

CHAPTER VII

DEPARTED INDUSTRIES OF THE OLDEN TIMES AND REMINISCENCES CONNECTED WITH THESE

OF the other industries, besides the agricultural, that were once carried on in Wamphray and in every other parish in Scotland, three have long since entirely disappeared, namely: weaving, mill-waulking, and coopering, and at present tailoring and dress-making are also extinct. Down to the end of the first quarter of last century there were four weaving shops in the parish in which woollen and linen cloth was manufactured. These two articles were native products, and as the whole process in preparing them for the loom—the shearing, scouring, carding, and spinning of the wool; the sowing, pulling, dubbing, breaking, heckling, and spinning of the lint—was done in the parish, there was no idle seat for anybody, least of all for the women. The latter, when field-work grew too heavy for them, found employment in knitting and in spinning on both big and wee wheels. The wee wheel, on which linen yarn was spun, was a delightfully social little machine. If the spinner felt lonely at her solitary fireside, she lifted her wheel to her neighbour's house, and spun socially for an hour or two, where joke and song and the birr of several wheels made time pass quickly and cheerily. Like as

in other things, some were both quicker and better at it than others, and perfectly marvellous was the fineness of the thread the more expert could draw. No machine, either for warding off ennui, taxing the ingenuity, or profitably employing time, has since been invented for female hands equal to the wee wheel. In the present state of civilisation in Scotland it is also a thing of the past. When the thread reached the weaver, his wife and daughter's hands were kept going at filling "pirns" to keep the shuttles of the weaver and his apprentices flying.

Before cotton became cheap, linen cloth of different degrees of fineness was used for sheets, shirtings, and, of course, for tablecloths. Perhaps the "dambrod" pattern was the farthest point in art the country weaver reached.

Other material was not unknown in the 18th century, but homespun cloth was the usual everyday attire for kirk and market for the great majority of the inhabitants—"Hoddin grey and a' that." The dye pot, often at home, generally in the waulk mill, was in use also, and all the colours in the fashion of that day produced. Greatcoats had not come into use in those days, so the shepherd's check for the indispensable plaid was never long off the loom. So far back as the 17th century there were two waulk mills in Wamphray, the one at Poldean, the other near Leithenhall. Tradition says the former was conducted by a man named Proudfoot, the latter by John Sprott. The surplus of the linen and woollen cloth manufactured in the parish was sold at Scotch or English markets or to chapmen who called at the door on their purchasing rounds. The first glass window put in a farmhouse in Wamphray was one at

Little Dalmakeddar—the result of an extra good market at Penrith for linen and woollen goods. The farmer paid as much yearly duty for the using of the four panes as he paid for the glass.

The invention of machinery for heckling, spinning, and weaving, and that aided by steam power, gradually drew away the manufacture of cloth of every kind to large factories, so the hand-loom in country cottages is now a thing of the past. The operations of dyeing and waulking have consequently followed the weaving, and as a matter of course the population has followed the industries.

The depopulation of the country districts has been further helped on by new and vastly improved implements of husbandry. Fewer hands are needed on a farm now than there were in those earlier days when the simple and primitive instruments, the hook and flail for reaping and threshing were in use, and the still more primitive method of winnowing the grain was practised. Fanners are not a very old institution. The first mills did not have fanners as part of their machinery. The travelling threshing machine is now going its rounds, and does its work quickly and well too. It threshes, separates "tops from tails," bags each separately, and bundles the straw. To both crofter and farmer it is a boon, but the latter, except when wishing to thresh a large quantity at a time will still use his own mill.

The hook gave way to the scythe; the scythe to the reaper; the reaper has in its turn given place to the combined reaper and binder. It is for a mechanical genius to say what is to be the next step in that direction. It was a lively sight in the olden time to

see a band of shearers at work, with the bandsters and stokers behind them. It was then that the "song of reapers was heard among the yellow corn." A band of twenty was nothing uncommon. A spurt in shearing was called "kemping." A "kemp" was not hard to set agoing. A slighting remark made on the way home by one of the band about his or her neighbour's workmanship brought one on next day, but in the beginning of harvest it was generally a preconcerted affair to let the "'prentice lads feel their bones." The tailors and websters were particularly soft. The youths who made up the ploy took into their confidence the most expert old dame in the field, who entered into the ploy heartily. A song was the signal to the field when to "fly" off. When the lilt began the whole band knew they were in for a "forenoon of it." The farmer might roar himself hoarse to "Tak time, ye're wastin' the corn"—all in vain. The stampede had begun, and like a herd of cattle they could not stop till they reached their goal, the "lan'en'."

