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## The Causes of the Highland Emigrations of 1783-1803

THE first great period of Highland emigration ended in 1775<sup>1</sup> with the outbreak of the American War of Independence. Then followed a perceptible pause, not broken until the Treaty of Versailles, which formed the starting-point of a fresh movement.

The emigration proceeded, not in a steady unbroken stream, but in waves, separated from each other by intervals of comparative inactivity. It was extraordinarily active between 1786 and 1790; it slackened<sup>2</sup> again during the early years of the Wars of the Revolution, which provided a temporary alternative for the discontented, or, as one contemporary put it, 'changed the coat of those who emigrated'; while it reached a fever heat during the opening years of the new century.

The new phase differs in many respects from that which preceded the American War, most noticeably in the different social status of the bulk of the emigrants. This difference can of course be over-emphasised. Tacksmen, the instigators of the movement of the seventies, still existed in many parts of the Highlands and Islands, and some certainly emigrated after 1783 for reasons similar to those moving their fellows before 1775. So also, the independent emigration of the lower classes, the characteristic mark of the new period, had its parallels earlier in

<sup>1</sup> See *Scottish Historical Review* xvi, p. 280, 'The Highland Emigration of 1770.'

<sup>2</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, March 15th, 1792. Walker, *Econ. History of the Hebrides and Highlands of Scotland*, 1808.

the century. Still, in the main, it is true to say that before 1775 the chief impulse to emigrate came from above, and the people most affected were the semi-aristocratic holders of large farms; after 1783 the impulse was from beneath, and it was the peasant class whose diminished numbers marked the force of the new movement.

As in the previous phase of emigration, it is neither easy nor possible to get precise figures. The *Old Statistical Account* mentions definitely the departure of four thousand persons between 1785 and 1793, but it also abounds in vague references to emigration from parishes for which no exact details are given. Additional data supplied by the *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Scots Magazine* of the corresponding years brings the total nearer six thousand.

For the first three years of the nineteenth century some exact figures are given by Robert Brown,<sup>1</sup> Sheriff Substitute of Western Inverness-shire. According to his statement, between 1801 and 1803 twenty-three ships left for America with Highland emigrants, carrying altogether five thousand, three hundred and ninety-one persons on board. Of these vessels all but one sailed from Highland or Island ports.

Brown's figures are corroborated by the engineer Telford writing in the *Scots Magazine* of May 1803, and there seems no reason to doubt their substantial reliability. Allowing then for some emigration during the early part of the war, the total number of Highland emigrants between 1782 and 1803 cannot have been less than twelve thousand, and may have considerably exceeded it.

To turn now to the causes of this upheaval, the suggestions made by contemporaries resolve themselves into attempts to explain two different things. The impulse to emigrate is the product of two factors—the desire or necessity of the emigrant to leave the home-land, and his willingness to go to the new one. The restlessness of the late eighteenth century Highlanders naturally supplies an essential condition for the movement of population, but the restlessness might, quite well, have taken other forms than that of emigration to America. There are thus two things to be explained, the causes that lay at the root of the Highland discontent and the special reasons that led to the drift of population westwards.

<sup>1</sup> Brown's *Strictures and Remarks on the Earl of Selkirk's Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland*, 1806.



In this last sense the emigration of the late eighteenth century is not particularly difficult to explain. Two powerful forces were at work, the growing familiarity with the New World, and the increasing commercial importance of the trade in emigrants.

To the poorer Highlander of the first half of the eighteenth century, America had been hardly even a name; to the Highlander of the eighties and nineties it had become a land of promise, a place above all capable of satisfying the land hunger for which Scotland itself had failed to provide a remedy. This changed attitude was the natural outcome of direct channels of communication being opened up between the Highlands and the colonies, the three chief contributory agencies being the Highland regiments, the Jacobite exiles, and the small tenants who had followed their tacksmen masters in the emigration of the seventies. *Agnes Scahill?*

Highland soldiers who had served in the Canadian operations, or the Hudson campaigns of 1757, were generally given the option of taking up land in America. Some did, and formed the nucleus of future Highland settlements. Others returned home, and familiarised their own people with the possibilities of the land beyond the seas. The Jacobite refugees and the pioneers of 1760 and 1770 acted in a similar way. Many of them kept up an active correspondence with their native places, and thus America came to be a household word in even the remotest of Highland glens. The parish ministers writing in the *Old Statistical Account* continually mention the letters from abroad as being one of the strong inducements to further emigration.

