

(12) *Wm. Blackie*

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THE
DEPOPULATION SYSTEM

IN
THE HIGHLANDS:

ITS EXTENT, CAUSES, AND EVIL CONSEQUENCES,
WITH PRACTICAL REMEDIES.

BY
AN EYE-WITNESS.

"Woe unto them that . . . lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed
alone in the midst of the earth!"—ISAIAH v. 8.

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PREFACE.

THE following remarks appeared originally in the pages of the *Witness* Newspaper, and as the Author is wishful that the subject of Highland Ejections should be kept before the public eye, he has been induced to issue them in the present shape. He has not given his name, not from any reluctance to authenticate his sentiments, but because he believes that giving or withholding it is a matter of moment to no one but himself.

EDINBURGH, *September* 26, 1849.

DEPOPULATION OF THE HIGHLANDS.

THE state of our Highland population, and more especially the system at present pursued by their landlords regarding them, cannot fail sooner or later to arrest public attention. The wonder is, that so much time has been allowed to elapse without a more distinct utterance of the voice of the country on the subject. The interesting events taking place on the Continent of Europe have no doubt contributed to this apparent indifference. Men's minds have been engrossed by them. The greatness of the scale on which they have been exhibited has served to exclude occurrences of apparently less moment. And we do not wonder that the souls of freemen should be moved to their profoundest depths by the struggles of their fellow-men, who would be free against a hateful despotism. The oppression of a great nation is a sad and grievous spectacle. But there is a sadder spectacle to be witnessed nearer home—a spectacle which a man need not leave the territory of Britain to see—we mean the gradual extinction of a high-spirited, loyal, and Christian people. And if we have sympathy for the oppressed Hungarian—and who that is worthy to be called a freeman has not?—surely we are not to close our hearts against all sympathy with the oppressed, the ejected Highlander.

At a period beyond even the reach of tradition these islands were flooded with the great wave of Celtic population, propelled westward from the middle portion of the Asiatic continent. Whether the Celts had won the territory by the sword from previous races, or recovered it by their industry from the primeval forests, we know not; but this we know, that, after being overtaken and overwhelmed in a great measure by a second wave of population, propelled from the same quarter with themselves, they have been hemmed in for centuries to the more rugged and inaccessible portions of Great Britain, where they have held their possessions by

the sword against all outward foes. But new circumstances have arisen. The battle of Culloden produced an entire change in the position of, at any rate, the Scottish Gael. They have been brought into intimate connection with British law and British civilisation, and the result is likely to be their complete extinction. And the ruin is the more melancholy when we reflect who the instruments of it are. The people who resisted the inroads of Romans, Danes, and Saxons, and bravely maintained their territory to the last, are now about to fall by the hands of their own chiefs. The men who are now in possession of their lands by means of the bravery of their ancestors—who shed, many of them, their last drop of blood in their defence—are the very men who now turn upon them as the instruments of their extirpation.

A complete history of Highland clearings would, we doubt not, both interest and surprise the British public. Men talk of the Sutherland clearings as if they stood alone amidst the atrocities of the system; but those who know fully the facts of the case can speak with as much truth of the Ross-shire clearings, the Inverness-shire clearings, the Perthshire clearings, and, to some extent, the Argyleshire clearings. The earliest of these was the great clearing on the Glengarry estate, towards, we believe, the latter end of the last century. The tradition among the Highlanders is (and some Gaelic poems composed at the time would go to confirm it), that the chief's lady had taken umbrage at the clan. Whatever the cause might have been, the offence was deep, and could only be expiated by the extirpation of the race. Summonses of ejection were served over the whole property, even on families the most closely connected with the chief; and if we now seek for the Highlanders of Glengarry, we must search on the banks of the St Lawrence. To the westward of Glengarry lies the estate of Lochiel—a name to which the imperishable poetry of Campbell has attached much interest. It is the country of the brave clan Cameron, to whom, were there nothing to speak of but their conduct at Waterloo, Britain owes a debt. Many of our readers have passed along Loch Lochy, and they have likely had the mansion of Auchnacarry pointed out to them, and they have been told of the dark mile, surpassing, as some say, the Trosachs in romantic beauty; but perhaps they were not aware that beyond lies the wide expanse of Loch Arkeg, whose banks have been the scene of a most extensive clearing. There was a day when three hundred able, active men could have been collected from the shores of this extensive inland loch; but eviction has long ago rooted them out, and nothing is now to

