

2. Rehearsal: The Eyes of the People.

‘Look around you and see the nobility, without kindness to friends; they are of the opinion that you do not belong to the soil’.

THE IMPACT of crudity exists in direct proportion to its grasp of the essential. Therefore: the unions of the English and Scottish crowns and parliaments (the disconvention of the latter so lately overturned) in 1603 and 1707 respectively established a unitary ship of national state with its decks cleared for imperial expansion on an international stage. But Jacobitism in the Scottish Highlands remained at the very least an irritant to this process, with risings taking place on one scale or another in 1689, 1715 and 1719.

The final one came along in 1745. The following year saw an end to the nonsense, however, and the Highlands were subject to first a military and then a commercial (and shortly, recreational) colonial occupation.

The chief features of this were, or would become, clearance and emigration; the exploitation of natural resources through sheep-farming and deer-afforestation; the exploitation of population resources through military recruitment; the smashing asunder of traditional society and its established pattern of class relations; the divorce by force of the common people from the occupancy of a land they looked upon as their own; and the invention of a tradition today identified as the cult of Balmorality.

The process was crude - so, indeed, were the times - but it represented for the government a very firm grasp of the essential. The characterisation of the process may be crude too, in that it does

scant justice to the subtleties involved. But it also commands, apart from the virtue of brevity, a sure sense of the essential.

As the Gaelic poet John MacCodrum wrote, 'Look around you and the see the nobility without pity for poor folk, without kindness to friends; they are of the opinion that you do not belong to the soil, and though they have left you destitute they cannot see it as a loss'.

The common people did not wait long to feel the effects of the process. If they would not join the services of the Crown (in which, to quote Wolfe's celebrated phrase, it would be 'no great mischief' if they were to fall), they could be migrated, that their hardy characteristics and imaginative minds might otherwise contribute to the construction of Empire. And removal from their homes was the first stage in this, their improvement.

The process has been widely documented, and not only by those writers whose work presumes to the majesty of established fact. No less a novelist than Stevenson, for instance, attributes the following to a character (in *Kidnapped*) on the shores of the sound of Mull:

'In the mouth of Loch Aline we found a great sea-going ship at anchor. As we got a little nearer, it became plain that she was a ship of merchandise; and what still more puzzled me, not only her decks, but the sea-beach also, were quite black with people, and skiffs were continually plying to and fro between them. Yet nearer, and there began to come to our ears a great sound of mourning, the people on board and those on the shore crying and lamenting one to another so as to pierce the heart. Then I understood this was an emigrant ship bound for the American colonies'.

Stevenson's scene would be in reality replicated time and again in the years to come. In the Arisaig area, for instance, the

townships of Bun na Caim, Port Na Luchag, Rubh and Ceann an Leothaid were emptied a little later in the same century. The Jane and the Lucy took 200 people away from Druim an Daraich; and a month later the British Queen took another 87 people away, from Arisaig itself. There were scores, hundreds, of other such little emigrations: though occasionally less predictable material comes to light, as in the Gaol Journal memoirs of the exiled Irish nationalist John Mitchel.

‘We have ridden to a lonely region, known as the Blue Hill, being a succession of small hollows lying westward to a high mountain which bounds our valley at one side. Went up to the first settler’s place we came to, a rather humble wooden house, and was received most joyfully by the proprietor, one Kenneth MacKenzie, an ancient settler, from Ross-shire. He brought us in, sent our horses to the stable, introduced me to his wife (one of the MacRae’s), a true Gaelic woman of tall stature and kindly tongue, who speaks Gaelic better than English, though thirty years an exile. As we sat round the table tall youths and maidens came in, and were addressed by such names as Colin, Jessie and Kenneth. Here is a genuine family of Tasmanian Highlanders, trying to make a Ross-shire glen under the southern constellations’.

What the common people thought of this improving emigration, or said of it amongst themselves, was no recorded - unless behind the cautiously illuminated veils of their poets. And such attempts as these common people may have made to halt the process are poorly documented too. And yet, from the closing years of the eighteenth century, there were signs of popular disaffection with the new order of things in the Highlands: scattered and unsynchronised though these signs were.

By the middle of the eighteenth century there were reports of 'widespread disaffection' from Argyll, where ambitious landlord plans were frustrated by a spirit of popular resistance. And as early as 1782, there was an attempt to stop sheep-farming in its early and destructive tracks in the Great Glen. Only the government and legal authorities, in the shape of the Home Office and the Lord Advocate, preserved its memory in durable fashion. Their records testify that during that spring two prospective Great Glen sheep farmers, one from the southern Highlands and Breadalbane and the other already a sheep farmer in the Borders, brought themselves to the inn at Letterfinlay on the eastern shores of Loch Loch in Inverness-shire.