Probably the best illustration of the importance of this factor is to be found in the consistency with which emigrants from the same district in the Highlands sought the same part in America. The war affected but did not destroy this tendency. Many of the Highlanders established in America were loyalists, and hence subsequently refugees, a fact which diverted their stream of followers from the Carolinas and the banks of the Hudson to the St. Lawrence and Nova Scotia. In general it is rare to find the Highland emigrants departing from the orthodox routes opened up by their former neighbours.

Thus we learn from the *Old Statistical Account* that S. Uist and Barra had from 1772 onwards, a continuous connection with Prince Edward Island. Some of the Hebrides had their goal upon Cape Breton;<sup>1</sup> Lochaber, Keppoch and Glengarry sent their emigrants to the district of Canada that took the name

<sup>1</sup> J. MacGregor, *Observations on Emigration to British America*, 1829.

of the last; the Arran exiles found a new home in Megantic County; while Skye, Sutherland, Ross and Argyllshire found their way to the Carolinas; and then after 1782 to various destinations in Canada, of which Pictou appears to have been the favourite. Possibly the settlement of the 82nd Highlanders at Pictou, after their disbandment in 1783, helped to turn attention in this direction.

Undoubtedly the clannish instinct was a powerful contributory force in promoting emigration, and a force which appeared to gain increased strength with the departure of each fresh batch of emigrants.

The persuasive powers of the emigration agents did a similar work for those districts which had hitherto been unaffected by contact with America. All contemporaries were agreed that their influence was enormous. The Highland Society,<sup>1</sup> in particular, thought it so important that it declared the most effective method of stopping emigration, would be to cut down the profits of the agents and shipping companies, by strict government regulations in the interest of the passengers; and, indeed, the condition of the emigrant ships was such that it might well be wondered why people were induced to go.

In essentials, the trade in emigrants was not new. The eighteenth century emigration agents had their seventeenth century prototypes in the captains of such notorious ships as the 'Ewe and Lamb' and the 'Speedwell.' To the seventeenth century skipper no one had come amiss; sturdy vagabonds, religious refugees, political offenders, voluntary emigrants, prisoners from the Tolbooth or unconvicted criminals, all were accepted, mingled together, and any deficiency in numbers made up by persons kidnapped for the purpose. In the eighteenth century the agent had to rely less on force and more on persuasion, but it is doubtful if the emigrants gained much by the apparent march of civilisation. Though the hardest indictment of the emigrant ships never quite reached the appalling grimness of Woodrow's picture of the New Jersey passage, the fact remains that their death-roll was a challenge even to the West African slavers of the same period.

But however horrible the ships, and however unscrupulous the agents, they are essential links in the chain of emigration. Previous emigrants might represent America as a place of refuge, but it was the agents that supplied the means of getting there.

<sup>1</sup> *Highland Society Transactions*, 1803.



Together, they brought emigration into the mental and physical horizon of the class which, earlier in the century, had found its only outlet in migration to Ireland, or to the manufacturing towns of Western Scotland.

But these suggested causes of emigration only explain half the truth. They explain why part of the Highland population preferred to remove to America, rather than anywhere else; they do not explain why a people so notoriously conservative and attached to their native soil should have chosen to move at all. Here we are dealing with causes of quite a different kind, some of which were very general in their operation, and some of minor importance, affecting only small areas, or special years.

Amongst the particular causes, the periodic famines stand out with special prominence. A typical example was the terrible year of dearth which occurred just at the beginning of our period, when the bad harvest of 1782 spread distress of a painful kind throughout the north and west of Scotland.