be seen but the ruins of their huts, with the occasional hothy of a shepherd, while their lands are held by one or two farmers from the borders. Crossing to the south of the great glen, we may begin with Glencoe. How much of its romantic interest does this glen owe to its desolation? Let us remember, however, that the desolation, in a large part of it, is the result of the extrusion of the inhabitants. Travel eastward, and the foot-prints of the destroyer cannot be lost sight of. Large tracks along the Spean and its tributaries are a wide waste. The southern bank of Loch Lochy is almost without inhabitants, though the symptoms of former occupancy are frequent. When we enter the country of the Frasers, the same spectacle presents itself—a desolated land. With the exception of the miserable village of Fort-Augustus, the native population is almost extinguished, while those who do remain are left as if, by their squalid misery, to make darkness the more visible. Across the hills, in Stratherrick, the property of Lord Lovat, with the exception of a few large sheep farmers, and a very few tenants, is one wide waste. To the north of Loch Ness, the territory of the Grants, both Glenmorison and the Earl of Seafield, presents a pleasing feature amidst the sea of desolation. But beyond this, again, let us trace the large rivers of the east coast to their sources. Trace the Beaully through all its upper reaches, and how many thousands upon thousands of acres, once peopled, are, as respects human beings, a wide wilderness! The lands of the Chisholm have been stripped of their population down to a mere fragment: the possessors of those of Lovat have not been behind with their share of the same sad doings. Let us cross to the Conon and its branches, and we will find that the chieftains of the M'Kenzies have not been less active in extermination. Breadalbane and Rannoch, in Perthshire, have a similar tale to tell, vast masses of the population having been forcibly expelled. The upper portions of Athole have also suffered, while many of the valleys along the Spey and its tributaries are without an inhabitant, if we except a few shepherds. Sutherland, with all its atrocities, affords but a fraction of the atrocities that have been perpetrated in following out the ejectment system of the Highlands. In truth, of the habitable portion of the whole country, but a small part is now really inhabited. We are unwilling to weary our readers by carrying them along the west coast from the Linnhe Loch northwards; but if they inquire, they will find that the same system has been, in the case of most of the estates, relentlessly pursued. These are facts of which, we believe, the British public know little, but they are facts on which the changes should

be rung until they have listened to them and seriously considered them. May it not be that part of the guilt is theirs, who might, yet did not, step forward to stop such cruel and unwise proceedings?

Let us leave the past, however, and consider the present. And it is a melancholy reflection that the year 1849 has added its long list to the roll of Highland ejectments. While the law is banishing its tens for terms of seven or fourteen years, as the penalty of deep-dyed crimes, irresponsible and infatuated power is banishing its thousands for life for no crime whatever. This year brings forward, as leader in the work of expatriation, the Duke of Argyll. Is it possible that his vast possessions are over-densely peopled? "*Credat Judæus appelles.*" And the Highland Destitution Committee co-operate. We had understood that the large sums of money at their disposal had been given them for the purpose of relieving, and not of banishing, the destitute. Next, we have Mr Baillie of Glenelg, professedly at their own request sending five hundred souls off to America. Their native glen must have been made not a little uncomfortable for these poor people, ere they could have petitioned for so sore a favour. Then we have Colonel Gordon expelling upwards of eighteen hundred souls from South Uist; Lord M'Donald follows with a sentence of banishment against six or seven hundred of the people of North Uist, with a threat, as we learn, that three thousand are to be driven from Skye next season; and Mr Lillingston of Lochalsh, M'Lean of Ardgour, and Lochiel, bring up the rear of the black catalogue, a large body of people having left the estates of the two latter, who, after a heart-rending scene of parting with their native land, are now on the wide sea on their way to Australia. Thus, within the last three or four months, considerably upwards of three thousand of the most moral and loyal of our people—people who, even in the most trying circumstances, never required a soldier, seldom a policeman, among them, to maintain the peace—are driven forcibly away to seek subsistence on a foreign soil. We ask, Ought these things to be so? The parties instrumental in causing the ejections are, no doubt, prepared with certain reasons which they are ready to offer for their conduct, and some of these we shall now consider.

The question then is—Can any thing be said in defence of the expatriation of the Highlanders?—and without doubt the system has had stout defenders both in the Highlands and elsewhere; and reasons for it are tendered which have considerable apparent force. And here let us premise, in coming to this part of our subject, that we write with no feeling of hostility to our Highland proprietors.

We believe that many of them have acted in ignorance: they are strangers to the people, and they have been made the dupes of other interested parties. We do not say that this is excusable, but we believe it to be the fact.

The first great reason that is urged in favour of the ejection system is, that the land is over-peopled. As to this statement, as applied more especially to the Hebrides, granting it, for the sake of the argument, to be true, we ask, With whom does the blame of this over-peopling lie? Who encouraged the crowding of the people upon their estates for many long years? Unquestionably the landlords. Who obtained an act of Parliament to restrain, as far as possible, emigration, lest the people should be drained away from their properties? Undoubtedly the landlords. It was their interest, while the kelp manufacture was in a prosperous state, to have as many people as could be got to reside on their estates, seeing that, at the time, their kelp shores were of four times the value of the rest of the land. But is it fair now, that, if they have had their share, ay, and the lion's share, of the benefits, they should not also share in the subsequent disadvantages? But we demur to the fact of this over-peopling. The population of North Uist in 1755 was 1909, in 1794, 3218, and in 1831, 4603. Now, we at once say that this ratio of increase is by no means equal to the general ratio over Great Britain during the same period, with all the means that were used to foster it. It will probably be said that a proportional advance was made elsewhere in regard to the means of subsistence, which was not the case with North Uist. But why was it not? Just because the labour of the people was monopolised by the landlord in the manufacture of one single article (kelp) for his benefit, while the land was necessarily neglected. But let us take the land and the population as they are. By the statistical account of North Uist, and *ex uno disce omnes*, the island consists of 55,000 acres, with a population of 4603, or about an individual to every twelve acres of the soil, or sixty acres to each family—surely no excessive population. But to carry our calculations further:—Of the 55,000 acres, 11,200 are arable, or capable of bearing crops. Let us suppose that of this two-fifths are under grain, which is less than the quantity which the agriculture of the Hebrides would warrant us to assume. It is well known that North Uist is the most fertile of all the western isles; and it is not taking too high a figure when we say that each of these acres should yield four quarters of grain, or, say four bolls of meal. There would thus be produced by the island somewhat about seventeen thousand bolls of grain or meal. Of the

