

PARISH OF MARYKIRK.

PRESBYTERY OF FORDOUN, SYNOD OF ANGUS AND MEARNES.

THE REV. A. C. LOW, MINISTER.

I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

Name.—THE ancient name of this parish was Aberluthnott, or, as it is more commonly expressed in ancient writings, Aberluthnet. This name seems to have been in use in the beginning of last century, from the fact of a pair of silver communion cups having been presented in the year 1715 for the use of the parish, bearing the following inscription: "This cup was given to the kirk of Aberluthnott by David Melvill and Jean Rait of Pitgarvie,

1715." The ancient name is now in disuse, having entirely given place to the modern one of Marykirk.

Extent.—Marykirk parish is situated at the southern extremity of the extensive plain known by the name of the "How of the Mearus." Its extreme breadth from east to west is about 7 miles; from north to south about 6; and its superficial contents are 15 square miles.

Boundaries.—This parish is of very irregular form. It is bounded on the south by the river North Esk, which is here the boundary between the shires of Forfar and Kincardine, and continues to be so till it falls into the sea, about five miles below the most southerly point of this parish; on the north and north-west, it is bounded by the parishes of Fordoun and Fettercairn; on the east and north-east, by the parishes of St Cyrus, Garvock, and Laurencekirk.

Topographical Appearances.—The parish, in its aspect, is level, sloping gently from the east, north-east, and north towards the North Esk. The only rising grounds which deserve the name of hills are those of Kirkton-hill and Balmaleddie. They run nearly parallel, in a north-easterly direction, for about two miles, from a little above the village of Marykirk to the Wide-open, a large gap or cut in the ridge. By it they are separated from the hill of Garvock, of which, with this interruption, they may be said to be a continuation. They terminate, in their southern extremities, towards the village, in declivities sloping towards the North Esk.

The climate is fully equal, and probably superior, to that of some of the surrounding parishes.

Springs.—The parish is, in all parts, well supplied with water, and we are not aware of any inconvenience having been felt from the scarcity of this necessary of life, except in the summer of 1826, when the extraordinary drought of the season dried up some of the brooks, obliging the farmers, in one or two districts, to drive their cattle to water to some distance from the farms. In the village of Marykirk, there are three springs, which supply the inhabitants with water, besides a small brook that flows through it, called, in ancient writings, "The burn of Aberluthnot." Of the three springs, the one known by the name of "the Lady Banks Well" is the best. By the side of the brook, a little above the village, there is a chalybeate spring, which was enclosed and covered over some years ago by the proprietor; but the work has since been allowed to become ruinous. The spring

is neither copious nor very strongly impregnated with iron. Close to the mansion-house of Balmanno is a very fine spring, known formerly, it would seem, by the name of "St John's Well," the water of which, in a more superstitious age, was held to be of peculiar potency in curing diseases. On the farm of Muirtown, till very lately, there were two springs within ten yards of each other, very remarkable for their difference of temperature. The water of one is slightly impregnated with sulphur, but has not been analyzed. They are both now dried by the tenant.

Rivers.—There are several small streams in this parish, such as the Black burn, the Dowry burn, the burns of Balmakelly and Balmaleddie, which, though highly useful to the inhabitants, can scarcely be deemed worthy of notice. The North Esk, and the small river of the Luther, are the only two streams at all worthy of the name of rivers connected with the parish. The North Esk has its rise in the neighbouring county of Forfar, and, flowing in an easterly direction, reaches the shire of Kincardine, after which, flowing in a south-easterly course, it divides the counties, and falls into the sea about four miles from Montrose. The Luther, rising in the Grampian hills, above the village of Fordoun, flows at first in an easterly direction, till it reaches the parish of Laurencekirk, through part of which it flows in a south-westerly course, and, being joined by several insignificant brooks, enters the parish of Marykirk, about a mile below the village of Laurencekirk. It still continues its westerly course, until within a mile of its junction with the North Esk, when it suddenly turns to the south, emptying itself into that river a little below the North-water-bridge, on the great north road from Edinburgh to Aberdeen. This small river, the Luther, may flow within the parish a distance of five miles, and from its source to its mouth may be about thirteen miles in length. Its temperature would seem to be higher than that of the larger stream of the North Esk. The North Esk and Luther both abound in excellent trout.

