

## PARISH OF POLMONT.

PRESBYTERY OF LINLITHGOW, SYNOD OF LOTHIAN AND  
TWEEDDALE.

THE REV. JOHN KER, MINISTER.

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### I.—TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY.

*Name, Boundaries, &c.*—THE etymology of Polmont is uncertain. Most probably, it is derived from a Celtic word, signifying pool of the moor, in allusion to the ancient state of the low part of the parish, which, though now highly cultivated and very fertile, bears abundant traces of its once having been covered with water. Its greatest length is about six miles and a-half, and its utmost breadth about 3 miles. It is bounded on the north, by the Frith of Forth; on the east, partly by the river Avon, which separates the county of Stirling from the county of Linlithgow, and partly by the parish of Muiravonside; on the south, by Muiravonside and Slamanan parishes; and on the west, by the parish of Falkirk.

Its general appearance is rich, varied, and beautiful. It is divided usually into two parts. The lower portion, which forms the Carse, is flat, and too valuable to bear any thing but grain; but the higher portion, which is termed the dryfield, is undulating, well-wooded, and adorned with many handsome villas, and mansion houses. The Carse is on a level with the sea, and would still be flooded by the tide, were it not protected by a strong embankment. The dryfield rises gradually, till it reaches the extreme height of about 553 feet, where is obtained a very extensive prospect, and remarkable both for its beauty and grandeur.

*Meteorology.*—The yearly depth of rain, on an average of seventeen years, from 1821 to 1837, is 31.31 inches. The district is very healthy. Though in one part of the parish, the cottages are far from being comfortable, being built generally of turf and clay, and the population considerable, if not crowded, there is very rarely any epidemic, even when prevalent in the villages of some of the adjoining parishes.

*Geology and Mineralogy.*—The minerals are both abundant and valuable, consisting of freestone, coal, ironstone, with fire-clay.

The freestone, which is the only rock, extends nearly throughout the whole of the parish. The dip of the strata generally is to the north-east, except when their position is altered by a dike which traverses one part of the parish, as exemplified in Brighton's Quarry, when the strata in consequence dip to the north-west. This is the only quarry which is at present in operation. Recently it has been, and is still wrought to a great extent, on account of the increase of demand for stone, occasioned chiefly by the projected railway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The quality of the rock is good, the colour brownish. Stones of any size can be procured. But preparations are making for opening another quarry at Battock. The freestone here forms a lower bed than what is found at Brighton's. It is of a white colour, and is hard and durable. The dip of the strata is to the north-west.

The coal is situated in different parts of the parish. The prevailing dip of the strata is to the north-east, rising, consequently, to the south-west, with an inclination of 1 in 12. The coal-field is intersected by several slips or dislocations, by which the strata are depressed in some instances many fathoms. Hence it frequently happens, that the seams of coal on the one side of a slip are not found on the other, being either thrown off, or thrown down to so great a depth, as to render the working of them impracticable, while new seams are often superinduced. Two main slips have been ascertained. These run from north-west to south-east. Besides, a great number of smaller slips have been discovered in sinking the coal; yet, on the whole, the coal-field, compared with many others, may be considered a clear field.

About half a mile west from Brighton's Quarry, one of the main slips is met with, which throws down the coal to the westward about 20 fathoms; and about three-quarters of a mile to the west of the first, is the second main slip, by which the coal is depressed to the westward upwards of 30 fathoms.

The first coal, found to the east of the first main slip, consists of two seams. The upper seam is about 10 or 14 fathoms below the surface, and is of a soft caking quality. Here it is from 34 to 36 inches thick, though, between the two main slips, it does not exceed 21 inches. Beneath this seam about 8 fathoms is the lower one; it is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick, and its quality is inferior, because there are several ribs of stone in it. Immediately above this seam

there are two or three bands of ironstone, which has been long wrought by the Carron Company and others, and is now nearly exhausted. But, besides these seams, it is proved that there are other two of considerably greater depth, which have not yet been opened up.

In the part of the field which extends between the two main slips, there occurs above the seams already described, to the eastward of the first main slip, a seam of soft coal, and it is the only one, excepting the seam just below the ironstone, which for many years has been wrought.