grain thus raised, deduct one-third for seed corn, &c., and we have ten thousand seven hundred bolls left. It is well known that six bolls a-year is the allowance given for the support of a farm servant and his family, exclusive of potatoes; but let us allow ten to each family, and taking the number of families as one-fifth of the population, or nine hundred and twenty, and we have thus the soil, even as at present, capable of producing two thousand five hundred bolls of meal more than is necessary for the support of the population, and that exclusive of the produce of the other three-fifths of the arable land, and upwards of forty thousand acres of pasture, from which, no doubt, the rent could with little difficulty be extracted for the landlord. But could the island not be made more productive than it is? Much *has* been done in the way of improvement. Since the year 1814, when the land was lotted, we learn from the Statistical Account that much larger and better crops have been produced in consequence. And as to what is doing, and might be done, let us judge by the following quotation from the same authority. We read that "the most productive part [of the soil] is nothing more than moss mixed with, and decomposed by, the limy particles of the sand. The process nature thus pointed out was remarked by some individuals of sagacity and observation, who persuaded a few to follow this guide. In consequence, along some of the shores where the moss was washed by the sea, a certain quantity of sand was led to the moss in the immediate neighbourhood, which produced crops in most instances sufficient to remunerate the trouble and expense, and which renders what was before of small value of permanent benefit as pasture ground. This improvement, by due encouragement, might be carried on to an immense extent by what we call draining and sanding moss. It is exceedingly facilitated by the cross roads which almost through every farm have of late years been made." The idea of the over-population of the Highlands and Islands is a gross delusion. The fact is, that many parts of the Highlands are not peopled at all; and we doubt not, from close observation, that ten times the present population could be maintained by the soil under a proper system. Why not as well assail the heaths of Scotland as the forests of Canada? The reply is, that there is at present an impassable barrier between them and the people.

Another reason urged by the landlords and their abettors for the ejection system, is the alleged indolence of the people. It is an old saying, "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him." Nothing is easier than to make such a charge as this; but even granting that

the charge is true, as they mean it, we must remember that it may be entirely a relative one. The people may be slothful and inactive as agriculturists, but that does not prove that they are inactive universally. It merely proves that agriculture is not the direction their activity takes. In the kelp manufacture, we are told of the Uist people, that they often work fifteen hours a-day at a most laborious occupation. (*Vide* Stat. Ac.) As fishermen, they spread themselves over the whole east coast during the season: they have had a share in the construction of most of the railways in the country. If such be the case, it is clear that there is inducement wanting to the expending of their labour on their land. And who would blame them for not laying it out on that which belongs to another, without the least security that they are to have any benefit? Would any capitalist in this country invest his capital (and their labour is their capital) in land without either the security of a purchase or a lease? We trow not. Now, we learn from the Statistical Account, that the small tenants in Uist have no leases. May not this be the secret of their indolence? Man must have some stimulus to exertion, and it is in vain to expect it of him unless this stimulus be supplied. We suspect that the want of leases tells as much against the agriculture of England as that of Uist; and perhaps our calling attention to this may obtain a little more sympathy for the poor Uist men. We are able to point out portions of the Highlands in which leases have been given, where the utmost activity was at once shown by the people, and where the produce of the land in consequence has been quadrupled at least. Some instances to the contrary may no doubt be pointed out; but let us bear in mind that there are things which effectually neutralize a lease, and these are, an exorbitant rent, or other unreasonable conditions. The certain way to ensure no exertion is to demand what is beyond human strength, and an exorbitant rent has in this way the same effect as the want of security of tenure. The Celtic population are, in fact, like other men who work when it is their advantage to do so, and who won't when it is not. Let us take two of the larger Highland estates for instance, and compare them with those we have been speaking of. We have on the west coast Lewis, where the people have been all along kindly treated, first under the family of Seaforth, and latterly under their present proprietor Mr Matheson. What a pleasing contrast does it present, in the condition of the people, to the rest of the Hebrides? And in the Eastern Highlands, the extensive estates of the Earl of Seafield, which have ever been managed with the most considerate regard to the wellbeing of the people—how pleasing a contrast do

they present, with their industrious and thriving population, to many properties in the same portion of the country, which are almost without inhabitants! And we believe such to be the case without the slightest comparative loss to the proprietors as respects a rental.