Geology.—Little of a satisfactory nature can be stated regarding the geological structure of Marykirk. The whole parish appears to rest on red sandstone, overlaid to a considerable depth by the original soil. The sandstone is, however, exhibited in the channel of the North Esk, at Inglismaldie and other places, and is or has been worked at Balmakewan and Hatton, but to no great extent, the expense of tiring the rock, and of clearing the quarry of water, being such as to render the operations unprofitable. A

bed of coarse limestone traverses the parish from east to west, and was formerly quarried at Balmakewan, and on the farm of Burn, on the estate of Kirktonhill; but the inferior quality of the rock, and the expense of quarrying and burning, made the works soon be abandoned. This bed seems a continuation of the same rock which traverses the high ground in the parishes of Logie Pert, Stracathro, and Brechin, where it still continues to be quarried to some extent.

Trap and likewise conglomerate appear in the high ground behind Kirktonhill and Balmaleddie. No ores, so far as known, have been found. The species of bastard whin or amygdaloid, commonly called the Scotch pebble rock, is sometimes found; and rock crystal frequently.

Soil.—The soil of the parish is various, but the greater part of it is well adapted for the crops usually cultivated. In some places it is light, and sandy or gravelly; in many places it contains boulders; but in the low-lying holms along the banks of the Luther and North Esk, the soil consists of haugh or alluvial land; in other parts it is a wet and rather poor clay. In the north and north-east parts of the parish, the soil, which was formerly moorish, has by cultivation been greatly improved.

Zoology.—The principal fishes are salmon, grilse, sea-trout; common trout, and eels. The quantity of the two former in the North Esk, where they are chiefly to be found, has decreased very much from what it was a few years ago. This is certainly owing to the introduction of new modes of fishing, particularly along the sea coast, by stake and bag-nets, which effectually prevent the fish from entering the river in any quantity, unless when, by the violence of wind and flood, the nets have been carried away from the mouth of the river.

Botany.—The plants in this parish are of the most common description. The *Linnaea borealis* was first discovered to be a native of Britain at Inglismaldie, in this parish, where it is found in great abundance. About Inglismaldie, also, may be found several varieties of the fern; but the botanical treasures of the parish have never as yet been examined with attention.

The plantations are extensive. The soil is adapted to the growth of all the ordinary kinds of timber. Few of the trees have as yet attained great size, not being, in general, above sixty years of age. Inglismaldie has long been famed for its plantations of fir timber, some of which are upwards of one hundred years old, and for size and quality are inferior to none in the county.

II.—CIVIL HISTORY.

Eminent Men.—The Strachans of Thornton were men of considerable distinction in the service of their country. The late Dr Crombie, who was also proprietor of Thornton, and patron of the parish, was a man of eminence, and of great repute as an author. His works on Natural Theology, and particularly his *Gymnasium*, are deservedly held in high estimation.

Land-owners.—The landed proprietors are, the Earl of Kintore; Sir Alexander Ramsay, Bart.; Robert Taylor, Esq.; Alexander Crombie, Esq.; the Honourable General Hugh Arbuthnott, M. P.; Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser; and Sir John Stuart Forbes, Bart.

Parochial Registers.—The registers of baptisms and marriages have been correctly kept since 1699. The records previous to that date appear to have been lost, from the following minute:—“The register of the baptisms within the parish of Aberluthnot since the 31st of August, being the admission day of John Thomson, minister, the former books not being found. 1699.” The books connected with the parish are not voluminous.

Antiquities.—As is remarked in the former Statistical Account, “the antiquities of this parish are few in number and of no great importance.” To the little there said, little can be added; indeed the traditions there set forth are now scarcely known to any of the people. Since the date of the former account, several stone coffins have been discovered on the farm of Cobbleheugh, in which were found the remains of skeletons of a very large size. The Thornton Aisle, which bears the date of 1615, is still standing. The inscription on the beautiful monument which it contained, as well as the monument itself, are now nearly defaced. The whole interior of the aisle has suffered much from the depredations of the youngsters in the village, and the roof, which seems at one time to have been finely painted, has been destroyed almost entirely by the same mischievous hands. Part of the old cross of the village is still standing.