Trail, the Sheriff of Caithness and Sutherland, writing in April 1783, said that the condition of northern Scotland was lamentable, and in Ross-shire people were dying in great numbers for want of food. Macpherson of Badenoch gave similar evidence for his district. Everywhere the fields were waste, the rents were unpaid, and even substantial farmers went begging their bread.<sup>1</sup> During the crisis most of the greater landlords appear to have behaved with generosity, many supporting the whole of their tenantry throughout the difficult time, but the smaller proprietors were themselves too hardly hit to be able to do much to help the farmers.

The distress of 1782 and 1783 undoubtedly helped the revival of emigration. In a letter appearing in the *Caledonian Mercury* of November 29th, 1784, a Halifax correspondent described the arrival of thousands of emigrants as a result of the famine. It is true that many of these were drawn from the Lowland districts of Banff and Aberdeenshire, and do not therefore come within the scope of this enquiry, but it seems probable that the affected Highland areas also contributed their share.

Another local cause of rather a novel kind was suggested by Sheriff-Substitute Brown of Inverness-shire. Brown attributed the emigration from certain areas to a movement which took its rise along the valley of the Caledonian Canal, and ultimately

<sup>1</sup> *Report on Distress in Scotland presented to the House of Commons, May 1783, printed May 1846.*

formed an interesting and unusual blend of religious revival and French Revolutionary propaganda.

‘The late flame of emigration first began to be kindled along the tract of the Caledonian Canal, by certain religious itinerants who addressed the people by interpreters, and distributed numerous pamphlets, calculated, as they said, to excite a serious soul concern. The consequence was that men who could not read began to preach, and to inflame the people against their lawful pastors, whom they never had suspected of misleading them. They next adopted a notion that all who were superior to them in wealth and rank were oppressors whom they would enjoy the consolation of seeing damned. Lastly, many of them took into their heads that all labour not necessary for the support of existence was sinful. When the fumes of discontent had thus been prepared, through the medium of fanaticism, to which, it is known, the Highlanders are strongly attached; at last those levelling principles which had long been fermenting in the south made their way among them, and excited an ardent desire of going to a country where they supposed all men were equal, and fondly flattered themselves they might live without labour.’<sup>1</sup>

This passage sheds a rather new light upon the psychology of the Highland emigrant, but there is unfortunately not sufficient evidence from other sources to enlarge upon it. Still, Brown was a contemporary, living practically on the spot he was describing, and it seems reasonable therefore to suppose that his statements were not made without some foundation.

Interesting, however, as these local causes of emigration may be, it is obvious that we must go further afield to account for the general restlessness of the Highland people during the twenty years in question.

Both then and since the three most popular explanations put forward have been rack-renting, the union of farms, and the displacement of cattle and tillage by sheep, all three being generally regarded as symptoms of the greed and tyranny of the landholding class.

Viewed more closely the three suggested causes tend to merge into each other. In the late eighteenth century it was not usual to find Highland farms being united except for the purpose of adapting them better to sheep-runs. Hence the second and third causes of emigration are hardly distinguishable. The question of

<sup>1</sup> Brown, *Strictures*, 1806.



the rise of rents is more complex, but is still closely associated with the introduction of sheep.

To start with, it may be granted that rents in the Highlands did rise throughout the whole of the eighteenth century. That rise can be attributed to various circumstances: to the special conditions created by the French Wars, to the substitution of commercial rents for the nominal ones hitherto paid by the tacksmen, to the abnormal competition for farms caused by the rapid growth of population, and sometimes to pure greed and stupidity on the part of the proprietors.

But in many cases it will be found that the rise in rents accompanied the introduction of sheep, and the charge of rackrenting against the landlord is simply the charge of sheep substitution put in another form, the truth being that the proprietor could get, without difficulty, rents from the sheep farmers that would certainly appear as rackrents if applied to ordinary tenants.

Telford, the engineer, said that the sheep farmer could pay with ease three times the rent normally given, and Sir George Mackenzie<sup>1</sup> gave an example from the Balnagown estate which bears out Telford's statement.

Three small farms were let about 1760 to nine tenants at a total rent of £9, *i.e.* £1 per head, the farms including a hundred acres of meadow, a big stretch of hill and heath, and a tract of moss and moor providing coarse pasture. As time went on the rent was gradually increased until the total for the three farms stood at £30, which some of the tenants thought so excessive that they gave up their holdings. At the time Mackenzie was writing the farms had been turned into one sheep-run, the tenant of which considered a rental of £100 as a moderate valuation of his farm.