The next plea which we notice as urged in favour of the ejection system is that of benevolence. Ejecting landlords and their friends urge that they are conferring a favour on these people by sending them to the colonies. As the great body of them are sent to America, let us consider this plea in connection with the colonies there. It is urged of late years that the potato crop has failed in the Highlands, and that the colonies are now the only field for the people. We answer that by saying that the potato crop has failed in the colonies to an equal extent. The fact is, the potato crop has failed every where; and what is to prevent the Highlands, under judicious management, from bearing up under the calamity, as well as any other portion of the globe visited by the same infliction? But we should like to act as guide to some of our benevolent ejectors through our North American colonies. And we would first bring them to the emigrant sheds at Quebec or Montreal, and we could tell them that, during the last great emigration, hundreds, we might say thousands, died in these sheds of a fearful pestilence. There is the result of their benevolence! Or, to show them Highlanders in a more advanced stage of settlement, we would bring them to Cape Breton, or the district around Pictou, in Nova Scotia, and we suspect we could point out an amount of destitution among old settlers not to be outdone by that of the Hebrides. Or, passing up again to Canada, we could bring them among the Lewis Highlanders on the Salmon River, who, after ten years of settlement, have hardly been able to pay the small sum due as the price of their lands; and, lest they should suppose that this state of things merely existed among the *lazy* Highlanders, we could tell them of an English settlement in the same neighbourhood, of several years' standing, where a friend of ours was told within the last year or two, on unquestionable authority, that there were forty families who had not twenty-four hours' food in their houses at the time, nor means of purchasing it, and it then wanted a month of harvest; or we could bring them among the many thousand Highlanders of Glengarry, where, we regret to say, they will see few symptoms of opulence, or even great comfort; and where we suspect that, if debts due for land and to storekeepers were paid, the nominal owners of the farms would, in most cases, have little remaining. Undoubtedly many of the Highlanders of Canada

are comfortable; but we aver, without fear of contradiction, that a less expenditure of labour at home, if permitted, would raise them to a higher point in the scale of social comfort, with the further advantage of spending their days in a climate immeasurably more conducive to health and happiness. We merely advert to the fact, that such is the dread of extensive immigration on the part of the Canadian colonist, that they have laid a heavy tax on each immigrant entering their ports.

We might proceed to consider some other reasons that are alleged for the ejection system; but we desist. Let us now consider what we believe to be the real causes of it.

It no doubt involves no very creditable insinuation, to speak of the real as distinct from the alleged reasons; but that they do exist, any man thoroughly acquainted with the Highlands must know, and that right well. And, as one of these, we advert to the inexplicable craving on the part of some proprietors after large farms. They join house to house, and field to field. They have adopted the idea that these farms are desirable, though in what we believe to be thorough ignorance of what is for their real interest. It may be that they think there is something aristocratic in large fields and extensive steadings. That class of men have a wonderful sense of what redounds to their own glory and honour. They can ride out of a forenoon with their visitors, and point out to them the splendid enclosures, or the extensive sheep-walks, or the well-stocked deer-forest, as they pass along, without once alluding to the amount of human suffering by which the whole was purchased. They want fine fields and fine forests. What care they for men? They want on their estates something worthy of their patrician greatness. What though hundreds or thousands of human beings should be wrenched from their beloved homes, and cast for subsistence on the cold world! Little do they know what they are doing—that each process of ejection is another portion in the fast-filling cup that will one day overflow and overwhelm them. It is no new subject to the public to call their notice to the rapid diminution of the landed proprietors in this kingdom, from 250,000 fifty years ago, to 25,000 now in round numbers. But perhaps it may not have occurred to them, that the proportion of those who farm the soil is equally diminished. Nine-tenths of the rural population of this country have no interest in the cultivation of the soil, except as mere serfs. Nor can they at present look for any improvement in their condition, seeing that the vast masses in which the land is held precludes the gradual uprising of the careful and industrious

labourer. Here is a hot-bed for revolutions. Do we wish to make men Conservatives? Let us give them an interest in the soil. But it is monstrous to expect men to be conservative of a system that crushes them, and precludes the very cherishing of a hope. And such is the system that shuts out the vast mass of the people from any interest in the soil on which they live, unless so much as may be a resting-place for their dust when time with them shall be no more. We are no advocates for planting a family of human beings on mere patches of cold moorland, to toil and starve. We leave that to the enlightened minds and large hearts of northern dukes.* There is a limit to the size of farms on the descending scale; but we would with right good-will wield the axe in bringing to the ground any system that interfered with a fair and beneficial division of the soil among the people, and that not merely in the character of philanthropists, but also of patriots. But now, who are the gainers by this large-farm system? Surely not the proprietors. (And our remarks here have reference to the system as developed in the Highlands.) These farms do not bring them larger rents; in fact, we believe that frequently they are less, while generally they are of the same amount with the united rents of the smaller tenantry. They do not help the improvement of their properties. The home farm on a large sheep-walk may be in an approved state of cultivation, while the rest of the arable land lies waste. But more than this, their estates deteriorate under the system. A sheep-walk will neither maintain the number nor rear the quality of stock, after a period of fifteen or sixteen years. Here, then, is a sacrificing of the whole efforts of human industry ever since the soil was cultivated, and suffering the face of the country to fall back into its original state of savage wildness. The order of the day elsewhere is progress; here it is retrogression. The two neighbouring counties of Sutherland and Caithness afford ample illustration of our position—the former having made no progress as respects the value of the land for the last thirty years under the sheep-farm system, while the latter has increased it by one-half under the agricultural. But the system is not beneficial to the large farmers themselves. They think it is, and will likely sneer at us for the remark. But we would ask them, How many of them have made fortunes by it? If they have made a bare living, is not that all? and how few of them have made that without debt? High rents and the vicissitudes in their markets preclude it. And we suspect there are darker days