To the westward of the second main slip, the first seam, which is limited to this part of the field, is to be found only in the higher grounds, and is of very partial extent. It is from 4 to 5 feet thick, of excellent quality, and rarely more than eight fathoms beneath the surface; but it is now almost wrought out. The second seam, which is also peculiar to this part of the field, and found from 25 to 35 fathoms below the surface, is the splint coal; it is 34 inches thick, and the quality is good. Below this seam 14 fathoms is the soft coal, previously mentioned, of 32 inches thick, and likewise of fine quality. Besides the seams occurring in the eastern part of the field, it is ascertained that here there is another, 30 inches thick, 46 fathoms under the soft coal; but to it there have hitherto been no sinkings.

The coal proprietors are, the Duke of Hamilton; William Johnstone, Esq. of Meadowbank; and John G. Drummond, Esq. of Abbotsgrange. To the first, belongs the Redding Colliery; to the second, the Middlerig Colliery; and to the last, the Shielhill Colliery. The Redding Colliery is conducted on the largest scale. The coals from the pits are raised by steam-engines, and conveyed to the Union Canal by a railway with inclined planes; one of these being upwards of 800 yards in length, and at which can be let down at one time from 10 to 12 tons. The splint and soft coals are those which are at present wrought, and sent chiefly to the Edinburgh market. The output varies, of course, in amount with the demand. But the quantity must be always very great, as there are employed at the Redding and Middlerig Collieries upwards of 400 men,—miners, labourers, and artificers, besides drawers, an office performed usually by boys, and by women or girls. Of the Shielhill Colliery, the Carron Company are lessees; and though at one period it was carried on very extensively, they have

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removed, meanwhile, their workmen almost entirely to the neighbouring parish of Falkirk.

The soil is of divers kinds. In the Carse, it consists of clay, of great depth, and of fine quality; being entirely without stones, and obviously an alluvial deposit, both from the number of marine shells with which it abounds, and from the general elevation of the surface not being above the rise of the tide. In the dryfield, it is chiefly of a gravelly or sandy nature, though in some places it is composed of clay, and in others of moss.

*Zoology.*—The population is too dense to admit of game being plenty. But all the common varieties are found, and some of those which might scarcely be expected in this district, such as the red and black grouse, and the wild duck. The squirrel is frequently met with,—more rarely the otter. Besides the more ordinary descriptions of birds, there are the jay, the sparrow-hawk, the common owl, and the water hen, while we have occasional visits of the wild-goose and the heron. In the Avon, numbers of sea-trout of good size are caught in the spring and autumn; but salmon very seldom.

*Botany.*—The wild plants are numerous but not rare. I am not aware of one which is worthy of being specified, except the *Osmunda regalis*, or flowering fern, which is found on the banks of the Avon. All the species, both of fir and of hard-wood, thrive well, but the last are chiefly grown. An attempt has been made to introduce some of the varieties of the Canadian apple, viz. the *Pomme grise* and the *fameuse*, by Mr Logan of Clarkstone, but not with much success, in consequence of our summers being generally too cold to bring the fruit to maturity.

## II — CIVIL HISTORY.

As the parish is but of recent formation, it affords few materials for history. It was disjoined from that of Falkirk in 1724. Its name, however, must be at least of long standing, for among the titles of the Duke of Hamilton, he is called Lord Polmont. I know not of any notices of the parish, save in the previous Statistical Account, and in Nimmo's History of Stirlingshire; and, in both, the notices are brief and meagre.

*Eminent Characters.*—Dr Henry, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, author of a History of Great Britain, resided here, for several years, during the summer months, and was buried in the churchyard in 1790, where there is a monument to his memory.

*Land-Owners.*—The principal of these are, the Earl of Zetland;

John G. Drummond, Esq. of Abbotsgrange; and Captain Dalgleish of Reddoch,—all of whom are non-resident; and among the chief resident proprietors are, Sir Thomas Livingstone, Bart. of West-quarter; William Logan, Esq. of Clarkstone; Thomas Walker, Esq. of Polmont Bank; James Milne, Esq. of Haypark; and William Johnstone, Esq. of Meadowbank. There is a peculiarity connected with the resident proprietors, which should be mentioned. Many of them, though the annual value of their lands be not great, are possessed of independent fortunes, derived from other sources. In the Carse, the properties generally do not consist of more than forty or fifty acres each, yet there have been few changes among the owners. For several generations, the same lands have been held, in various instances, by the same families.

