

## NUMBER XXXV.

## PARISH OF ABERNETHY.

(County and Presbytery of Perth—Synod of Perth and Stirling.)

By the Rev. Mr. WILLIAM DUNCAN, Minister.

*Origin of the Name.*

THE town of Abernethy, from which the parish takes its name, is called, in the Pictish Chronicle (published by INNES, and afterwards by PINKERTON) "*Aburnethiye,*" or "*Apurnethiye;*" the *b* and *p* being indiscriminately used in the Gaelic language. The name, which Highlanders give to Abernethy, is *Obair* or *Abair Neachtain*, that is, *the work of Nechtan*. This NETHAN, or NECTAN the I. began his reign over the Picts, A. C. 456, and reigned 25 years. He is said to have founded the church of Abernethy\*, and to have dedicated that town, and an adjoining district of land, to God and St. Bridget.

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Form,

\* Other Kings might afterwards confirm and add to the foundation: from which, as was often the case, they might be stiled Founders. &c.

*Form, Extent, Surface, and Climate.*—This parish is of an irregular figure. It extends from E. to W. 4 miles, and from N. to S., in some places, about 5. The surface is uneven; a considerable part of it is hilly, and forms a part of that ridge of hills, called *the Ochills*. The low ground, bounded by the rivers *Tay* and *Earn* on the N. and the hills on the S. are nearly an oblong square; in length from E. to W. about 4 English miles, and in breadth from N. to S. about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ . There is a bank of a gentle rise, that runs diagonally through this square. It begins in a point on the *Tay* at the north-eastern extremity of the parish, and extends nearly in a line to the foot of the hills, not far from the western extremity. All below this bank, to the banks of the *Tay* and the *Earn*, which may be about two thirds of the low ground, is flat, and the soil artificial. As the air is salubrious, there is no disease peculiar to this parish. The prejudices against inoculation are wearing off. No part of the country can afford better diversion to the sportsman for hares, partridges, foxes, &c.

*Soil.*—About 25 feet below the surface of this flat ground, and 4 feet below the highest spring tide mark in the rivers *Tay* and *Earn*, there is uniformly a stratum of moss, from 1 to 3 feet thick. This moss is a composition of the wood and leaves of some trees, such as oak, alder, hazel, birch, &c. The soil above this bed of moss is composed of strata of clay and sand, of different thickness, and of different colours and qualities. The sand for the most part is very small, and in colour brown and white; the clay orange and blue, and in some places the one, and in other places the other is at the surface. The soil of this flat then, upon that account, is various. The sand, indeed, even in the composition of the soil, and its extent upon the surface, bears but a small proportion  
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to that of the clay. There are fields of blue clay, fields of orange clay, and fields of light sand, all on the same farm; and even in the same fields part is sometimes clay, and part sand, and often a mixture of both. The blue clay is thought to be richer than the orange, and more easily cultivated. Both are equally productive by proper management. The sand where there is little or no clay is very easily managed, though not so productive as the clays. But where there is a proper mixture of clay and sand, which is often the case, it is easily managed, and usually more productive than any of the other. The Earn, by breaking down the opposing banks in its serpentine turning, has formed beautiful links or haughs, alternately, on each side of its stream. The high spring tides, which overflow these haughs, carry back, and leave on their surface, the finest particles of the clay washed down by the river. This clay mixing with the rushes, and rich grasses that grow and rot on these haughs, has formed a soil of amazing fertility. Some of these haughs are now secured from being overflowed by embankments. The soil of the bank, that runs diagonally through the plain, is vegetable mould, or loam with a mixture of sand; in some parts a mixture of till or natural clay. Above the bank, to the foot of the hills, there are large fields of deep loam, some small fields of natural clay, but, in general, the soil is a light loam, with a mixture of sand or till, and a gravelly bottom. This gravelly bottom conveys the water from the hills, which, when not carried off by proper drains, is very hurtful. The soil in general, among the hills, where they are arable, is a light vegetable mould, with some banks inclining to till or natural clay.