Modern Buildings.—Of the modern buildings in the parish, the bridge over the North Esk, a little below the village of Marykirk, may be first noticed. It was begun in 1811, and finished in 1813. It is a neat substantial building, consisting of four circular arches of equal size, and has proved of the greatest utility to the whole district of the county. The bridge over the North Esk, on the road leading from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, is of great an-

tiquity,—it is this summer undergoing extensive repairs, by which it will be much beautified and improved.

The mansion-house of Kirktonhill has been rebuilt since the date of the last report. It is a handsome building, and, from its commanding situation, forms a prominent object in the district.

The mansion-house of Balmakewan has also been rebuilt since the date of the former report. It stands on a rising ground near the North Esk, and is a neat and commodious structure surrounded and sheltered by thriving and highly ornamental plantations.

Inglismaldie, one of the seats of the Earl of Kintore, is an old house, in a castellated form. It has not been occupied for some time, but is in tolerable repair.

Thornton Castle, the property of Alexander Crombie, Esq. of Phesdo, is an ancient building, in the style of the Scotch castellated mansion house; part of it bears date 1531. It had been allowed to get into a ruinous state, but was repaired by the late Mr Crombie of Phesdo, about twenty years ago, with much taste and at considerable expense. In making these repairs the style and character of the old castle was strictly attended to—it is now a comfortable residence, and is occupied by a tenant.

The House of Hatton, the property of the Honourable General Hugh Arbuthnott, is neither large nor commodious. It is, however, in tolerable repair, and occupied by the tenant of the farm.

The parish church, built in 1806, may also be noticed. It is a neat, though plain, building, and is capable of containing about 700 sitters. It occupies a site near the centre of the village, different from that of the old one, which stood in the middle of the church-yard.

Spinnig-Mill.—There is only one spinning-mill in the parish, at Caldhome. Flax is there manufactured; the mill is driven by the Luther.

All the buildings are of freestone, obtained generally from the quarries of Hatton, Balmakewan, Balmanno, in this parish, and also from Brechin and Laurieston; chiefly from the last.

III.—POPULATION.

According to Dr Webster's list of inhabitants, the population of this parish amounted in 1755 to 1280. According to Mr Garden's account, it amounted in 1774 to 1080. In 1793, the population seems to have been 1481. Since that date the population has increased rapidly. By the census of 1821, it amounted to 1839; of 1831, to 2032. By a census taken in 1836, to 2200, and by

the census of 1841, it amounted to 2389. The increase of inhabitants is to be attributed to the progress of manufactures, it being principally observable in the village of Luthermuir, where many weaving shops have been established.

The parish contains two villages, Marykirk, in which the church stands, and Luthermuir, nearly four miles distant from it. The former contains nearly 300 inhabitants, the latter about 1090, consequently about 1000 reside in the country part of the parish.

The average number of births may be about 50, and of marriages 22, for the last seven years. The number of deaths cannot be given, there having been no record kept of such.

Of nobility, there are none residing in the parish. Two families of independent fortune, Robert Taylor, Esq. of Kirktonhill, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser of Balmakewan, reside constantly in the parish. Each proprietor derives an income from land above L.50.

The number of inhabited houses in the parish is 554; of uninhabited houses, 20.

There is only one insane person belonging to the parish; fatuous, 8; blind, 3; deaf and dumb, 2.

The general character of the people is moral and religious; they are decidedly intelligent. Poaching for game and also for salmon in the North Esk, has prevailed to a considerable extent in this parish hitherto, but it is hoped that the Kincardineshire Society for the Protection of Game will speedily put a stop to this demoralising practice.

IV.—INDUSTRY.

Agriculture.—“Marykirk is essentially an agricultural parish—the manufactures carried on being limited to a flax spinning-mill at Caldham, and the hand-loom weaving of linen in Luthermuir. To which may be added three or four saw-mills, chiefly employed in cutting up home-grown fir timber, for agricultural purposes.

