the shambles, such as the country doth afford, for three or four shillings sterling, and sometimes they say for two ; so that as I have heard some of the more intelligent inhabitants observe, that here is the cheapest market in the world : and the gentlemen can live better upon 1000 merks, than they can do in the south upon 4000 per annum, who may improve their stocks to as great if not a greater advantage than in any other place in Scotland, for they may save their rents, having within themselves what provision is necessary for their table, and may sell out much store every year, what to the inhabitants in the country for their own use, or for salting and sending abroad, and what to drovers who take them south : and it is observable, that if any buy a piece of land, only what is arable is accounted for, as for what serveth for pasture, they use not to take notice of, though upon that consideration they may value their acres at a greater rate. In the way between Thurso and Dunnot, we saw much low ground overblown with sand, for two miles back from the sea, which formerly not many years since was a pleasant meadow.

There are ten parishes in this country, five of which can be served with ministers not having the Irish language, few of the people there speaking it but the other five cannot be supplied otherwise than by ministers understanding Irish, in some of these parishes there being very few who have any knowledge of our language, and some of the ministers are obliged to preach both in English and Irish for the edification of all : some of the parishes are very wide and populous, which tends to the increase of ignorance among many, the ministers not being able to overtake their work ; some churches also are ruinous, for when heritors are not friends to the work of God, or cannot agree among themselves, as to the concerting of suitable measures, for putting or keeping things which concern the parish in order, it useth to go ill with ministers as to their external accommodation, and with churches as to their repair.

The two principal towns in the country are Wick and Thurso. Wick is a royal burgh, on the east side of the country, washed by the German Ocean at the mouth of Murray Firth, by the side of which runneth a small river ; at the mouth of the river there is a harbour for boats or barks to lie in, which they come into at full sea, but this harbour is not so much frequented as another about a mile to the north-east of Wick, where they judge the boats do lie safer. Opposite to Wick lies Thurso, at twelve miles distance, on the west side of the country, which though it enjoy not the privilege of a royal burgh, yet it is more populous than Wick, and hath better buildings in it ; by the east side of the town runneth a small river called the Water of Thurso : they have the best church in the country, well furnished, and kept in good order.

In the water of Thurso there is good salmon fishing, which they take two ways, one is by crues or creels with crossed or barred doors going from the one side of the water to the other, so framed that they suffer the fishes to go in, but not to go out, out of which sometimes they will take several horses burdens of fish. The other way they take them is by a net, wherewith they fish a pool, which lieth a little below the crues, and is about a pair of butts in length : they having spread the net upon the bank, which is long enough to reach the breadth of the water, they go in with it, and one man on each side drawing it down the pool, it is followed with eighteen or twenty men, going in a breast behind it, with long staves or poles in their hands, wherewith they keep the net to the ground, and loose it when any way entangled ; the pool in some places will rise to the height of the breast of the waders, but there is no danger. So they bring down the net softly and warily to the mouth of an enclosure, which they call a Stem, into which