These men had come to look at part of the lands of George Cameron of Letterfinlay with a view to leasing it as a sheep farm. Intelligence of their coming had clearly, however, spread among the people of the district. Their opinion of sheep-farming, and the forces it represented, can readily be assessed from what ensued. On the evening of 28 May, John Cameron MacInnes, 'Dark John' as he was known in the area, along with a group of local people (many of whom, and not for the last time either, were women) set upon the would-be sheep farmers, beating them severely in the process. The following day too, as the farmers were making their way back down the glen towards the government stronghold of Fort William, MacInnes appeared from behind a wall and after threatening and abusing them 'fired several shots at them'.

Soon afterwards, at Strathoykel on the border of the counties of Sutherland and Ross, there were signs of further and more serious dissent, with reports of a 'combination' of recently-evicted indigents formed to 'steal and destroy the sheep and lambs' of a tenant-farmer originally from Perthshire and currently leasing land

from Sir John Ross of Balnagowan Castle. The aim of the combination was to force the tenant, Geddes, to give up his sheep farm, thus forcing Ross to return it to its previous occupants.

Ross was a former vice-admiral who had arrived at Balnagowan in 1762; indeed, he was the first landlord to come to the north of Scotland with the specific intention of exploiting the region by sheep-farming. Soon after his arrival, therefore, he began to organise the importation of sheep to the district, along with south-country shepherds. This did not impress the native population, as Sir George Steuart MacKenzie was to observe in his general survey of the county a few decades later. These shepherds 'found themselves very disagreeably situated, amongst a race of people who considered them as intruders, whose language they did not understand, and who used every cut to discourage them, and to render their lives miserable'.

They had, Sir George was to observe, to struggle against the prejudices of the people, 'which were inveterate against the new system', and it was with great difficulty that the people of the district had been restrained from acts of violence. The precise nature of that restraint is nowhere recorded. But considerably more is known, however, about another and much greater surge of direct-action opposition, which was centred on Kildermorie in 1792, and which has since become known as the Year of the Sheep.

A long time afterwards, the minister of Rosskeen was to observe that prior to that year, the minds of the people had been 'irritated by recent occurrences'. And he went on:

'As the sheep-farming system was progressing in every corner of the northern Highlands and the people driven year after year from the fields of their fathers, their minds were exasperated at what they

deemed oppression, and thus were ready to adopt any course, however violent, which they foolishly thought would rid them of sheep and sheep-farmers’.

At the centre of the dispute was the conduct of two farmers who had come to the district in or around 1790, leasing land for sheep from the owner, Sir Hector Munro (MP for Inverness Burghs for the previous 24 years). Their arrival was greeted with alarm by the natives of the district. As Sir George Steuart MacKenzie noted, ‘strong symptoms of opposition began to appear about this time, among the lower orders of the people’. Nor was this opposition entirely isolated in nature, for events far beyond the Highlands had induced ‘the lower classes inhabiting the low country to make common cause with the dispossessed Highlanders’.

It was rumoured, for instance, that a Gaelic-language edition of Paine’s Rights of Man was spreading rapidly through the Highlands. In public affairs a well-rooted rumour can command amazing strength, and sedition in an unknown language must surely be counted by any propertied Žlite as a danger most doubly poisonous. In any case, with these ‘rights of man’ as the watchword of the tumultuous events then under way in revolutionary France, the very idea of such a book can only have struck terror into the hearts of the land-owning class in the Scottish north.

Therefore, ‘at the unfortunate time when the spirit of revolution was fast gaining ground over the whole Kingdom’, an open insurrection broke out in 1792, with the aim of simply driving the newcomers back whence they had come. The conduct of Sir Hector Munro’s tenant-farmers, Cameron brothers from Lochaber, served as the spark for this insurrection. They complained to Sir Hector that the cattle of the natives were being allowed to graze on land

they had leased for sheep: and soon enough the Camerons began to impound such cattle, demanding a fine as a condition of their release.

In May of that year all the cattle belonging to the people of Strathrusdale, the glen immediately to the north of Kildermorie, crossed onto the Cameron's land - where they were at once impounded by shepherds and penned at the western end of Loch Moire. The owners of the cattle sent a messenger to the people of Ardross, further down the glen, to ask their assistance in the recovery of the stock by force rather than fine. The joint party of Strathrusdale and Ardross people were then led to the pen by one Alexander Wallace, where they overpowered the Camerons and took re-possession of their cattle. Wallace himself disarmed one of the Camerons of a firearm and a foot-long dirk (which, a century later, was still in possession of Wallace's grandson).

Thereafter, the seizing of cattle was discontinued. But the Camerons turned instead to the law. Four months later, at the Inverness Circuit Court, Lord Stonefield tried eight men of Strathrusdale, including Alexander Wallace, on charges of 'riot, assault, and battery, by assembling with a number of other persons, and forcibly relieving from a poind-fold certain cattle confined there, and at the same time assaulting and beating the gentlemen and his servants'. The good jurors of the town, though, found the defendants not guilty, and they were released to return to their glen.

Kildermorie had by then sparked much greater developments, however. Having reclaimed their cattle, the people of Strathrusdale went on the offensive with a vengeance some weeks later that summer. At the end of July they gathered for a wedding in the area. Given the rural nature of their community, such a meeting was rare

for these people, rather than an everyday event. Nothing is now known about that wedding; and written history is, in any case, a grotesquely incompetent means of recovering the currents of popular consciousness in conditions of social repression.