" And when the corn was cut down
 And built upon a moo',
 It's aye a rantin' kirn we gat
 When my auld hat was new."

(Old Song).

A great feast was prepared for this occasion. Everyone who had, however small, a hand in reaping, was invited to the feast, and all were smartened up for the entertainment. After the substantial feast had been amply enjoyed, the last or dessert dish was basins of cream set along the table, with a spoon to each guest. The supping of the "kirn" ended the repast. A dram

was sent round the table and all who wished took a taste. The fiddlers began to tune their instruments, and soon a merry company were tripping it on the kitchen floor. Songs there were in abundance ; one person after another, in the intervals of the dancing, sang a Jacobite ballad, an Irish or a Scotch "comic," and the best of Burns.

Peat casting, or turf-fuel making, may not be classed among the everyday money-making industries, but it stood out prominently as a money-saving one, and was indispensable in those days before railways were in existence to bring coal to everybody's door. It was hard and dirty work, but the social conditions under which it was done lightened the toil and cast a veil over the dirtiness of it. There was only one peat-hirst or moss in the parish. Every householder, the minister, the farmer, the crofter, the cottar, had each an allotment, or dass, or hagg, as it was variously called ; and as peat could only be made in dry weather, and in the earliest dry weather of the year, the latter end of April and the beginning of May was the time set apart for that work. Then there could be seen a busy and populous scene in the moss, some flaying the ground, some cutting the wet peat to its proper dimensions, and boys and women wheeling off half a dozen or so pieces on a barrow, and tilting them out to dry.

There were no fences between the hags or the spreading grounds. The flayer and the tilter drew a straight line by the eye, and if they did not their neighbour did it for them right speedily. The moss was not large, so at the two meal-hours (10 a.m. and 2 p.m.), and after feeding (sowans was one of the peat-

moss dishes), crowds gathered together, the youths to run, wrestle, and jump, as briskly as if they had been idle all morning. The older folk sat and retailed the latest local gossip, or aired their grievances in church and state affairs, each one propounding his own theory of management, and how much better Scotland would be by adopting it. But time flies; the hour of rest, and fun, and theorising was up, till next meal-hour. Down into the hagg, to spade and barrow for three hours, and up at two p.m. and repeat the foregoing.

There was much work in drying the peat by "fitting" and "stacking," but that was mostly done by women. When the toilers sat in the long, cold winter evenings by the blazing fire that their summer labour had won them, the work in preparing the fuel was all forgotten in the comfort it now gave. All the weariness had faded from their memory, and the only things remembered were the sun in the blue sky, the laverock singing the livelong day in the "lift" overhead, and the fun and the jokes and the arguments, with occasional loss of temper by the disputants, the odd says and saws they "let oot o' them" at such times, and the short-sighted body that could not draw a straight rut with the spade and was "aye skating" too far into his own or his neighbour's ground, and the barrowman that fell off the plank into the pool "barrow and peats and a'."

But they had many sources of conversation by the fireside besides their peat and harvest work. Some were alive who had seen the two Stuart rebellions of '15 and '45, and were full of stories of Lord George Murray's contingent as it passed through Annandale. How the hungry soldiers jumped up, cut down and ate

the black and white puddings hanging from the kitchen beams of the farmhouses. How the cheese and bread and yill and whisky disappeared which the farmers plied them with in order to get them away quietly and quickly. A report had preceded the soldiers of their propensity for shoes, hose, and horses, so the hospitable entertainers had carefully hid both shoes and hose worth lifting and had galloped off their best horses far into the glens among the hills. And with laughter the tale was told of the excited farmer (whose house the soldiers never went near) who, after taking all other precautions, put his gold into a "mowdie" skin purse and hid it in a well on the hillside, taking his son for a witness. Also stories of the American War of Independence; and, farther back still, the oldest among them had seen their grandfathers, who either had seen, or whose fathers had seen and suffered in the terrible persecutions during the reigns of Charles II and James II. All these, mixed with weird stories of fairies, bogles, deid lights, warnings, and witches, and the minister's last sermon, proved a web of such and so varied a hue as no fireside party in town or country at the present day can produce, or even approach to, either in variety or absorbing interest.