* This is done by men who take the title of "The farmer's friend."

awaiting them than any they have seen. There seems to be a thunder-cloud at present over their heads, the hursting of which will, we fear, prove what we say to be too true. And we would tell our large sheep-farmers, besides, that they and their system are but a step in the downward progress of the country, and that they are tracked by another system which pursues them rapidly, and before which they must fall. Of late years deer are found to be more profitable than sheep, and for these must the latter make way. Their extinction is not far off; and much as we rejoice in our beloved Sovereign's visits to our country, we fear they may hasten the consummation of making our Highlands a great deer-forest, by inducing a larger number of our English aristocracy to flock to them for the purposes of sport. We warn our large sheep-farmers that there is a danger here; and we call on them, appealing to their self-interest, if not to their patriotism, to make common cause with us in resisting the evils that afflict, and still threaten the country, on the only basis on which it can be done—the maintenance of popular rights. And have the body of the people benefited? Alas! few of them in many places remain; but of those who do, if being reduced in means, in mind, and in morals, be a benefit, then the benefit is theirs. If being reduced from a state of honest, sturdy independence, to that of miserable fawning serfdom, while beneath there is a smouldering fire of deep-rooted hatred and discontent, be a benefit, then the benefit is largely theirs. But if these things be evils, then they are evils which form no small portion in the lot of the peasantry of our country.

Another real cause of the depopulation of the Highlands is the competition for the lands of the people among the larger farmers, conjoined with the influence which these possess with the landlords and their factors. We are glad to have it in our power to say, that there are honourable exceptions; but as a general rule, the larger farmers of the Highlands—synonymous in some respects with the middle-men of Ireland—are the scourges of the people. These men have access to the proprietor, they frequently meet him, and they are often the guests of the factor. The process is a simple one when an ejection is desired. The people of a certain township are represented as exceedingly troublesome. They trespass, they steal; there is no evil of which they are not capable, if the account of their neighbour be true. Then they are said to be lazy. Donald So-and-so is a worthless, lazy fellow; his land is in a shocking state; and a gentle hint is thrown out, that if the place were in the hands of the speaker, things would be in a different way. The laird is credulous,

indifferent, or likes large farms; the factor thinks it easier to collect the rent from one than from many; besides, his friend is a fine companionable fellow. If the Established minister be present, he is perhaps a large farmer himself, and his sympathies are with the class; or perhaps he has a grudge at the people for their Free Churchism, and he hacks his friend and hearer. So poor Donald, and John, and all the rest, are condemned in absence; and next March brings on them, like a thunder-clap, a summons of removal, and the population of perhaps a country side is swept away. Here, we say, is the secret of many an ejection.

The next real reason for the ejection system to which we advert, is one which has come recently into operation—we mean the dread which proprietors entertain of the working of the New Poor Law. And this is a cause which we suspect is operating more extensively than some parties would like to acknowledge. And it is no wonder that all parties should feel alarmed. The rapid increase of poor-rates is a subject for the serious consideration of the country, and that as much with regard to the future as the present. But what is the position which many of our proprietors hold as respects the poor? They, in the first place, did all they could to force a poor-law on. They were in a great measure the origin of it. By means of the ejection system they reduced large bodies of the people to a state of pauperism; and, by resisting with all their force the claims of the Church to her spiritual freedom, they cut off the only source of supply from which these paupers could be sustained. And now, how do they propose remedying their blunders? By laying hold on those paupers whom they have reduced to that state, and remorselessly expelling them from the land. In place of seeking to retrace their steps, they plunge deeper in their course, and add sin to sin. And they expect the country to look quietly on; nay, they call for the military—who are paid out of the public purse, and, in a measure, by the very people they are ejecting—to aid them in perpetrating the atrocity. They must surely give the public of this country no small credit for good-natured forbearance, when they could venture to hint at such a thing; and this is an amount of credit, we take leave to say, which is far from complimentary to the nation.

We might mention, as another reason for the ejection system, the uncomplaining character of the people, and, in many cases, their inability to make their grievances known, being, as they are, separated from the rest of the community by their difference of language and peculiarity of position. In the former of these cases

they are assailed through their very virtue. They are a people who "fear God and honour the king," and the oppressor does not dread their revenge. In the latter case, advantage is taken of their peculiar position, and consequent want of knowledge of the world and its ways; and deeds are perpetrated within the Highland line which men would not venture on this side of it. The people could not plead their own cause, and they had few to plead it for them, and they suffered in many cases unheard.