*Parochial Registers.*—There are registers of births and of proclamations, both of which commence at the origin of the parish. There is also a register of funerals, which extends back for fifty years.

*Antiquities.*—The Roman Wall, commonly called Graham's Dike, erected by the Emperor Antoninus Pius about the year 140, and stretching from the Frith of Forth to the Frith of Clyde, passed through the parish. All remains of it have disappeared, though some existed only a few years ago. On the hill beyond Redding is a stone, known in the neighbourhood by the name of Wallace's Stone, and, if tradition be credited, commemorative of the place where the famous Sir William Wallace, in consequence of his quarrel with Sir John Stewart, another of the Scottish chiefs, viewed the battle of Falkirk, from the site of which it is distant about two miles, and of which it commands a prospect,—a sullen and inactive spectator. But, whatever be the credit attached to the tradition, the stone is obviously of recent origin, and, on examination, will disappoint the antiquary.

*Modern Buildings.*—Most of the houses of the resident proprietors are modern,—Polmont Park, Parkhill, Clarkstone, Polmont House, Millfield, Polmont Bank, &c.

### III.—POPULATION.

Amount of population in 1755, by Dr Webster's Return,	1094
1791,	1400
1801,	2194
1811,	1827
1821,	2171
1831,	3200
1835, December, by a census taken by the writer of this report,	8107

These statements require, perhaps, some explanation. In 1801, the colliery at Shielhill was in active operation, and hence the large

increase at that time compared with the census in 1791. In 1811, the work there was almost discontinued, and hence the decrease. Again, from 1821 to 1831, the Redding colliery was conducted on more than its present extensive scale; and in 1835, the diminution was occasioned by fewer workmen being employed.

The population connected with the collieries amounts to about 1000. The rest of the population consists of agricultural labourers and quarrymen, with a small number of shopkeepers and mechanics.

During the last seven years, the average number of births was 83, and of marriages, 27. The number of deaths cannot be ascertained with any accuracy. There is only a register of funerals, and as many from neighbouring parishes are buried in the church-yard, it gives no correct index of the mortality in the parish. Nor is much reliance for any practical purpose to be placed on the registers of births and of marriages, or more properly of proclamations; for not a few omit to record the names of their children. Though an account be kept of the publication of bans, it often happens that one of the parties resides in another parish.

Of villages, the two principal are, Bennetston and Redding; the former containing 474 inhabitants, the latter 587.

In September 1838, there were 34 different proprietors on the list of heritors. Of these, 27 have properties of the yearly value of L.50 and upwards, and two only draw from their lands in the parish above L.1000 per annum.

The people, on the whole, are orderly and peaceable. Among the colliers, there has been a perceptible improvement during the last few years—more attention being paid to the education of the young.

#### IV.—INDUSTRY.

##### *Agriculture* :—

Land cultivated, or occasionally in tillage,	3790 Imperial acres.
Uncultivated,	531
Under wood,	100

The uncultivated consists of the Redding Moor, and is capable of being cultivated. It is an undivided common, belonging to the Duke of Hamilton; but the right of pasturage is held by some of the other heritors. Till very recently, it was altogether a waste, when portions of it, with the permission of the superior, were partially enclosed and cultivated, chiefly with the spade by the colliers, at their spare hours,—a circumstance creditable to their industry, and advantageous to their morals; and in some instances, they have reaped an abundant produce both in oats and potatoes. Were the whole brought under culture, it would be a very great improvement.

*Rent of Land.*—The rent of Carse land varies from L. 3 to L. 4, 10s. per acre, according to the prices of grain determined by the county fiars, and of dryfield from L. 1 to L. 3 per acre. The real rent of the parish is between L. 7000 and L. 8000.

*Wages.*—The wages of labourers per day run from 1s. 8d. to 2s. Farm-servants, hired for the half-year, receive from L. 7 to L. 10, with bed and board.