RURAL DEPOPULATION.

In 1755 the population of Wamphray was four hundred and fifty-eight, from that date, with one exception (the 1801 census), the numbers gradually increased till it reached five hundred and eighty in 1831. From then it has gradually decreased, with slight fluctuations, till in the census of 1901 it stood at three hundred and ninety-six.

The subject of rural depopulation is engaging, we may say engrossing, the minds of many of the leading economists and politicians of the present generation. Various reasons may be given for this general decrease of rural population, but the chief one is want of employment. One of the nostrums of the present day for retaining the people in the rural districts is small holdings, but that can only be adopted to a limited extent, and the holders confined to those persons who are situated near a town or can find employment at a trade or other work needed in a country community. Undoubtedly the large-area farms play a powerful part in this rural depopulation. Even with the vastly increased wages of the present day it is "too far a cry" yet for a young ploughman to cherish the ambition of becoming one day a farmer in his native land. The consequence is that the best men emigrate to realise their hopes in one of the colonies, and many rush off to the large towns only to be woefully disappointed. It is just a pity that the large-area farm idea, which it was once argued would bring the "greatest good to the greatest number," should have been pushed on many estates to its severe logical conclusion. Like some other political ideas it works ill in present circumstances. Small farms in the present day are as efficiently cultivated as the large ones, at least they seem so. Where all is a garden land they are no blot on the landscape. It is to be regretted there had not been left several of like dimensions in those far back days of wholesale annexations. It is much easier to annex than separate. On those large farms there have been built splendid steadings, at a great expense, but the case calls loudly for reform, and the only way to

get it is to reverse the process and in some measure to curtail the size of farms. As has been said, small holdings do not solve the problem, and nothing less than an increase of the farms requiring one or two pairs of horses seems feasible for retaining a larger population on the land. In this way the direct proceeds of the land would be better divided, the number of farms would be largely augmented, the attractions to a country life would be enhanced to many who at present seek to better themselves in our cities or in foreign countries, and the number of people who could look forward to ending their days in an independence derived from the land would be largely increased.

POPULATION.

From the earliest report in 1755 till 1901.

1755, - 458.	1821, - 554.	1871, - 505.
1791, - 487.	1831, - 580.	1881, - 455.
1801, - 423.	1851, - 522.	1891, - 458.
1811, - 481.	1861, - 559.	1901, - 396.

PARISH RATES.

1871, -	Poor Rates, 2½d.;	School Rates, 3d.
1881, -	" " 4d.;	" " 3d.
1891, -	" " 1d.;	" " 6d.
1901, -	" " 2¾d.;	" " 5d.
1905, -	" " 5d.;	" " 2¾d.

Average Poor Rate for last 24 years, 2¾d.; one half payable by occupier and one half by owner.

Average School Rate since 1875, 4d.; one half payable by occupier and one half by owner.

DEATHS.

*Number of deaths in the parish for the fifty years ending
31st December, 1904, and their respective ages.*

Under 1 year,	-	-	-	-	-	-	57.
Over 1 year and under 10,	-	-	-	-	-	-	62.
" 10 " " " 20,	-	-	-	-	-	-	30.
" 20 " " " 30,	-	-	-	-	-	-	25.
" 30 " " " 40,	-	-	-	-	-	-	26.
" 40 " " " 50,	-	-	-	-	-	-	18.
" 50 " " " 60,	-	-	-	-	-	-	26.
" 60 " " " 70,	-	-	-	-	-	-	42.
" 70 " " " 80,	-	-	-	-	-	-	52.
" 80 " " " 90,	-	-	-	-	-	-	47.
" 90 " " " 100,	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.
Over 100,	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.
Total for fifty years,							395.

BIRTHS.

Number of births up to 31st December, 1904, - 635.