*Agriculture and Produce.*—Little or no improvements in  
agriculture

agriculture were made in this parish before the year 1782\*. From that period, farmers from different parts of the country, but especially from the Carse of Gowrie, have settled in the parish, and now mostly possess all the lower part of it. A different mode of culture is introduced; a regular rotation of crops is established. Fallow, wheat, green crop; (pease beans, sometimes drilled turnip and potatoes), barley, grass, and oats, is the general practice. Fallow is prepared by 5 plowings; 1 in winter and 4 in summer, dunged and limed according to the quality of the soil. The wheat is sown from the middle of September to the end of October, and the return is from 10 to 15 bolls an acre. Pease and beans are sown as early in March as the season will permit; the ground is prepared by 1 plowing in the spring; sometimes by 1 plowing in the winter and another in the spring. The returns however are precarious; from 2 to 12 bolls an acre.—Barley is sown in May; the ground is prepared as fine as garden mould, by 1 plowing in autumn and 2 or more in spring; 20 lib. weight avordupois of red clover seed, if the grass is intended for green feeding, (and, if intended for hay, the addition

\* Some particular fields, and even farms, both in the hills and low ground had been limed, but by continual cropping, and unskilful management, the light land had been run almost to a *caput mortuum*, and the clay reduced to a state worse than that of nature. The farms in general, both in the hills and low ground, were divided into *infield* and *outfield*. In the hills, barley and oats alternately, with sometimes a few pease, was the mode of cropping on the infield; 3 years oats, and 3, 4, and sometimes 5 years in natural grass, was the mode of managing the outfield. The dung made through the year was laid on as a preparation for bear. The sheep and cattle, during summer, folded at night on that part of the outfield pasture that was intended for oats next year, sometimes enriched it sufficiently for 3 succeeding crops. The culture of the low ground differed little from that of the hill, only a few more pease and beans were sown, and here and there a few acres of fallow, which was followed by wheat, but little or no sown grass. No regular rotation of crops.

dition of 1 bushel of rye-grass seed), is sown in each acre along with the barley. The return is from 5 to 10 bolls an acre. Grass is partly cut green for summer food to the work horses and milk cows, and sometimes for a few young cattle in the straw yard; also a little for pasture to give the cows an airing. The rest of it, which will commonly be about the half, is made into hay; which the farmer uses for his own horses, or occasionally sells. The quantity of hay upon an acre will be from 200 to 400 stones, 22 lib. avoirdupois to the stone. The first crops were more luxuriant; about 500 stones of excellent hay have been produced, at an average, over a large field. Some of the stems of clover, in the swath after the mower, measured in length 4 feet. From the loss of milk cows, and the danger well known in pasturing red clover by horned cattle, some of the farmers are now laying down part of their land with white clover, rye, and rib grass for pasture. Oats are sown in March and the beginning of April; the ground is prepared by 1 plowing; the returns from 8 to 12 bolls an acre. One man and a pair of horses plow in the low ground. The ploughs are of different kinds, some with iron heads, some with crooked socks, chains below the beam, &c.; but all with cast iron mouldboards.—The harrows are different; some coupled one way, some another, some drawn by a pair of horses, some by a single horse. The rollers used are of different constructions and different weights, for the purposes of breaking clods, smoothing the surface for the smaller seeds, and condensing the lighter soils. There are 4 threshing machines which are found to answer well.—Harvest begins in the month of September, sometimes later even in the low ground, and always in the hills. Some of the farmers that have settled here from other parts of the country, owing possibly to the smallness of their stock, the exhausted state of the ground at their  
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entry, the great rise of rent, and the improvement of their farms, have for some time past had a struggle to fulfil their engagements; but now their farms begin to answer their own expectations, and far to exceed the expectations of those among whom they have settled. Nor have the old tenants, with listless apathy, seen the exertions and improvements of those who have settled among them; they have not only copied, but even tried to excel them in improvement. Fallow, wheat, and sown grafs have been introduced among the hill farms. Lime is now laid on old ley, as well as fallow, with judgment and success. The crops of wheat and sown grafs are often considerable, and of good quality. This new mode of farming has induced many of them to give up keeping sheep. Some of the hill farms are very extensive. Great part of what is called *outfield* is steep, and of difficult access, lying also at a distance from their houses; *that ground* they are with great judgment laying out for pasture in parks from about 4 to 20 acres. The small feuers in the town of Abernethy, who may have 1, 2, or 3 acres, and not lying all together, though they cannot conveniently get it fallowed, are laying on lime, sowing grafs, and drilling beans. Each farmer raises as much flax as is sufficient for his own family; little is raised for sale.