*Husbandry.*—In the dryfield the five-shift course is followed, and in the Carse, very generally the six-shift, viz. 1. summer fallow; 2. wheat; 3. beans; 4. barley; 5. hay; and 6. oats. Great improvement has lately been made in the culture of land, in consequence of the introduction of tile-draining. It costs per acre from L. 4 to L. 7, according to the nature of the soil, and, if small stones or gravel be laid above the tile, the expense will be increased; but the increase of expense is amply compensated by the increase of benefit. The whole outlay is repaid in additional produce in a few crops. There is one steam-engine in the parish, which turns a thrashing mill—a great saving in horse-labour, and otherwise not costly, as coal is near and cheap. It may be proper to state, that great facilities are afforded for conveying manure here, from Edinburgh and Leith, both by the Union Canal, and by the Frith of Forth. Nor are these facilities disregarded. The mode of farming usually practised is of the most approved kind. The land, particularly in the carse, and in the dryfield to the north of the Union Canal, is almost in as high a state of cultivation as it can be brought by skill and capital; but the same thing cannot be said of the land to the south of the Canal, and in the most elevated district of the parish, where, for the most part, the poverty of the soil operates as a hinderance to improvement.

There are two works for making tiles and bricks.

*Produce.*—The average gross amount and value of raw produce, as nearly as can be ascertained, are the following:

Wheat,	450 imperial acres, at 4 quarters per acre,			L. 4320	0	0	
Oats,	700	do.	5	do.	2825	0	0
Barley,	450	do.	5	do.	3375	0	0
Beans,	300	do.	3½	do.	1575	0	0
Potatoes,	160	do.	5	bolts,	2640	0	0
Turnips,	80	do.	L. 10,		800	0	0
Hay,	450	do.	180	stones,	2700	0	0
Pasture,	1200	do.	L. 1, 10s.		1800	0	0

L. 20,085 0 0

#### V.—PAROCHIAL ECONOMY.

*Market-Town.*—The nearest market-town is Falkirk.

*Means of Communication.*—There is no want either of modes

of conveyance or of communication. The post-town is Falkirk, from which there is a runner daily for the delivery of the letters; but, no doubt, the establishment of a regular post-office in Bennetstown would be a great improvement, for the runner requires to travel over so wide a field, that the letters are seldom received by many in time to be answered in course. There are about two miles of turnpike; and coaches pass daily to and from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling. The Union Canal also intersects the parish for about two miles and a-half; and the projected railway\* between Edinburgh and Glasgow, so far as it extends in this parish, will be almost in the line of the Union Canal.

*Ecclesiastical State.*—The present church was built in 1731. It is seated for 607. It is damp, ill arranged, and most inadequate to the wants of the parish. The number of communicants belonging to the Establishment cannot be accommodated in it, for they amount to 749; and the total number of individuals connected with the Establishment, according to the census of 1835, was 2585. Since that period, the proportions have not decreased but increased. Yet how long the present church may stand, it is hard to tell. It cannot be condemned, and by the existing law, all the heritors must agree before a new one can be erected, and, consisting of above thirty, unanimity among so many is not easily attained. In the Redding district, where the destitution is greatest, there is a preaching station. There a probationer of the Church of Scotland has officiated regularly since 1835, in a school-room belonging to the Redding colliery; yet, prior to that period, service was performed occasionally in it on the Sabbath evening by the parish minister. The Dissenters in the parish belong to the United Associate Synod, the Relief, and the Cameronians, and attend public worship at Falkirk, Lauriston, and Linlithgow. The whole of these, including a few Episcopalians, amount to 503, and the total number of sittings rented in their respective places of worship is 158. There are nineteen persons who profess to belong to no religious denomination. In the village of Bennetstown there has been for upwards of two years frequent service on the Sabbath evening in a school-room, by ministers or preachers of most of the Dissenting denominations in the neighbourhood.

The manse is in good repair. The glebe consists of five Scotch

\* This railway is now nearly made. It is expected that it will be opened for the passage of locomotive carriages by August or September next.

acres. The garden, with the shrubbery, extends to about an acre more. The stipend is 17 chalders, half meal, half barley, with L. 8, 6s. 8d. for communion elements.