But we must hasten to consider the last of our reasons for the system of ejection, and that is, the almost inextricable difficulties in which many of the landlords are. Not long ago we noticed a great Hebridean baron advertising his intention of raising £200,000 by mortgage on his entailed estates. May there not be some connection between this fact and some recent clearings? Charitable people may be inclined to say, that we should rather sympathize with men who are thus in difficulties, and without means. But we say, if they have no means they have no right to be landlords, any more than other men in like circumstances, and are not entitled to our sympathy till they cease to be so. Their difficulties involve the misery of other parties innocent of any share in their production. And what is the history of the poverty of many of our landlords? Is it not for the most part the result of horse-racing and gambling? Do not they spend their years in one unvarying whirl of levity and dissipation? and then, when they are at their last sipping, they turn and avenge themselves on their unprotected tenantry? And, wretches though they be, they must be bolstered up in their position by an iniquitous system of entails, and be aided by the law-officers of the crown in inflicting punishment on parties who never injured them. The captain has, by his ignorance and folly, wrecked the ship; and, in the act of sinking, he turns to wreak his vengeance on the crew. Better for him did he try to stop the leak, and make an effort to get the ship, crew, and all, into working order. But, like many other men in similar circumstances, their efforts at extrication merely sink them deeper in the mire. What are they the better of expelling the people? They are so much out of pocket by assisting them to emigrate, and whence or when is the sum to be recovered? What is this but expending the remnant they possess in a vain and sinful effort to better themselves. They remind us of the scholastic, who in the shipwreck, when all on board were looking about for something to float them, in great triumph grasped the anchor as a means of certain safety. How sad it is that many men, when in difficulties, become thoroughly infatuated, and, instead of doing

that which would help to relieve them, make efforts more like the convulsive and aimless struggles of a drowning man than aught else, or worse—grasp at that which sinks them deeper.

We might with great safety mention ecclesiastical differences as the secret cause of many clearings—there are estates in the Highlands on which almost every office-bearer of the Free Church has been carefully weeded out within the last few years; but we refrain. We do not wish to make this a matter of any one Church more than another. We wish it to be a question of general public interest. Besides, the body of the people expelled from South Uist were Roman Catholics; and we have no more sympathy with the expatriation of Roman Catholics than with that of Free Churchmen. We are the avowed opponents of Popery; but we would desire the good of those who adhere to it. We earnestly pray for their conversion; but, so far as we can, we will resist their expatriation.

But, having thus given the causes which, we believe, prompt the ejections in the Highlands, let us, in a few sentences, characterise the system. And without doubt it is a system distinguished by unmingled cruelty. We would only ask our readers to witness for once a clearing; and, if they did not read cruelty in every feature of the transaction, we would be inclined to doubt their having the feelings of ordinary humanity. We might be able to point out to them, perhaps, the cottage of a poor widow with several children. It is marked out for destruction. The enforcers of the law begin the work of demolition. Her little articles of furniture (with many of which, trifling though they be, there may be fond associations connected with him who is now in the dust) are rudely cast out. She has a small web of cloth, in a half-finished state, to which she hopefully looks for the winter clothing of her little ones. It is mercilessly cut from its place in the simple loom, and tossed heedlessly amongst the rest of her furniture. The work of demolition proceeds rapidly. Her dwelling is soon a wreck; and she, who happens to be on the shore gathering shell-fish to feed her starving children, returns to find and weep over her now desolated home; while, dark as is the present, the future is darker still. Such are the scenes that mark a clearing. Multiply such scenes a hundred times, and, if we go back some years, a thousand times over, and we hardly reach the amount of cruelty exhibited in connection with Highland clearings. And we would tell our clearing landlords, that there is not a feeling that dwells in their breasts that does not exist in as great, ay, and greater strength (for it has not been deadened by intercourse with a heartless world), in the breast of him who inhabits the poorest

cottage from which they can eject him. He loves his country, its heathy mountains, and its rugged and stormy shores; he loves his partner in life and his little ones, and desires their comfort as earnestly as ever he who sat in baron's hall. Do their ejectors then think that there is no cruelty in their proceedings towards them? We just ask them how they would like to have the same measure meted out to themselves they are meting to these people? How would they like that the officers of the law should visit their castles, in the name of an indignant British public, and cast them forth upon a cheerless world for their subsistence? And if the reason of the thing is to be considered, we suspect that in uselessness, prodigality, and neglected estates, better reasons could be found for their ejection than for that of those who really suffer. But what we ask is, Would they not think it hard measure? Would it not be sore to hear? Then, let them remember that this is the very hardship they are inflicting on an unoffending tenantry.