*Inclosures, Orchards, &c.*—Some farms in the low ground are inclosed, and subdivided by ditches and thorn hedges. The farmers, not thinking the ground adapted to pasture, say the hedges are hurtful, by stopping the free circulation of air, and hoarding a great number of sparrows, and other birds, that destroy the grain. None of the hedges are in a thriving condition (except those on the estate of *Craigpettie*), which is chiefly owing to the little care taken of them. One farm at the foot of the hills, containing about 88 acres, fit  
both

both for grain and pasture, Mr. William Sommerville (tho' having only a lease of 30 years) has sufficiently inclosed and subdivided by stone dikes and thorn hedges at his own expence. Fruit trees thrive well in the low ground, and their fruit is not thought inferior to any in the country.—There are 4 orchards in the parish: Ash, elm, plane trees, &c. wherever they have been planted, grow to a good size, and the wood is of the best quality. The N. side of the hill is particularly adapted for planting. Scotch, and other firs, if planted, would turn out to the advantage of the proprietors, and tend to beautify the country. A part of these hills, planted about 20 or 30 years ago, are in a thriving condition.

*Cattle, Commerce, Wages, &c.*—Both cattle and horses are bred in this parish, of a good size and considerable value: Some of the farmers pay a particular attention to this pleasing and profitable object. There are only 3 flocks of sheep. About 30 years ago, almost every farmer had a flock. At that time there was little wheat sown, and no grafs. From experience, it is found, that the advantages arising from wheat and grafs, and their being able to breed double the number of cattle bred formerly, far overbalances the profit derived from keeping sheep. Those who now do so, have an extensive range of hilly ground; a considerable part of which is covered with heath. Considerable quantities of wheat and barley are sold and carried to Perth, or exported at Newburgh shore. Small quantities of oats and pease are purchased by the farmers in Fife for seed. The ancient servitudes, so oppressive and harrassing to the farmer, are almost entirely abolished. Men servants get from 6l. to 10l. Sterling a-year; women servants from 2l. 10s. to 3l. Men servants during harvest (for about a month) receive from 1l. 5s.

to 11. 10s.; women from 18s. to 11. 1s.\* Masons' wages are 1s. 8d. per day; wrights, 1s. 3d.; tailors, 8d.; a thatcher gets 1s. 6d. a-day, a labourer 1s., and a thresher 8d. with their victuals, or 7d. per boll. The prices of provisions are nearly the same as in Perth; but there are rather too many ale-houses in the parish, there being no fewer than 11, when 3 or 4 might suffice.

*Rivers, Fish, Island, Mills, &c.*—The Tay, which washes part of the northern boundary, is navigable; it affords many salmon and sea-trout. The proprietor of Carpow has fishings upon it, which yield him 100l. per annum. In the middle of this river, opposite to Mugdrum, (which is in the parish of Newburgh), is an island (called *Mugdrum Island*) belonging to this parish. It is nearly 1 English mile in length; its breadth varies, but its greatest is 198 yards 1 foot. It measures 31 acres, of which 21 are embanked under cultivation, and produce luxuriant crops; the remaining part is esteemed valuable as a salt marsh for pasture. There is a house upon it, in which the tenant resides with his family; it rents about 68l. Sterling. Mr. Hay of Leys, the proprietor, has fishings in the river that rent at about 200l. yearly.—The Earu, which bounds the northern part of the parish, (till it falls into the Tay, a little below the mansion-house of Carpow), is navigable for several miles, which has been of late years the  
source

\* About 6 years ago, the best ploughman could have been hired at 4l. or 4l. 10s. Sterling, and women at 2l. for the year. Harvest-men at 11. and women at 15s. Farmers loudly complain of the sudden and great rise of wages. Cottages are not encouraged; they are even demolished. By this impolitic measure many of the lower class of people are forced into towns, and their children trained to other occupations. Thus the country is deprived of the best nursery for able and healthy servants, servants trained from their infancy to sobriety and industry, to skill and practice in the peculiar labours of agriculture.

source of much agricultural improvement, as most of the farmers have their lime brought by water, either from the N. of England, or the Earl of Elgin's lime kilns on the coast of Fife. It produces salmon and trout as the Tay. The salmon are of an excellent quality, sell at 6d. and 7d. per lib. in the spring, and 4d. during summer. Few indeed are sold in the neighbourhood. They are chiefly sent to Perth, and from thence to the English market. Fishing upon the Tay begins about the middle of April; upon the Earn, when not frozen, about the beginning of February; it is given over in both on the 15th of August. There are two passage boats on the Earn: one at *Cary*, which is seldom employed; another at *Ferryfield*, upon the estate of *Carpow*: this place being near the junction of the Earn and the Tay, the boat belonging to it is often employed, in carrying passengers over the Tay to the Carse of Gowrie. There are 20 boats from the parish usually employed in fishing during the season; each boat having 2 men, who are generally tradesmen or labourers in the neighbourhood: they are allowed, for wages, 6s. 6d. a week, with what trout they catch. The *Farg*, a rivulet, about an English mile and a half W. from Abernethy, abounds with small trout. Upon it there are one oil mill, with 2 corn and 2 lint ditto belonging to this parish.—There is another small rivulet, called *the Ballo Burn*, that runs by Abernethy on the W. and supplies the inhabitants with water; on it also there is a corn mill.