The parish contains 9320 imperial acres which may be thus classified :

Arable,	-	6955
Pasture,	-	578
Wood, chiefly Scots fir,	-	1582
Roads, rivers, &c.	-	260
Total,	-	9320*

* In 1807, the arable and pasture land was as under: arable, 4557; wood, 1800; pasture, 2963; total, 9320.

The arable land may be further subdivided into haugh or alluvial land, lying along the north bank of the North Esk, and the margin of the Luther water, the burn of Balmakelly, the Black burn, Doury burn, and the Forder burn, amounting altogether to, say 350 acres; light gravelly land on an open bottom, 600 acres; good strong loam and old infield land, partly on a porous sub-soil, 1600 acres; inferior clay land and black moorish soil, on a wet and retentive subsoil, 4405 acres; total, 6955 acres.

The waste land and ground under planting is invariably a poor clay, or moorish soil, of very inferior quality. The farms are generally laid out in regular fields, by earthen dikes or fences; thorn hedges and stone dikes being restricted to the home farms of Inglismaldie, Balmakewan, Kirtonhill, and Balmanno.

The rental of Marykirk amounts to, of land rent, -	L.7205	0	0
Fishings in the North Esk, - - - -	40	0	0
Annual sales of wood, - - - -	420	0	0
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Total, -	L.7665	0	0

Being at the rate of L. 1, 0s. 2d. per imperial acre for the arable land, and 2s. per acre for pasture and wood land.

The valued rent of the parish is L.6065.*

Gross Produce.—

Acres.			
1720, oats, 4¼ quarters per acre, 7740 quarters, at L. 1, 2s.,	L.8514	0	0
800, barley, 3¼ quarters per acre, 2800 quarters, at L.1, 10s.,	4200	0	0
280, hay, 170 stons per acre, 37,200, at 4d.	620	0	0
2260, pasture, L.1 per acre,	2260	0	0
200, potatoes, 20 bolls per acre, 4000 acres at 7s.	1400	0	0
1000, turnips, at 7s. per acre,	3500	0	0
455, in grass parks, at L.1, 10s.,	682	10	0
260, in fallow.			
Oat and barley fodder, 10,540 quarters, at 5s.	2695	0	0
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6955 acres.	†L.23,811	10	0

Live-Stock.—Horses used in husbandry, 210; carriage, saddle, and carriers' horses, 40; foals reared annually, 20; total, 270 horses. Bulls, say, about 8; cows, 380; calves reared annually, 420; cattle of one and two years old, 760; total, 1568 cattle.‡

Of the above about 140 cattle may be fattened for the butcher; the remainder of the year's growth (about 240,) being sold to the grazier or dealer, when rising two or three years old.

* In 1795, the rental was L.3900. In 1807, L.4099, 7s. 4d.

† In 1807, the ground under crop and the produce was as follows: wheat, 50 acres; bear, 500; oats, 1375; pease, 75; turnip, 250; potatoes, 62; flax, 15; fallow, 75; gardens, 30; sown grass, 2125; total, 4557 acres.

‡ In 1807, the live-stock amounted to, horses, 146; riding horse, 15; foals, 24; total, 185. Cows, 280; oxen, 12; calves, 240; other cattle, 708; total, 1240. Sheep, 200; swine, 20.

From three to four hundred pigs may be reared and fattened every year, in the parish.

Husbandry.—The alternate husbandry is in full operation; the rotation followed being generally the five shift course. The crops cultivated are, barley, oats, turnips, potatoes, and grass; little or no wheat is grown, and pulse crops scarcely enter into the rotation. Much attention is paid to the rearing of black-cattle, and to these the farmer looks for a great part of his rent. The Angus or polled breed is in great estimation. The farms are generally small, there being only eight farms of 200 acres and upwards, with twelve of 100 and not amounting to 200 acres each, the remainder of the parish being divided into farms under 100 acres, and crofts of from two to twenty acres. The larger farms are accommodated with suitable steadings, substantially built of stone and lime, and slated. A thrashing-mill is attached to every stead- ing where the extent of land amounts to 100 acres. Although much has been done in improving the land, still much remains to be accomplished. The land, from being on a retentive subsoil, is generally wet, draining is therefore the first and most essential improvement. This may be followed by planting for shelter, and by a more judicious and general mode of enclosing.