But the system is also most unjust. The title to the lands in the Highlands is well known to have been different from that which existed in any other part of the kingdom until modern times. The system of civil economy in force there was the patriarchal. The land did not belong to any individual; it belonged to the sept. It had been originally won either by the industry or the bravery of one and all, and it was afterwards held by all as a matter of equal right. The chief was not the owner of the soil; he was the *Ceann Cinnidh*, or the head of the clan. He was not the proprietor of the land; he was the leader of the people; and so much was this the case, that by the *Tanist* law the chief was elective. There was no direct hereditary succession, though it was respected when it suited otherwise the object of the clan. Feudalism and its ruinous consequences they owe to Lowland Scotland, which owed them to the Normans; and surely Lowland Scotland should now yield its assistance in undoing what it helped to do, and what is attended with such sad results. Highland landlords for many centuries disdained feudal charters; but, now that they have an object to accomplish, they bring them to bear with dire effect. But while they do so, we maintain that they are perpetrating an act of distinct spoliation. It is as much robbery as if they crept into the people's outhouses in the night and robbed them of their cattle. It may not be so in law, but it is so in fact.

But the system is one which is opposed to the best interests of this kingdom. Does the strength of a nation consist in no small degree in the number of its people? Then he who lessens their numbers is the enemy of his country. But it may be said that the

ratio of increase in the population of Great Britain is sufficiently great! Then we take up the question of quality, and ask, Is it for the best interests of this country to be importing thousands of starving Irish to cluster in our large towns, and eat the very vitals out of the middle classes of the people, as paupers, and, at the same time, export a number as great of industrious, well-disposed, peaceable people? Is this a wholesome system for the country? Does it promise well for the future? Certainly not. But where are we sending these people? To America,—many of them to the United States, where they at once go to strengthen the hands of a foreign power; and many to Canada, which, now a colony of Britain, is likely one day, and that not a distant one, to be an opponent of our nation. And when the country is in difficulties, and needs defenders, will we raise the 42d, and the 72d, and the 79th, and the 93d, among our desolated straths, to earn victory for Britain on the field of battle? We imagine not. And this is a consideration not to be lightly dismissed by the man who wishes well to his country.

And, again, the system is one which is in direct contravention of the Divine appointment. God gave man the earth. It is no doubt accursed because of his transgression; but accursed though it be, it was given him by his Maker, to extract from it his daily bread in the sweat of his face. It was left to an iniquitous system of human laws to double the curse, and withhold from him the earth itself. It is a sad spectacle to see the brute—the soulless brute—feeding and fattening, cherished with all man's skill, while immortal man himself is either suffered to pine and perish, or driven away like a thing of nought. But this is the result of the system which we are exposing. Can there be any situation in life more trying to human patience than that of the man who is the daily witness of the sheep and the deer fattening at his door, while he must fold his arms, and see his beloved ones waste and die, and yet dare not upturn a foot of the soil, or cast one seed into its fertile bosom? Far be it from us to assail the laws that go to adjust wisely and usefully the distribution of property; but we do raise our protest against a system, the effect of which is to secure the benefit of the few, even were it their benefit, at the expense of the misery of the many.

And now the practical question arises, What can be done to remedy the evil we have been endeavouring to expose? It may occur to some that it would be well to agitate the question of security of tenure generally over the kingdom—that there should be grounds distinct from the mere will of the landlord, on which alone

a tenant can be removed. No doubt there would be great difficulties in detail here; but it is a startling fact, that 25,000 individuals are at this moment legally entitled to expel the whole of the rest of the rural population from this kingdom. Such an agitation would have this advantage, that it would secure the concurrence and support of the great body of the tenant farmers. The difficulty at present in obtaining any reform bearing upon the agricultural portions of the country is in detaching the tenants from the landlords; but such a movement as the above would have the effect most completely. We do not pretend to say whether a movement of the kind would be a wise one; nor do we profess to speak of it as if it were a new suggestion. We merely introduce it as bearing upon the question under consideration, and as meeting a difficulty—we mean that of including this merely Highland question in some great national movement, without which we fear that much cannot be done.

Another remedy which suggests itself is an action at law, to try the question of right on the part of the Highland landlords. We know that there are great authorities in favour of the people in the matter, and some have been surprised that the question never has been raised. We do not intend being the apologists of the people of Uist in their resistance to the execution of the law, though we feel the force of the truth, that “oppression maketh a wise man mad;” but did they raise the question of right, we think they would do wisely; nor do we imagine that they would want support in carrying their action into Court. At the same time, we fear for the result. Our law courts are so completely made up of the privileged classes, and so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the feudal law, that we have misgivings as to their success. Still, the question is one which affords ample room for discussion, and in which a strong case—in fact, an impregnable case—can be made out, at least on the ground of equity, for the people.