It is true that some of the sheep farmers were unable to pay the rents they had light-heartedly offered, a fact which Mackenzie attributed to want of skill, knowledge and capital on the part of the native farmer. In any case, it was inevitable that as more land passed from cultivation into pasture the abnormal profits of the sheep farmer must decline, and he might find himself at the end of his lease quite unable to pay the rent he had willingly offered at the beginning.

In general, however, the landlord was not accused of rackrenting the sheep farmers, since it was plain that most of them prospered notwithstanding the high rents. But it may be admitted that what were fair rents to the big sheep farmers

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, *Agricultural Report of Ross and Cromarty*, 1813.

would certainly be excessive when applied to the small cattle farmer or cultivator. The outcry of the philanthropist against the rise in rents was thus in essence a protest against the proprietor revaluing his estate on a basis of sheep, instead of tillage or cattle farming.

The most common view then of the general causes producing this phase of emigration tends to resolve itself into these three propositions—that emigration was chiefly the result of the creation of sheep runs ; that the introduction of sheep was due solely to the greed of the landowner, and his callous indifference to the interests of his original tenants ; that the landlord, therefore, is to be held primarily responsible for the great exodus of population from the Highlands westwards.

To take these points in order, there certainly exists a certain amount of evidence pointing to sheep farming as the cause of emigration. The following contemporary writers all give some support to this view : Sir John Sinclair,<sup>1</sup> James Anderson,<sup>2</sup> the Rev. Mr. Singers,<sup>3</sup> Sir George Mackenzie,<sup>4</sup> Telford,<sup>5</sup> Captain Henderson,<sup>6</sup> as well as several ministers in the *Old Statistical Account*. The value of these particular authorities lies chiefly in the fact that most of them were not unfriendly disposed towards the landowners, while both Sinclair and Mackenzie were supporters of the introduction of sheep, and hence not likely to prejudice their case by exaggerating its effects upon depopulation. Further, it must be added that some of the authors were speaking from first-hand knowledge ; the minister of Loch Broom was drawing his conclusions from his own parish ; while Captain Henderson gave from his experience two authenticated cases in 1806 of small tenants evicted to make way for sheep, one in Strathnaver and one in Edderachylis.

Admittedly, then, some emigration must have resulted from the introduction of sheep, but the extent of such emigration is an extremely debateable point. The majority of the writers who favoured sheep farming as the sole, or even the main cause of

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Sinclair, *General View of Agriculture of the Northern Counties and Islands of Scotland*, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> James Anderson, LL.D., *Present State of the Hebrides and West Coasts of Scotland*, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> Singers, *Highland Society Transactions*, vol. iii. 1807.

<sup>4</sup> Mackenzie, *Agricultural Report of Ross and Cromarty*, 1813.

<sup>5</sup> Telford, *Scots Magazine*, May, 1803.

<sup>6</sup> Henderson, *Agricultural Report of Sutherland*, 1812.



emigration based their case, not on definite examples, but on general principles.

Sheep-farming, they argued, compelled the enlargement of farms, and must therefore have led to the eviction of small tenants. Sheep-farming raised rents, and the small farmers who were unable to pay must have been weeded out. Sheep-farming required less labour than cattle or tillage, and by diminishing employment must have caused depopulation. Finally, sheep were introduced in large numbers into the Highlands during the eighteenth century, and simultaneously emigration from the Highlands took place on a large scale, hence the one must have been the cause of the other.

There is a certain amount of truth at the back of all these assertions, but the case for the causal connection of sheep and emigration is far from complete, and there were not wanting writers even in the eighteenth century to show flaws in the arguments. They also in many cases, like the minister of Kilninver and Kilmelfort, were writing from direct observation of the effects of sheep introduction in their own parishes. The opponents of the sheep-farming thesis were far from being agreed in matters of detail, but collectively they produced the following counter-assertions.

They denied that sheep-farming, in most cases, displaced cultivation or even cattle-farming, much of the land brought under sheep having hitherto been entirely waste. They denied that such displacement, where it did take place, necessarily produced emigration. They denied that cattle-farming, as practised in the Highlands, gave much more genuine employment than sheep-farming. Finally, they suggested alternative causes for the emigration of the period.