Besides the flax spinning-mill at Caldham, there are in the parish, six corn-mills, one flax-mill, and five saw-mills. Drying kilns are attached to the corn-mills.

Salmon-fishing.—Salmon-fishing is carried on, but not to a great extent, in this parish. There are, in the beginning of the season, generally five or six men employed at the rate of 10s. to 12s. 6d. a week, and towards the close only two or three at the same rate. The rents of the fishings amount to L.40.

Manufactures.—As already mentioned, flax is manufactured at Caldham mill. About thirty hands are employed. They work about thirteen hours a-day, and receive 4s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. a-week. The foremen receive from 15s. to 21s. weekly.

The other branch of trade is hand-loom weaving. This trade is carried on chiefly in Luthermuir, where nearly 200 persons are engaged in it. The yarn is supplied by Richards and Co. in Montrose, and by two companies from Brechin. The weavers work generally fourteen or fifteen hours a-day, and when the material was good, used to make from 11s. to 14s. a-week. The wages have gradually fallen to 7s. or 8s. weekly. The trade has been so bad

for the last six months that several of the best hands employed have scarcely earned 3s. 6d. a-week.

V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

Market-Town.—There is no market-town in this parish. The nearest is Montrose, distant about six miles from the village of Marykirk, where every necessary of life can be procured at a reasonable rate.

Means of Communication.—The means of communication enjoyed by the parish are, on the whole, good. There is a post-office in the village of Marykirk, where letters are posted for, and received through Montrose every day. The turnpike road from Aberdeen to Perth passes through the parish, and the Defiance coach goes and returns from Edinburgh every lawful day. The commutation roads in the parish lead through it in various directions, and are generally good and well kept. The bridges on all the roads are in good repair. At Mill of Barns, a bridge is much wanted over the Luther.

Ecclesiastical State.—The parish church is very inconveniently situated. Its distance from the south boundary of the parish is only about 300 yards, and from the opposite extremity from five to six miles. It was built in 1806, and is at present in good repair. The number of sittings is 638, all unlet, and all allocated to the heritors.

The manse was repaired in 1838, at considerable expense to the heritors, and is now comfortable and commodious.

The glebe is four acres in extent, good land, and may be worth L.10 yearly. There is no grass glebe, nor any remuneration for it. The stipend amounts to 150 bolls of meal and 126 bolls of bear, which, on an average, amount to L.200. The allowance for communion elements is L.8, 6s. 8d. The surplus teinds belong to King's College, Aberdeen. There is no chapel of ease attached to the Established Church, nor any Government church or missionary in the parish. There are two Dissenting chapels; one belongs to the Congregational Union, the other to the United Associate Synod.

The communicants belonging to the Established Church amount to 957. The communicants belonging to other sects, who reside in the parish, are, to the Congregational Union, 30; United Associate Synod, 63; Bereans, 9; Episcopalians, 12.

Divine service at the Established Church, and at the other two chapels, is generally well attended. The only collection for cha

ritable purposes, made in the parish church, is for the Montrose Infirmary. It is made annually, and amounts, on an average, to L.6.

