

ABBOTSHALL PARISH

MANUFACTURES.-The staple manufacture of this place is that of bed ticks; to which, of late years, has been added a species of coarse half-white linen called Dowlas, both for home and export trade. Linen cheeks for foreign consumpt have fallen into decay, from the greater cheapness of a similar fabric now made from cotton in other places. There is one manufactory for sail-canvas; one bleachfield for whitening and preparing linen yarns, a branch of trade that has of late years entirely superseded the use of hand-wheels, which were formerly so common in this and all other districts of Fifeshire, and which gave employment both to the older and younger members of families. The introduction of machinery into this branch of manufacture has not only materially increased the quantity, but has considerably diminished the expence of labour, it being produced at about two-thirds less than when spun by the hand labour. There is one factory, worked by a steam engine, for weaving a thin sheeting from linen yarn. It is considered to be well conducted, and is ,the only one of the kind in the county. The low rate of weaving by the hand is probably the cause why this branch of enterprise has not been more generally adopted. A brick and tyle-work of considerable extent has been very long. established in this parish. At the same place, a pottery for making brown earthen-ware is carried on. A coal gas-work, for the purpose of supplying the town of Kirkaldy, Linktown of Abbotshall, &c. with gas, was erected in this parish, about two years ago. The quality of gas is considered good, and the quantity used throughout the year may average 5000 feet each night. The work is capable of affording a much greater supply; but as yet.gas has not been introduced as a general light for dwelling houses, being principally used for the lighting up of streets, public works, and shops. There are a variety of mills which go by water,and are employed for making flour, barleymeal,&c. At one of these, not less than from 1 0, 000 to 15,000 bolles annually are made. There is also one mill which goes by water for grinding flint, and belongs to the same gentleman that has the pottery. Brewing was formerly carried on to some extent, but now there are only two breweries in the parish, which manufacture nothing stronger than small beer. This is certainly to be regretted, as good malt liquor is a more wholesome beverage than whisky, which is now so common, and the cause of so much wretchedness and crime. The high price of wheaten bread gave rise, a number of years, ago to the establishment of two Societies, by which the inhabitants might be supplied with that important article of life at a cheaper rate than by the regular bakers. In so far as the cheapness of the bread is concerned, these societies have answered the purpose intended; but if it be the case, as some allege, that they have been the means of depreciating the quality of bread throughout the community (the regular trader being unable to compete on equal terms with a joint stock company)

it is not so evident how far they ought to be encouraged, or whether in one way they have not done as much harm as they have done good in another. There is also a meal Society on a similar plan, which is of advantage to the public, by affording a ready supply of meal at all times, and generally at a reasonable price.

In the conducting of the different public works in this parish, there is nothing particular claiming to be noticed. The usual hours of labour at all of them are ten, excepting the spinning-mills, where twelve hours are common. All the people employed at the different works receive a. fair remuneration for their labour, and, if careful, live comfortably, and, frequently rear large

families. The wages of certain operatives, however, have of late years been much reduced. An ordinary weaver, for instance, on the best paid fabrics, will not receive above an average of 8s. per week for his own labour. None of the public works here are considered prejudicial to the health of those employed in them; the linen manufacture in all its branches being more wholesome than that of cotton, from the absence of artificial heat or damp. Although it cannot be denied that the congregating together of so many young people of both sexes at spinning-mills and other public works, naturally tends to a corruption and depravity of morals, yet it can hardly be said that the morals of those so employed are worse than the morals of the aggregate number of others in the same grade of society in the parish. This may be owing to the steady principle of the gentlemen to whom the works belong, and the good discipline introduced by them into all the different departments of the business. The increase of commerce and manufactures in this parish and neighbourhood gave rise, in the Year 1825, to a Society known by the name of the Kirkaldy Chamber of Commerce, the intention of which was to unite the influence of the merchants and manufactures, and thus render them more useful to the communities to which they belonged. It is managed by a committee of directors; and some of the leading members belong to this place.

VILLAGES.-The principal town or village in the parish is what is called the Linktown, which is situated on the west side of the bay of Kirkaldy, from which it is only separated by the intervening beach. The Linktown has only one street, which is about three quarters of a mile long, and forms a continuation on the west to the principal street of the town of Kirkaldy. It is a burgh of regality, and governed by a baron-bailie, appointed by Mr Ferguson of Raith, who is superior of the whole.

The street and the lanes of Linktown are narrow, and the original houses are mostly low and uncomfortable. Many of the houses, however, have been rebuilt, and many new ones erected; all of them, in point of convenience and accommodation, far exceeding the old ones. Some of the principal manufacturers in the parish reside in Linktown, and, according to their success in business, it must prosper or decline. About the centre of the town, and at a proper distance from the street, stands the mansion-house of John Pratt, Esq. of Glentarkie, surrounded with its fine garden and shrubberies, and which is at once a credit and an ornament to the place. There are a few very good shops in this part of the parish, and more of an inferior description, which supply the inhabitants with the necessaries and conveniences of life. Two annual fairs of old standing are still held here, one on the third Friday of April, and the other on the third Friday of October. The spring fair was formerly principally kept up by the sale of lintseed; and the autumn fair, by the sale of black-cattle. Both fairs are now on the decline, and the principal commodity at each of them is shoes, which are frequently brought from a considerable distance, and sold at very low prices. In the Linktown, there is a jail or rather lock-up-house, to which the baron bailie has the power of consigning offenders. It is in bad repair and little used.

The flourishing condition of trade and consequent increase of inhabitants induced the late Mr Ferguson of Raith, about the year 1790, to feu property for building on a regular plan a street running nearly at right angles with the east end of Linktown, in the direction of the parish church. This line of building, which has never been completed, is known by the name of the New Town, and contains about 780 inhabitants, of whom, with the exception of a few respectable families, almost all are operative weavers. Here are situated the spinning mills of Mr James Aytoun, a gentleman of much enterprise and usefulness in the place. At Mr Aytoun's mills, not

less than 120 individuals are constantly and regularly employed. There are, besides the Linktown and New Town, several villages in the country district of the parish, of minor note, containing in all about 197 souls.

INNS.-The number of licensed alehouses in the parish is nearly 30, a number by far too large, and which certainly ought to be reduced. Restraint, too, ought to be put upon them as to the hours during which they ought to be kept open. The justices have power to do both. The steady exertion of these powers is what is wanting.

April 1836 (Rev. John Murray)