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Our New Neighbours.

Turriff And Towie-Barclay
By an Incomer
(First published in Gateway Journal in 1916)

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Some friends of ours went to Turriff and got badly beaten on the bowling-green. But that did not spoil their appreciation of the town. 'I would like to live yonder,' said a bowler who seemed to speak for all the others. He may have had many desirable features in view. There is first the fine surrounding country. Even Samuel Johnson, scornful as he was regarding the treelessness of the east of Scotland in his day, would have to admit that there was plenty of fine timber in the neighbourhood of Turriff. He would meet, any day, a traction-engine dragging several trunk-laden trucks of the red, odiferous pine.

Rolling ridges of fat corn-land are watered by streams large and small, the chief of which is the Deveron, that flows northward to the Moray Firth. He would see every detached house with trees about it, big or little. Farm-homes of red stone snuggle cosily on the hillsides. The railway touches Turriff in a hollow; but such are the undulations of the ground that many parts of the neighbourhood are still lower than the railway line. The town itself is built on the face of a hill, a black wood standing behind the white chalet-like houses that are now rising one by one along the ridge in the middle distance. Everywhere are the trimmest of trim gardens and velvet lawns. Creepers of vitis, wisteria, clematis, or rambler rose wander over the house-fronts, with sometimes and admixture of pear (and occasionally cherry) bearing fruit as I write, though the pears have not reached the ripe or taken the russet hue that they will show a month hence. All doors stand open; and noting the signs of care and comfort, you wonder how it is done, for there do not seem to be any large businesses about. When you come to pay Turriff prices, and learn about Turriff wages, you well understand some of the mystery.

The condition of the People.

One summer night a painter was working about my place after hours, not because of any importunate demand of mine, but because his employer was busy.

'I hope you will be paid time and half for this,' I said.

'the De'il a fear o' me!' said he, with the brusque candour of this part.

'Sixpence an oor for day time and overtaime baith!'

'And how long is the working week?'

'Fifty fowre oors,' he answered.

'How long is the apprenticeship?'

'Six years.'

'It's hardly labourer's wages. And you'll have short time in the winter. But it's your own fault. There's nothing to be got without combination. At present prices, twenty-seven shillings a week is equal to about eighty shillings in normal times. In Aberdeen the rate will be eightpence or ninepence an hour, with extra for overtime. And everything except house rent is cheaper in the city... Yet I suppose the Aberdeen employer sometimes takes country work from the local people.'

'Ay,' said my man briskly. 'I never could understand what wye they did it; but they dee dee't.'

It was not difficult to understand; but it was no affair of mine, and I let him resume his whistling. One can't withhold a certain sympathy for the bottom dog, even when, with a family of eight, he whistles upon sixpence an hour in war-time. It is only common decency to wish to see the people around us well-fed, and well-schooled; and even with gardens, twenty-seven shillings a week, with the sovereign worth less than fourteen shillings, does not exactly represent a standard of comfort for an imperial race.

But Turriff poverty hides itself decently in 'lanes.' The town has no slums, no unlet houses, none of the more obvious signs of private vice and civic decay.

A Red Town.

Turriff is different from other Buchan towns in respect that it is built not out of the drab granite which makes Peterhead especially look cold, but of warm red sandstone from the quarry of Ardinn. It suggests the yellow brown brick of English towns; and doubtless will be not less durable.

There are a few sawmills about, and the roughish timber that goes into farmers' out-houses will be comparatively cheap in the neighbourhood. The result is that where elsewhere they build of brick and roof with slate, in Turriff they use wood and corrugated iron, both painted a red-brown. One wonders what they did here before corrugated iron was made.

A 'Smart' Town.

In a guidebook Turriff is amusingly described as 'a smart town. ' What this means would take some defining.

Turriff is 'smart' in the sense that its business men are keen. It is also 'smart' if you please, in the sense that it is musical, has a choral society, and that if a bazaar falls to be held, palmists attend and rope in fees from the 'castles in the air' in the most approved metropolitan style. But from anything I have ever noticed of Turriff men, they take as long to clinch a bargain as other people. There is no undue smartness in their general social, civic and commercial attitude.