Some of the facts offered in support of these statements are worth giving in detail.

As against the depopulation theory there was the argument from statistics. The *Farmers' Magazine* of 1800, basing its figures on Webster and the *Old Statistical Account*, stated that in 1755 the population of Argyllshire, Inverness-shire, and Ross-shire was 170,440; by the *Old Statistical Account* (1792-8) it was 200,226, a substantial increase for an area in which there were no expanding towns of any size, and in which sheep-farming was developing rapidly.

Secondly, there is the significant fact that Argyllshire, which took strongly to sheep-farming, provided comparatively few of

the late eighteenth century emigrants, while the Hebrides, which were much less affected by sheep-farming, provided many.

Again, a writer in the *Caledonian Mercury*, of December 1781, pointed out that at the last tryst at Falkirk the number of black cattle presented exceeded all previous records, despite the fact that they were drawn from districts into which sheep had been largely introduced. His statement is borne out by the *Agricultural Report of Perthshire*, 1799, and the conclusion seems reasonable that the sheep were an addition to and not a substitute for the original stock. The following passage from Duncan Forbes might be quoted in the same connection :

‘Of this large tract of land [from Perth to Inverness] no part is in any degree cultivated, except some spots here and there in Straths and Glens, by the sides of Rivers, brooks, or lakes, and on the Sea Coast and Western Islands. The grounds that are cultivated yield small quantities of mean Corns, not sufficient to feed the inhabitants, who depend for their nourishment on milk, butter, cheese, etc., the product of their Cattle. Their constant residence during the harvest, winter and spring is at their small farms, in houses made of turf; the roof, which is thatched, supported by timber. In the summer season they drive their flocks and herds many miles higher among the mountains, where they have long ranges of coarse pasture. The whole family follow the Cattle; the men to guard them, and to prevent their straying; the women to milk them and to look after the butter and cheese, etc. The places in which they reside when thus employed they call shielings, and their habitations are the most miserable huts that ever were seen.’<sup>1</sup>

Apparently it was possible to introduce sheep to some extent without disturbing anything but the summer pastures, and such a disturbance was not entirely a matter for regret, since the existence of these pastures generally tempted the Highland farmer to overstock his farm, with disastrous results during the winter months.<sup>2</sup>

So far then, sheep-farming did fill a blank in Highland estate economy, and involved no necessary displacement of population. This, however, was not invariably the case. The high rents offered by the sheep farmers were a strong temptation to the landlord to turn into sheep walks not only the vacant high

<sup>1</sup> Culloden Papers, *Thoughts Concerning the State of the Highlands of Scotland*, by Duncan Forbes, probably 1746.

<sup>2</sup> O.S.A. *Kilniver and Kilmelfort*.



ground, but also the occupied and partly cultivated lower slopes, and in any case the sheep-farmer needed some low ground for crops and enclosures. Displacement of population in these cases undoubtedly took place, but it must be noted that the displacement did not necessarily lead to emigration, or even to migration to a distance.

Captain Henderson, for example, admits that the tenants evicted from Strathnaver and Edderachylis were given the option of taking farms on lower ground nearer the sea, though most of them refused the offer, and preferred to emigrate. So also the minister of Criech in Sutherland (O.S.A.), in describing the farms being conjoined and turned into sheep walks, added the information that the evicted tenants were simply transferred from one part of the parish to the other. A similar case was that of Alness in Ross-shire. In that parish so many farms had been united to make sheep runs that riots had occurred, and public attention had been excited; yet the minister makes it clear that here also the evicted tenants had been offered other farms, either on the same estate, or on neighbouring properties.

The general conclusion we draw from the evidence on both sides is that sheep-farming did displace population; and hence did cause a certain amount of emigration, but that the extent of the displacement has been exaggerated, and where emigration occurred it was not inevitable, but was largely the result of the inability or unwillingness of the native farmer to adapt himself to the new conditions.