Education.—Besides the parish school, there are five private schools, which, with the exception of one, which is endowed, are on the teachers' own adventure. The parish school is at present vacant; but the usual branches of English reading, writing, arithmetic, mensuration, geography, and Latin have been taught. The average number of scholars for the last few years has been 50, and the average amount of fees L.20 yearly. The salary is L.30, with a house, garden, and about four acres of ground. In 1840, a handsome school and school-house was erected in Luthermuir by the liberality of Sir John Stuart Forbes, Bart., and by subscriptions from the heritors and others, which is endowed by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, with a salary of L.15 per annum; besides which the teacher has about three acres of land rent free from Sir J. S. Forbes. It is attended by 60 scholars, and the average amount of fees may be L.22 yearly. In the private schools, English reading, writing, and arithmetic are generally taught. They are attended by about 160 scholars. The number of children attending school in the parish amounts to about 270. All the teachers, except one, are members of the Established Church, and, in all the schools, great attention is paid to the religious instruction of the pupils. There cannot be said to be any children in this parish between the ages of six and fifteen years who can neither read nor write, and, with the exception of a few old people, there are few above that age who cannot do so. In the parish generally, parents seem very anxious that their children shall enjoy the benefits of education; but in Luthermuir, where children of tender years are of some use to their parents in their ordinary employments, their education has been much neglected; and this is very visible in their conduct in after years. From the number of schools, there is every opportunity for the instruction of the children, within a reasonable distance of the abodes of the parents.

Library.—There is a library consisting of about 200 volumes, chiefly religious, which was presented to the parish by Patrick Taylor, Esq., son of the late John Taylor, Esq. of Kirktonhill, before he left the parish for Australia. It is highly valued by the people, and, in the winter season, much read.

Friendly Societies.—There is a sort of Friendly Society or rather

Savings bank, which has been in operation in Luthermuir for about twelve years. The nature of it is this: The members contribute 6d., 1s., or 2s. 6d. weekly as they can; this sum, as it accumulates, is lent out at interest among the members, in sums not exceeding L.5, for which the member borrowing gives, as security, two other members of the society, who may not require the use of such a sum. A great part of the funds are lent out in this way, and the money not so lent is laid out to the best advantage, and the whole sum, principal and interest, is divided at the year's end among the members in proportion to their weekly contribution. This society has been very useful in the parish. There being no proper Savings bank, the people generally avail themselves of those established in the neighbouring parishes of Logie-Pert and Fettercairn.

Poor and Parochial Funds.—The average number of poor on the roll is 50, and the average allowance 4s. a month to each. Besides these there are about 20 others who receive occasional relief. The ordinary church collections, including collections at the communion, amount to L.50; the interest of stock funds, L.20, 17s. 6d.; the dues of mortcloths, L.4, 2s. 8d.; voluntary contributions from the heritors, in proportion to their valued rents, amount to from L.100 to L.150. There is a growing disposition, on the part of the poor, to seek parochial relief, and they seem to have no idea of any thing degrading in it.

Fairs.—There is now an annual fair in the parish, held on Balmakelly moor, on the last Friday of July, for the sale of cattle, horses, sheep, wool, and for the engagement of harvest shearers. It is called St James's fair. It was formerly held on the Hill of Garvock, but was removed to Balmakelly moor about two years ago, for the better accommodation of dealers.

Inns and Alehouses.—There are six inns or alehouses in the parish, certainly far too many; but they seem to be less frequented now than they were a few years ago. There cannot be a doubt that they have a bad effect on the morals of the people.

Fuel.—Coals are chiefly used. They are obtained in Montrose at a cost of 1s. 2d. per barrel, and the cartage to Marykirk may be about 4d. a barrel more. Brushwood is also to be had in considerable quantities, at the price of 1s. 6d. per load. The farmers may obtain turf and peat from the moss of Arnhall, in the parish of Fettercairn, on account of their farms; but they do not avail themselves of their right to a great extent.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

The agricultural improvements of the parish, since the date of the last Report, have been very great. The land is now mostly improved, and in a high state of cultivation. That incapable of improvement has been planted with wood, which seems to be generally thriving.

Luthermuir, which, at the time of the last Report, seems to have been deemed unworthy of notice, being at that time only a barren moor, is now mostly cultivated, and contains a population, as already stated, of above 1000. On account, however, of the decline of manufactures, especially the weaving trade, it is beginning to decrease in point of population, but to advance in several other respects. A few years ago, this place seems to have been the resort of the destitute and abandoned from almost every parish in the country. It is pleasing to remark, that it is improving very fast in point of morality and religion,—persons of a loose character having been obliged to leave it from want of work, and the remaining inhabitants becoming more alive to their duties both to God and man.

May 1842.