In some respects, indeed, Turriff is delightfully old-fashioned. In its High Street the houses are dumped down on the principle of a lightning zigzag or dogs-tooth outline, which the pavement closely follows. The important shops have practically no shop windows. The enormous open shop front of indecent exposure leads to no end of spoiled goods, and must give the shopkeeper somewhat of the feeling of a fish in an aquarium tank. The chary Turriff shopkeeper adheres to the old-fashioned, modest window, scarcely, if at all, bigger than the windows of his house, which is overhead and next door.

The quiet taste is shown also in the manner of signboards. The correct sign is of raised gilt letters, by no means obtrusive in size, and well spread on the house front.

Some shops have no sign at all, but a modest gilt-lettered inscription on a fanlight over the door. In these days of splash with paint and print, I like the quiet style of it. If folk are blind they will see you name as readily in decent print as if you filled the landscape. To the blind it matters not how big your letter may be.

All the Frivolities.
Turriff is a business place, but it is also a place where pleasure is not neglected. *The* Club brings the potent, grave and reverend seigniors together; and seigniors who escape the net of *the* Club are gathered in the bowling-club, or a curling club, or a Debating Society, or one or other of the associations not exactly innumerable, but at the same time not readily to be enumerated.

Ancient History.
The earliest mention of Turriff is in the Book of Deir, where, in 1132 it appears as Turbrand, the seat of a Celtic monastery of which Cormac was abbot. Dermongart [excellent name!] was the 'ferlughin' [wielder of the ferule that is}, scribe or teacher of its school. Marjory, that oft quoted daughter of the last Celtic Mormaer of Buchan, who married William Congan. In 1210, and became Countess of Buchan gave the church fee, with its income, four years later, to the monastery of Arbroath. By this time the Celtic monastery had probably ceased to exist. A son of the Congan's founded an Almshouse at Turreth (what spellers they were in those days) in 1273 for the accommodation of 'a master, six chaplains, and thirteen poor husbandmen of Buchan.' The husbandmen of the thirteenth century must have been a tough lot if it required seven ghostly counsellors to keep thirteen of them going with religion; but probably there was plenty of outside work for them that was not contracted for! 'Some houses,' says Dr Pratt, 'called Abbey Land or House of the Refuge' (Majestie Dieu) mark the site of the Almshouse founded by the Earl of Buchan. 'The Monks Gate' (says Mr Moir) is still known by that name.'

A picturesque ruin is all that remains of the later church, which was built by Alexander Lyon, Chanter of Moray (son of the 4th Lord Glamis) who died in 1541 and 'lyeth buried in the quier of Turreffe' where a memorial now mostly hidden from view, exhibits his initials 'A.L.' and the family name.

Towie-Barclay.
Turriff has plenty of ancient history connected with it, albeit that history was chiefly made about the time of the 'Trubles.' Again and again in the early part of his narrative Clerk Spalding has occasion to mention it.

For one thing, the first blows of the Covenanting struggle were struck here. One of those blows would appear to have been fatal, and it was dealt from the roof of Towie- Barclay Castle, which stands to-day as peacefully among sylvan surroundings and affords an excellent view of the whole countryside.

The pleasant old tower was anciently the residence of the Tolly-Barclays, a family which provided Russia with a general to baffle and harass Napoleon in the Moscow expedition of 1812. The old house is in a very excellent state of preservation and shows what might have been done with other Buchan castles, given proprietors of means and taste. The wings and outbuildings, long since disappeared, and the old roof, with the topmost story, has also gone. But the tower containing the groined banquestting hall, with other interesting stonework, is still intact and in use, and, under the auspices of the Governors of Gordon's College, to whom the castle belongs, a scheme of improvements is being carried out with the view of increasing the attractiveness, interest, and utility of the old fortalice. In the dining-hall religious

services are held, and other apartments are used as offices and storeplaces. A stone stair gives egress to the flat, asphalted roof, where embrasures innocent of cannon preserve the castellated appearance of the old tower.