*Population.*—The population has decreased somewhat within these 40 years.

The return to Dr. Webster in 1755, was	-	1490
By an accurate list taken in the months of October		
and November 1792, the number was only	-	1415
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	Decrease,	- 75

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Of these there were,	Males.	Females.	Members of the Estab. Church,	628
Under 10 years of age,	138	141	Antiburgher Seceders,	- 774
Between 10 and 20,	158	112	Burgher ditto,	- - 4
----- 20 and 50,	242	337	Relief ditto,	- - - 1
----- 50 and 70,	118	118	Episcopalians,	- - - 4
Aged 70 and upwards*,	28	22	Independents,	- - - 4
	<u>684</u>	<u>731</u>		<u>1415</u>

## LIST OF BAPTISMS, MARRIAGES, AND BURIALS, FOR 9 YEARS.

	Baptisms.		Marriages.	Burials.
	Males.	Females.		
1784	22	5	9	44
1785	14	16	16	40
1786	19	22	11	23
1787	13	14	11	37
1788	19	20	15	40
1789	27	18	13	40
1790	15	19	8	28
1791	16	14	18	61
1792	17	24	11	34
	<u>162</u>	<u>152</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>347 †</u>
Annual average, 18		16 $\frac{4}{9}$	12 $\frac{4}{9}$	38 $\frac{1}{9}$

*Manufactures.*—There are in the parish 82 male weavers and 3 female ones. Many of them excell in working all kinds of household cloth : but the greatest number have been employed, for several years past, in working what is called *Silesia linen*, to the Perth merchants. The yarn for these webs

\* There are none now living in the parish, who have attained to the age of 90, but 2 or 3 are very near it. One man died lately at the age of 96.

† Though it appears, from this list of burials, which is extracted from the parish register, there have been for 9 years past 347, yet this does not ascertain exactly the deaths that took place during that time, as several persons from other parishes have been buried here, and a few from this in other places.

webs they get warp'd and ready to put into the loom, and are allowed so much per yard for weaving. Some time ago their profits were great, but they now find it difficult to procure employment; and, when employed, can earn but a scanty subsistence. Two or three buy yarn, which they manufacture and sell where they can find the best market. A small quantity of diaper and dornick is made here; but these only for the use of private families.

*Rents and Proprietors.*—The valued rent is 888 4l. 15s. 1d. Scotch: The real rent about 4000l. Sterling. Farms let at from 10s. to 2l. per acre: Burgh acres from 1l. 10s. to 4l. There are 90 proprietors of land. Excepting three they are all feuers; some of them hold of the Earl of Mansfield; almost all in the town of Abernethy hold of Lord Douglas.—There are 2 commons, 1 belonging to the burghesses of Abernethy, lying a little above the town, on which the inhabitants pasture their cows and horses in summer, and from which they are furnished with *divots*, turf, &c. The other lying E. from the hills of Balgony and Abernethy, belongs to the adjoining heritors and feuers. A division of this common is intended.

*Ecclesiastical State, &c.*—The church is remarkable for nothing but its antiquity. There are no records, nor so much as a tradition when it was built †. The value of the living, exclusive

† Here was an Episcopal see, and there were 3 elections of bishops when there was only 1 bishop in Scotland, or at least in the kingdom of the Picts.—When KENNETH the III. King of Scots, had entirely subdued the Picts, he translated the Episcopal see to St. Andrew's. After this the Church of Abernethy became a Collegiate Church, possessed by the Culdees. While they held it, there was an *University* here for the education of youth, as appears from the priory book of St. Andrew's.—In the year 1273, (by which time the Culdees

exclusive of the glebe and manse, is 59l. 15s. 7½d. Communion elements, 5l. 11s. 1½d.; grafs, 1l. 13s. 4d.; 22 bolls 3 firlots and 2 pecks of bear; 18 bolls of oat-meal; 1 boll 3 firlots and 2 pecks of wheat. The manse was built in the year 1774; both it and the offices are in good repair. There are 4 acres of a glebe. The Earl of Mansfield is patron. The Antiburghers have a meeting-house here. Their minister is a very prudent sensible man, quiet, and conscientious in the discharge of his duty. The spirit of secession has for some time past been on the decline. The members of the establishment and the Antiburghers live in the most friendly habits.