Another remedy which we heartily propose is, an earnest, vigorous assault by the country on the laws of entail and primogeniture. These laws have been the curse of this nation. They have fettered the soil which the Creator made free. They have beggared the proprietors, and they have beggared the people. They have formed a great and widening gulf between the different classes of the community. They have checked the progress of improvement; and they have kept down, many degrees, the standard of general comfort and happiness. It is a remarkable fact, that the abolition of these laws in France has raised the number of the proprietors of the

soil from 2,000,000 to 15,000,000, and has, notwithstanding the compulsory division of land—against which we equally object—proportionally raised the standard of comfort and independence among the people. And here, let us remark, that it appears to us not a little surprising that these laws should not have attracted more of the notice of the great reforming parties in the country. We can easily see that no reform short of their abolition will truly reach the root of our social and political evils, so far as these depend upon our laws. Any other reform is a mere scratching of the surface. Let what political changes men choose be made, and these laws will baulk them of the advantage. They have deprived the country, in a great measure, of the benefits of the Reform Bill, and will also of the measures of free trade. It is vain to expect that we can emancipate the people until we emancipate the soil. Men naturally follow the fate of the soil. There is nothing else here with which they are so closely connected, and on which they so entirely depend. Let other laws be made as men list, it is the state of the soil that will ever decide the state of the people. Let the laws, then, that fetter it be abolished. We wish we could believe that the knell of their extinction was rung. And were the question fairly taken up by men able to grapple with it, and who feared not the face of man, we would have little doubt of seeing the object we desire accomplished. Unquestionably, it would be the greatest political struggle this country has witnessed in modern times. Political privileges, with all the tenacity with which men cling to them, are little redd of when compared with those which effeir to property. But powerful as the opposing confederacy would be, we feel assured that a decided assault, associated as it would be with a good and popular cause, would put all opponents to the route, and that the laws of entail and primogeniture, with all their accompanying evils, would be expunged from the statute-book of the realm.

And let us here say, that we make these remarks in the spirit of the truest conservatism. We wish to touch no man's property;—let every man quietly enjoy his own; but we desire to have all property under the control of a system of laws that shall secure the wellbeing of the nation. We wish to see this done constitutionally; and we wish to tell our landlords, that better is a constitutional movement for this end, than such a movement as brought about a like change in France; and it does not require the spirit of prophecy to be able to say that one or other will, nay, must occur.

And we would also take leave to say to those who may be in-

clined to step forward in defence of our Highland population, that they have no easy task before them. They must nail their flag to the mast. The opposing party have done so already. The proceedings at the late Circuit Court at Inverness show us distinctly that they are resolved to carry their point, at whatever cost. Four men are arrested, charged with resisting the levelling of their houses; and, having been admitted to bail, have to find their way, as they best can, to Inverness, 120 miles off, to be tried for this breach of the law. They are refused a passage in the steamer sent for the witnesses for the prosecution; still their bail-bond is redeemed; they keep their day, and appear at the bar, without a single witness in their favour, being without the means of bringing them forward; without counsel, save what was provided at the last hour by public benevolence. The trial proceeds; and a jury, whose names deserve to be held in high honour, return the following verdict:—"The jury, by a *majority*, find the pannels guilty as libelled, &c.; *unanimously* recommend the pannels to the utmost mercy and leniency of the Court, in consideration of the cruel, though it may be legal, proceedings adopted in ejecting the whole people of Sollas from their houses and crofts, without the prospect of shelter or a footing in their fatherland, or even the means of expatriating them to a foreign one." And yet, after such a verdict, these men, who have ever borne a character of the highest respectability, are, as we hold, with most undue severity, sentenced to four months' imprisonment—that imprisonment to be followed up virtually by perpetual banishment to America at the instance of their prosecutor, and all this for defending what may turn out to be their just rights. It is not the sentence of the judge, however, which we wish to mark here, but the determined resolution of the oppressor to carry his purpose out. What we covet, then, is equal determination—nay, superior—in offering sympathy and constitutional resistance.

But now we desire to call the attention of the public to a question in which they are deeply involved, as closely connected with these ejections—we mean that of a legal provision for the able-bodied poor of the country. These proceedings of our Highland landlords must undoubtedly hurry such a measure on. We believe it is talked of in high quarters already as a remedy for these grievances. But is the country prepared for this? Are the middle classes in our large cities willing to be offered up a sacrifice at the shrine of landlord oppression? We should hope not. Still it is a result they have to fear. There is a class of politicians who dread touching the real grievances of the country, and who would like to patch things

up, and keep them as long as possible as they are. Such men are likely to look with fond eyes on a measure of the kind spoken of; and, if the middle classes wish to be relieved from the burden of supporting out of their often scanty means those whom Highland and other lairds choose to sweep off their estates, let them now step forward and utter their voice in condemnation of ejections. Let the people have the land at its value, and we will have little occasion for poor-laws.

And now, let us express our hope that the subject of Highland clearings may be taken up by parties able to do so with practical effect. They present an object of intensest interest to every one possessed of the feelings of ordinary humanity; but, above all, they present to the Christian public an object worthy of their efforts and their prayers. We do not imagine that it belongs to the Church, as a Church, to take the question up; but, surely no question befits more its living members in their individual capacity. What movement could be more worthy of the followers of Him who healed the sick, restored the sorrowing widow her son, and whose heart ever melted in the presence of human suffering? But we have done. And if these imperfect notices have in any way added to the public interest in a subject in which we feel deeply interested ourselves, our object is accomplished.

THE END.

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