An early Barclay took 500 followers from Turriff to the Crusades. Only ten returned. The incident is thus referred to in the Rev Andrew Chalmers' beautiful and too-little known poem 'A Red Cross Romance'

Then Ythan heard the call for aid,
This Knight its sons to duty waking,
And he, of Barclay's house the head,
His castled home forsaking,
Upraised on Turriff's Temple brae,
The crimson sign of Calvary's anguish,
And marshalled there a brave array,
The Soldan's pride to vanquish.'
A spirited description of the battle with the Saracen host concludes:
Then fought the valiant knight alone,
With mighty arm his broadsword sweeping,
As if Jerusalem's tottering throne
He singly held in keeping.
But pierced by spears in breast and brain,
Uz harpen ducmo loudly calling,*
With banner staff that brake in twain
He slew a foe in falling.
'Well done,' the Paynim Sultan cried,
'No hand shall harm nor tongue deride.
His grave shall be on Tabor's side,
That banner staff beside him.'
With water from Tiberius Lake
His dust-stained, wounded forehead bathing,
In softest abroad, like snowy flake,
His stately form enswathing.
On levelled spears to Tabor's brow,
A band of turbaned warriors bore him,
Where softer seven long centuries now
Each rising dawn shines o'er him

**[but a stranger in the earth]*

The First Shot.

It was from the roof of Towie-Barclay that the first shot of the Covenanting struggle was fired. On the 8th of May some of the King's followers appeared in Buchan to beat up against the Covenant. Before coming by way of Turriff they paid a visit to Ellon and tried to get the Laird of Kermuck to abandon the Covenanting cause. The laird was found 'in his own house of Arduthie,' and with him were 'the lairds of Watertown and Auchmacoy, with about eighteen persons.' Kennedy 'returned answer he could not perjure himself and leave his covenant. However, says Spalding, 'they did no more wrong to him, and some went in and drank friendly in his house.' On the 10th this same company, to the number of eighty horse and sixty foot, came to the place of Towie-Barclay, with the intention of removing from it 'such arms, muskets, guns, and carabines as the lairds of Delgatie and Towie-Barclay had plundered from the said

young laird of Cromartie out of the place of Baolquholly; but it happened the Lord Fraser and Master of Forbes to see their coming, so they manned the house of Towie, closed the yeatts, and shot diverse shot frae the house head where [by] a servant of the Laird of Gight's was shot, called David Prott. The braons, seeing they could not mend themselves [query, did they try to mend Davy?] left the house, thinking it no vassalage to stay while [until] they were slain, syne without more ado rode their way. 'But here,' says Spalding, 'it is to be marked that this was the first time that blood was drawn since the beginning of the Covenant.

The Raid of Turriff.
The foregoing episode arose out of a Royalist visit. But the Covenanting lords had paid Turriff itself a visit several months previously. There was Trot of Turriff and there was a Raid of Turriff. The Raid was first. It took place on the 14th of February 1639, and the Raider was the Earl of Montrose, a stalwart for the Covenant. According to Spalding, 'The Earl of Marischall was not there himself, but his men, tenants, and servants of Buchan and Mar was there; and likewise the young Earl of Errol, his men about the number of eight hundred well horsed, well armed gentlemen and on foot together, with buff coats, swords, corslets, jackits, pistols, carbines, hagbutts and other wapins.' These wapings were snugly and handily planted round the inside of the churchyard walls; and matters being thus comfortably arranged, the heads of the Raid sat down as a committee, acting under the Table of Central Committee of the Covenant, 'for stenting the country and numbering the men.' And now came what might have led to serious trouble.

An Armed Reconnaissance.
The Marquis of Huntly had been about this time at the burial of his aunt, the Lady Foveran, and hearing of the sederunt of the committee of Turriff, 'some evil-disposed person informed him that he durst not be there that day.' Incensed at this challenge, Huntly mustered his followers to the number of 'about two thousand brave, well horsed gentlemen and footmen, albeit wanting arms, except sword and shot.' The marquis advanced upon Turriff on the north-west side, his force in battle array; and, the companies looking to one another, without any kind of offence or injurious words.' Having made his demonstration and tacitly invited the Covenanters to tred on the tail of his coat, Huntly disbanded his force, and went himself to Forglen. Thus the Raid: now for