*Schools and Poor.*—There are 2 schools in the parish, at an average about 50 scholars at each during the winter. The parochial schoolmaster has generally that number throughout the year. His salary, and perquisites as session-clerk, amounts to about 9l. 18s. He has likewise the interest of 190l. and 1l. 13s. 4d. from a mortification for teaching poor scholars. The fees for teaching are very low. He has a good house, but no garden. His income will not exceed 30l.—The poor's funds are made up of the money collected on Sundays, and the rent of 11 acres of land, called *Kirk land*, amounting annually to about 25l. Sterling. The poor on these funds are from 13

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were much discouraged), it was turned into a priory of regular canons of St Augustine, who were brought, it is said, from the abbey of Inchaffray.—FORBES, in his *Treatise on Tythes*, says, that “the Collegiate Church was founded by the Earl of Angus;” probably he meant ARCHIBALD Earl of Angus Lord of Abernethy, who gave the town a Charter of Privileges, August 25. 1476. The Earl might be a benefactor to the Collegiate Church, or restore it to a better state than it had been in for some time before, and, on that account, might be said to have founded it. To the above charter, a venerable man, Sir JOHN FRIZZLE, (that is FRAZER), Provost of the Collegiate Church of Abernethy, was one of the witnesses. This charter was renewed by WILLIAM Earl of Angus, at Holyroodhouse, on the 16th of November 1628. By this charter the government of Abernethy is vested in 2 bailies and 15 counsellors.

to 18, and get from 1s. to 5s. a-month. The Antiburgher kirk-session distributes 2cl. Sterling annually to the poor in this parish, besides contributing to the relief of others that attend their meeting-house from neighbouring parishes. There are no begging poor in the parish, yet no place is more pestered with vagrants and poor from other quarters.

*Roads and Bridges.*—There are 2 public roads; that which leads to Fife by Newburgh is in tolerable repair; the other, which is through the glen of Abernethy (and by which great quantities of coal and lime are brought from Fife to Strathearn) is very bad; that which strikes off the glen to Auchtermuchty, is in winter almost impassable. The statute labour, and composition-money allowed, are totally inadequate to keep these roads in repair. There are 2 bridges over the Farg; the one at Gowly, which is old and ruinous, the other below *Potty Mill*, which is too narrow for carriages, and lies at some distance from the public road. A new bridge over this water, near Aberargie, would be a desirable object, as after heavy rains it swells to such a height, and is so rapid, that it is both difficult and dangerous to cross it.

*Antiquities.*—In the church-yard stands a tower of an extraordinary construction. It consists of 64 courses of hewn stone, laid circularly and regularly, is in height 74 feet, in circumference 48 feet. It is difficult to assign this to any but the Picts, as it stands in the capital of their dominions. There is but one other tower of a similar structure in Scotland, viz. at Brechin. The use of these towers, according to the latest and most probable conjectures, was not only for the confinement of those who were doing penance, but also for calling people to public worship by the sound of a horn or trumpet, before the introduction of bells. S. W. from the town there is a hill, called *Castle-law*. Tradition says there

was a fort upon the top of it; it probably served for one of those watch towers on which the Picts used to kindle fires, on sudden invasions, insurrections, or the approach of the enemy; these signals were communicated from tower to tower, till the whole country was alarmed and flew to arms. These fires were attended with the blowing of horns, which was the signal for war. From this hill there is a most beautiful and extensive prospect. About a mile and a half E. from Abernethy, a little below the mansion-house of Carpow, stood the ancient castle which belonged to the Lords of Abernethy\*; part of its foundation may still be seen. In the S. W. corner of this parish, among the hills, stands *Balvaird Castle*, which belonged to the MURRAYS of Balvaird, in the reign of ROBERT the II. It is now the property of the Earl of MANSFIELD, the lineal descendent of that ancient house.

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\* One of the predecessors of the Earl of ANGUS married the heiress of ABERNETHY, and by her got this lordship, which is now vested in the person of Lord \_\_\_\_\_, who annually receives the feus of many neighbouring estates, as well as of the town of Abernethy.