These facts also form a partial answer to the second proposition, that the introduction of sheep was evidence of the callous and selfish attitude of the Highland landlord towards his tenants. That the self-interest of the proprietors was the chief motive power in the change seems undeniable, but it must be remembered that the temptation to convert the Highlands into sheep runs was extraordinarily strong. The superiority of the rents offered has been already noted. As Knox said:

‘It need be no matter for surprise if gentlemen should embrace the tempting offers from sheep-farmers. One man will occupy the land that *starved* fifty or more families; he gives a double or treble rent, and is punctual to the day of payment.’<sup>1</sup>

We have emphasized the word ‘starved’ since it calls attention to a point continually touched upon by all eighteenth century travellers through the Highlands. All were agreed that the

<sup>1</sup> Knox, *Tour through the Highlands*, 1786.

climate was entirely unsuited to tillage, especially in cases where the farmer was too poor to tide over the effects of several disastrous seasons in succession. The frequency of the bad years was for ever threatening ruin both to the farmer and the owner, and there seemed no hope of betterment while they continued to place their dependence upon grain crops. This fact had been brought prominently before the eyes of the landlords by the great famine of 1782. One estate then dropped no less than £4000 in arrears of rent, and it was typical of many. No proprietor could reasonably be expected to view this state of things with enthusiasm or even with acquiescence. The Highland landlord was in general neither more brutal nor more disinterested than the rest of mankind, and he lived in days before the social and ethical problems involved in private landownership had become matters of common discussion. He saw, or could see if he were sufficiently intelligent, that the existing system brought neither profit to himself nor prosperity to his tenants.<sup>1</sup> The alternative had its painful side, though emigration seems on the whole a lesser evil than hopeless poverty, but at all events it offered certain tangible benefits to the owner, to the farmer and to the community.

The landlord got higher rents and more security for their payment. The new type of tenant could pay the increased rent and yet enjoy a prosperity unknown to his predecessors.<sup>2</sup> The community gained by the development of natural resources hitherto untouched, and by the increase of its food supply at a time when the latter was urgently necessary.<sup>3</sup> It seems scarcely fair to charge the proprietors with abnormal greed

<sup>1</sup> 'But indolence was almost the only comfort which they enjoyed. There was scarcely any variety of wretchedness with which they were not obliged to struggle, or rather to which they were not obliged to submit. They often felt what it was to want food; the scanty crops which they raised were consumed by their cattle in winter and in spring; for a great part of the year they lived wholly on milk, and even that in the end of spring and the beginning of winter was very scarce' (*O.S.A. Lochgoilhead and Kilmorich*).

<sup>2</sup> 'A farmer can pasture a large extent of inaccessible grass, not safe for black cattle; that he can maintain a stock, with less danger of heavy losses by famine in winter and spring; and that sheep as a stock are managed at less expense and are more marketable than any other' (Rev. Mr. Singers, *Transactions of Highland Society*, vol. iii. 1807).

<sup>3</sup> 'The produce of this parish since sheep have become the principal commodity is at least double the intrinsic value of what it was formerly, so that half the number of hands produce more than double the quantity of provisions for the support of our large towns' (*O.S.A. Lochgoilhead and Kilmorich*).



because they yielded to these arguments. No doubt the first weighed most heavily with most of them, but the most advanced opinion of their own day was with them.

Men like Sir John Sinclair who were eager advocates of sheep-farming may have been entirely wrong in their opinions; they were certainly partly influenced by economic theories which can no longer be accepted as absolute. Yet they stood for public spirit and enlightenment in their own time, and their freedom from purely personal and sordid considerations was above dispute. It is not unreasonable then to suppose that other motives mingled with self-interest in the promotion of sheep-farming, and we have already given evidence to show that many landlords made an honest effort, as in the cases of Creich and Alness, to prevent the inevitable hardships of the transition period from falling too heavily upon their original tenants.

Some proprietors there were who went further, and in spite of all inducements refused to introduce sheep walks, deliberately sacrificing their own interests and the economic development of their estates to the immediate needs of their tenants.<sup>1</sup> It was an action which compels admiration, but it also brings us to the answer to the third proposition, and, in fact, to the crux of the whole question. Suppose all Highland landowners had followed the example of these self-sacrificing Hebridean gentlemen, would the tide of late eighteenth century emigration have been held back, and would the tenants have received any permanent advantage from this self-denial?