The Trott.
The meeting committee had adjourned after the Raid, to meet again at Turriff on the 10th of the month. With this gathering in view, the Covenant party began to assemble by the 13th. Among them were, again, the retainers of Earl Marischal and the Earl of Errol. By this time the Royalist lairds had determined to do more than make a reconnaissance. Some eight hundred of them assembled, and taking out of Strathbogie, the Marquis of Huntly's place 'four brazen field pieces,' they advanced rapidly and quietly upon Turriff, resolved to strike at the Covenanters before these had assembled in full force. By peep of the day on the 14th they had come to the town of Turriff and presently the trumpets gave tongue and the drums began to beat. Says Spalding, 'The Covenanters, whereof some were sleeping, others drinking and smoking tobacco, others walking up and down, hearing the noise of drums and trumpets, ran to their arms and confusedly to array; and by this time the Covenanters and Anti-Covenanters are in sight of one another in order of battle. There were two shots shot out of the Earl of Errol's house against the barons, which

they quickly answered with two field-pieces, then the Covenanters began on hot service, and the barons also and many musket shot; then the barons shot a field-piece among them, which did no skaith, but frightened the commons; at last another field-piece was discharged, which made them all take flight for fear, they followed the chce.'

There is a slight ambiguity here as to who fired, and which 'they' ran and which followed. We know from other sources that the sprinters were the Covenanters.

Spalding continues: 'The Lord Fraser was said to have foul foldings.' (Is this seventeeth century for 'hard lines'? Or does it mean that my lord, like Tam o Shanter, 'skelpit me through dub and mire? Or what does it mean? In any case, Lord Fraser 'wan away.'

The Trott was not entirely a harmless affair, nor did all the Covenanting lords have the luck of Lord Fraser, despite his 'foul foldings.' A number of the lords, among them Echt and Skene, were taken prisoners, and some were hurt and some slain.

A Person in Trouble.

The minister of Turriff at this time was the Rev. Thomas Mitchell. He had not managed to clear the town, and Spalding relates how the Royalist commanders on their return to Turriff from chasing the Covenanters, 'fleyed' Mr Thomas Mitchell. It appears that the Rev Thomas was creeping above the sylling of the churche, with his sonne disguised in a womans habite, whilst the souldiers were discharging volleys of shotte within the churche, and piercing the syling with their bullets in several places.'

It is not clear whether it was the parson or his sonnne who was in 'a woman's habite' – would this mean petticoats? – but it seems tolerably clear that the 'souldiers' knew there was game on the upper side of the 'sylling' and that the 'fleying' was done on purpose.

The streets of Turriff are quiet enough today - except it be Porter Fair – but they must have been fairly lively with 'three or four shotte' from 'feeld pieces' and 'a salvo of their muskets' flying 'alonge the streets.'

The Covenanting debacle is the less creditable when we learn that they had such commanders as Sir William Keith of Ludwharne, and Sir William Hay of Delgatye, the latter have been 'bredde at the warre.'

Milder Manners.

The citizen 'souldiers' of today 'let flee' their 'salvoes' at the Knockiemill range; Lord Erroll's Lodging no longer give forth artillery fire; the church of St Congan's has neither 'sylling' nor even roof to protect a minister today, and although Turriff has a Castle Street, a Castle Hill and a Castlegreen, it has not now, and apparently never had, an actual Castle. It is a prosaic, prosperous town of shops and banks, of churches and good inns, and a population of over two thousand souls. It has a severely plain market cross, erected near the site of the ancient *Crucem de Turriff*, is lighted with gas at 6s 10d per 1000 cubic feet; and law-abiding township as it is, is policed by a sergeant and a constable upon whose hands time is reported to hang heavily; though there *have* been occasions when a certain notorious white cow provided them with more work than they could do.

In Buchan but not of it.

Turriff is in Buchan, but is hardly of it. It is near the border – so near being outside the charmed circle between the Deveron and the Ythan that it runs a narrow squeak of being outside it altogether.

Considering its small size, it is a wonderful centre. As one thinks of its commercial steadiness, the absence of any element of gambling from its trade, and the way in which it feeds and is fed by miles of prosperous country on every side, from which a network of roads converge upon it, of the town itself we may emphatically say, as is said in an inscription on a lintel in one of the wynds running off the High Street:

For Others Thou Was and for Others Thoul Be.