*Religious Societies.*—A Bible Society has existed for many years. Since the dispute between the British and Foreign, and the Edinburgh Bible Societies, its annual income has never been so large. It fluctuates now from L. 6 to L. 8.

*Education.*—The parochial teacher receives the maximum salary—L. 34, 4s. 4½d. The scholars are so numerous, as to render an assistant necessary, who is paid by the teacher—the average number being about 140. The whole emoluments, including the fees of the session-clerkship, exceed L. 100 per annum. This is the fiftieth year of the present teacher, Mr Thomas Girdwood's tenure of office, and no man ever filled it more worthily, or more efficiently discharged its duties. There are other five schools, attended in all by 250 scholars; but the provision for the support of the teachers, consisting, with one exception, entirely of the school fees, is generally very inadequate.

Of Sabbath schools, there are three,—one taught by the preacher at the preaching station; one by the teacher at Old Redding, under the superintendence of the minister of the parish; and another at Polmont by the parochial minister, assisted by the parochial teacher.

*Library.*—A parish library was instituted in 1820. It contains 340 volumes. While the novelty lasted the books were eagerly read by the working-classes, for whose benefit it was intended; but the interest, for some time, has much subsided; and proportionally the subscribers have been reduced.

*Savings Bank.*—One of these has existed since 1818. It is chiefly parochial. The deposits are lodged principally by farm-servants. The following is a state of the funds for the last four years.

January 1835,	.	L. 279	0	10
Do. 1836,	.	282	5	1
Do. 1837,	.	310	6	8
Do. 1838,	.	349	16	2
Do. 1839,	.	309	3	10

There was a benefit society; but, as it was established on faulty principles, the box was broken, and the society dissolved a few years ago, in consequence of the payments being inadequate to meet the expenditure, and the rapid diminution of the funds. There are still two societies for defraying funeral expenses.

*Poor and Parochial Funds.*—The average number of poor on

the roll is 37. In 1838, there were 39 regular pensioners. The whole sum divided among them was L.84, 14s. None of them receive above 5s. per month, nor less than 3s. per month. In addition to this sum, there were expended in occasional allowances, L.26, 4s. 5d. The funds are made up of collections at the church doors, proclamation dues, &c. The average amount of collections yearly is L. 78; exclusive of sums gathered for special charities or missionary objects. For the last two years, they have exceeded the usual average; amounting in 1837 to L. 80, 3s. 7½d.; and in 1838, to L.84, 13s. 7½d.\* The income arising from other sources is very fluctuating. In 1837, it amounted to L. 31, 6s. 8d.; and in 1838, to L. 42, 8s. 5½d. Hitherto the poor have been supported without an assessment,—at least for many years; and I trust the day is yet distant, when such a mode of providing for their wants must be resorted to, because of the manifold evils which it brings in its train. But much depends on the conduct of the heritors, whether so untoward an event is hastened or retarded, if not altogether averted. Here, as elsewhere, there is a growing disposition to claim parochial aid; and, in consequence of the collieries being wrought so extensively for the last fifteen years, it is not unlikely that the number needing aid will be ere long increased. Then the chief resources at present to supply the necessities of the poor arise from the collections at the church door. But if the church accommodation remains stationary, while the population is augmented, if the means are not afforded for their attendance on public worship, for their being trained up in moral and religious habits, it is more than probable, that, among the baneful effects thereby occasioned, will be an increase of pauperism so great as to render necessary a compulsory mode of relief.

*Inns.*—Of these, there are three in Bennetstown, and one at Polmont kirk. The number of taverns or public-houses in the parish is large, and some of them might be spared, without injury to the comfort, and with advantage to the morals of the people.

*Fuel.*—It consists almost entirely of coal. Recently the ton cost from 6s. to 7s. 6d. at the hill. At present the price per ton is 5s. 10d. But even this sum is considerably larger than the price for the same quantity a few years back.

\* It ought to be stated, that, at present, there are two pauper lunatics for whose maintenance provision is made by an assessment on the heritors, and the amount of which is kept entirely distinct from the administration of the funds appropriated to the support of the ordinary poor.

March 1839. Revised April 1841.