Our answer to both questions is no.

The real cause of Highland distress and Highland emigration in the late eighteenth century is to be found in circumstances which the landlord did not create, and which were entirely apart from the introduction of sheep. Briefly, the Highland population was over-running its resources, and, unless positive preventive measures were taken, emigration or migration on a fairly large scale was inevitable.

No one, of course, can lay down an arbitrary limit to the number of persons the Highlands were capable of supporting. Had all the resources of civilisation, even eighteenth century civilisation, been applied to the problem no doubt the limit might have been considerably extended. But the fact remains that as things were, a large and increasing number of the Highland

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Present State of the Highlands*, 1785; MacDonald, *Agricultural Report of the Hebrides*, 1811; O.S.A. *Ardochattan and Muckairn*.

inhabitants were superfluous, that is, there was not enough work for them to do, nor enough food for them to eat.

To come to the evidence, there are, in the first place, the rather remarkable population figures supplied by Sinclair's *Analysis of the Statistical Account*, 1825, and by MacDonald's *Agricultural Report of the Hebrides*, 1811 :

		POPULATION.	
		Cir. 1755	Cir. 1795
Sutherlandshire, -	-	20,774	22,961
Inverness-shire, -	-	64,656	73,979
Argyllshire, -	-	63,291	76,101

The Hebridean figures are more sensational :

		CHURCH RECORD.	
		1750	1808-9
Total population of Hebrides,		49,485	91,049

The particular parishes show this remarkable increase in detail :

		1750	1808-9
Coll and Tiree, -	-	2,704	4,390
N. Uist, -	-	1,836	4,012
S. Uist, -	-	1,958	5,500
Duirinish, -	-	2,685	4,100
Gigha, -	-	463	850
Harris, -	-	1,993	3,420
Kilfinichen, -	-	1,616	3,500

These figures are sufficiently striking by themselves ; they are more so when we remember that they leave out of account the remarkable emigrations of our own period which removed part of the surplus. Keeping in mind what the Hebrides were like, their natural limits under the best of cultivation and their want of all expanding manufactures, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the greater part of the increase must have been nothing but a dead weight upon the scanty resources of the islands, and a means of lowering the general standard of living of all the inhabitants.

The problem of unemployment is of course one which necessarily arises in any rural area where land is the sole or almost the sole means of support. The aggravated character which it assumes in the Highlands, and especially in the Hebrides, is due partly to the temperamental peculiarities of the Highlander, and partly to the geographical isolation in which he lived.



In the Lowlands, a person who found himself without work moved off to the town to look for it, and the problem, therefore, never developed to an extent that attracted public attention. In the Highlands the people were to start with more prolific; the tie of kinship was sufficiently strong to allow an able-bodied man to live for some time on the charity of others, without any feeling of shame;<sup>1</sup> while his attachment to the soil, and his remoteness from the manufacturing areas, increased the moral effort required of the Highlander who would leave his home in search of work. Some did make the effort, but it is obvious from the population figures that many did not, or at least not until things had come to such a pass that only emigration in numbers would relieve the situation.

Most eighteenth century writers were agreed that the rapid increase of population in the Highlands was a comparatively new phenomenon, not dating back much before the opening of their own century. The time of its appearance is not difficult to explain; the removal, or partial disappearance, of such checks to population as private war and the small-pox scourge did so much; the introduction of the potato, and the natural fecundity of the Highlander did the rest.

One of the earliest allusions to it comes in Martin's *Western Islands*, published in 1703.<sup>2</sup> He describes the population as having the utmost difficulty in subsisting, though then it only numbered some forty thousand as against MacDonald's ninety-one.

By 1747 the *Scots Magazine* was appealing vigorously for the establishment of manufactures in the Highlands that would give work to the unoccupied inhabitants, while twenty years later Pennant,<sup>3</sup> who was never a sympathiser with the landlords, found himself unable to refrain from commenting upon the abnormal number of idle able-bodied adults to be found in many Highland households.

References of this kind multiply as the problem itself becomes more acute.

'There is no doubt,' wrote Anderson, 'that one-tenth part of the present inhabitants (of the Highlands) would be sufficient to perform all the operations there, were their industry properly exerted.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald's *Agricultural Report of Hebrides*, 1811.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *History of the Western Islands*, 1703.

<sup>3</sup> Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*. Pt. I., 1772.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 1785.

An article appearing in the *Caledonian Mercury* of October 21st, 1791, for the purpose of *denouncing* those responsible for the emigrations, included the sentence, 'It must at the same time be admitted that with the best management pasturage and agriculture alone can never find subsistence for Highland fecundity.'

In the *Old Statistical Account* the ministers of Lochgoilhead and Kilmorich, of Glenelg, of Duirinish, of Bracadale, of Lochalsh, of Jura and Colonsay, of Tiry, and of Kilniver and Kilmelfort, all testify to the growth of their parishioners beyond the resources of their parishes.

To quote at random from their accounts: 'Emigrations to America have proved once and again a drain to this island, but in the present mode of management it may be said to be still overstocked with inhabitants' (Jura and Colonsay); 'they must go somewhere for relief unless manufactures be introduced to employ them' (Tiry).

'A principal cause of this emigration was that the country was overstocked with people, arising from frequent early marriages; of course, the lands were able to supply them but scantily with the necessaries of life.' (Small Isles.)

'The inhabitants are now become so crowded that some relief of this sort [emigration] in one shape or another seems absolutely necessary.' (Lismore and Appin.)

These quotations seem to make the connection of the redundancy of population with emigration fairly evident, but we might add two more, the one from Mr. Kemp, who, after a prolonged tour through the Highlands, drew up a careful analysis of the causes of emigration for the *Scots Magazine* of 1792; the other written ten years later by the Minister of Rannoch, also as the results of personal observation.

Kemp concluded as follows:

'An attentive and general observation of the present state of the Highlands and Islands, it is imagined, will warrant the assertion that the great and most universally operating cause of emigration is that, in comparison with the means of subsistence which they afford, these countries are greatly overstocked with inhabitants.'<sup>1</sup>

The same general idea was expressed by Irvine of Rannoch in 1803 with rather more forcibleness.

'In some valleys the population is so excessive that it is a question with many discerning people how the one half of the

<sup>1</sup> Kemp, *Tour to the Highlands* (S.P.C.K.); *Scots Magazine*, Feb. 1792.



inhabitants could subsist though they should have the land for nothing. Those who would be tenants are so numerous, and the land fit for cultivation so scanty, that all cannot be satisfied. The disappointed person, feeling himself injured, condemns the landlord and seeks a happy relief in America.<sup>1</sup>

The cumulative effect of this evidence seems fairly obvious. The late eighteenth century emigration was not primarily due to any changes in Highland estate economy. The introduction of sheep, and the other factors already mentioned, no doubt helped to bring matters to a head, but even had there been no change from cattle and tillage to sheep, emigration must still have taken place, and taken place on a large scale.<sup>2</sup>

It is possible, of course, to argue, as many have done, that the landlords ought to have been able to think of preventive measures that would have held back the tide. In point of fact many did make an effort, and some, as MacDonald testified, sacrificed a considerable amount of rent in their attempts to cope with the problem. But the generous feeling which allowed tenants to partition their little farms to provide for their families, until the sub-divisions became so small that the holder could neither live on his produce nor pay any rent, could only end by aggravating the situation.

If it is essential to bring a charge against the average eighteenth century landlord for what he did or left undone in connection with this phase of emigration, it can mostly be resolved into the admission that he possessed neither the capital nor the brains to solve a problem which, in a rather different form, is still perplexing the statesmen of the twentieth century.

MARGARET I. ADAM.

<sup>1</sup> Alex. Irvine, Minister of Rannoch, *Scots Magazine*, Feb. 1803.

<sup>2</sup> 'Every candid observer of things will admit that from the Highlands, even under the old system, emigration must have taken place to a certain extent, unless the growing population had been reduced by worse causes than the one complained of—by the sword, the small-pox, or other destructive maladies.'—*Highland Society Transactions*, 1807.