But between the whisky and the dancing and the matchmaking, what did the people - within the private citadel that was their Gaelic language - talk about? What did they know of events in the wider world? Had the sentiments of the radical press in the south filtered to the north of Scotland? What might they have thought of the spirit of that scandalous and revolutionary sentiment, expressed in the contemporary radical newspaper *Black Dwarf*: 'The earth is the common property of man. In its produce we have a common right as a means of preserving our existence - and he is a robber and murderer, who would prevent me from obtaining that subsistence'.

Had the people of Strathrusdale been following the great events shaking France over the previous three years?

There, in July 1789, the capital had fallen to the mob, which had promptly looted 30,000 muskets from the HTMtel des Invalides and stormed the Bastille - that hated symbol of former tyranny. And that season, an impromptu army of peasants left across the blue summer sky a langorous trail of smoke from the castles and manor-houses that it had burned. Then, at the end of August the Assembly, still at Versailles, had adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, with its implicit approval of the 'right of rebellion'. In the following three years, the destruction of the nobility had gathered pace: and the royal family was dragged back from Varennes to Paris in the hot June of 1791, prisoners of the people in arms. (Louis XVI would be executed in January, 1793).

Is it credible that the people gathered at that wedding knew nothing of these great - and hopeful - events in France? Is it likely that the storming of the Bastille as a symbol of tyranny inclined them to think of similar symbols rather closer to home? Did the notion of the Rights of Man strike a common chord that day, as the celebrations gathered pace?

We do not know now, and never can do in detail. But we do at least know that at that wedding the leaders of the people plotted to drive away all the sheep, and by implication all the sheep-farmers, in the entire district. Two days later they issued a proclamation to that effect, distributed to all the neighbouring parishes. Soon afterwards, hundreds of people were gathering at Strathoykel.

Their plan, which they quickly began to effect, was simple: to drive south all the sheep that they could find in the parishes of Lairg, Creich and Strathoykel itself. Within days of this drive getting under way, another 200 men, from the Balnagowan estate, had joined them and were also driving sheep southwards. By the end of that first week, perhaps 10,000 head of sheep were on the move. The authorities took immediate fright. The sheriff-depute of the county, Donald MacLeod, wrote to the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, asking that a force of the Black Watch be sent north to crush what MacLeod saw (with some reason) as rank sedition and open rebellion.

The Lord Advocate wrote to the Home Secretary to report that sheep farming was very unpopular in the Highlands, as it 'tended to remove the inhabitants from their small possessions and dwelling houses'. The Home Secretary replied to the effect that it was 'undisputably necessary that the most vigorous and effectual

measures should be taken for bringing these daring offenders to punishment' - and ordered troops to proceed north with all despatch.

By now, muskets were reported to be in the possession of the men involved in the drive, while the local landlords believed that some of the seditious drovers had recently been visiting Inverness for the purpose of purchasing gunpowder. In Edinburgh, serious accounts of the rising began to circulate. The Evening Courant reported that 3,000 sheep had been drowned by 'people rendered desperate by poverty'. The sheriff-depute wrote again to the Lord Advocate. 'Not one constable had ventured or dared apprehend' any of the man taking part in the sheep drive. The men of property in the district were now, he reported, 'so completely under the heel of the populace that should they come to burn our houses or destroy our property in any way their caprice may lead them, we are incapable of resistance'.

The sheriff-depute also wrote to his opposite number in the county of Inverness. 'You can be no stranger to the tumults, commotions, and actual seditious acts that are going on in this country. The flame is spreading. I understand a force of about 400 are now actually employed in collecting the sheep. I have the Lord Advocate's orders to proceed against the insurgents, should it be necessary, to the last extremity'.

In the event, this final extremity involved a joint attack at midnight some days later by the local gentry on horseback, along with the soldiers sent by the Lord Advocate, upon the drovers' ranks. Unsurprisingly or otherwise, the drovers scattered - an excellent outcome and a timely one, in the view of the sheriff-depute, for the spirit of sedition was afoot in the northern hills.

As he noted later, 'A regular plan for a general insurrection was formed. The spirit of violence was carried so far as to set the civil power at defiance; the laws were trampled on; there appeared no safety for property; and the gentlemen of the country seemed to be subjected to the power and control of an ungovernable mob [which was] linked by solemn ties and engagements. The first object of their united exertions was to banish and drive off all the sheep from the hills of Sutherland and Ross'.

The lower orders of these counties had been infected - in the considered view of the sheriff-depute - with a turbulent spirit of anarchy, and they had talked of other 'improvements' as soon as they had banished the 'noxious' sheep. Had the sheep-drive been allowed to continue for another week, the sheriff-depute added, a force of 2,000 soldiers would not have managed to suppress 'the insurrection which would ensue not only in this but in the counties which surround us'.

Therefore, in September, the ringleaders of the drive appeared in court in Inverness, charged with 'advising, exciting, and instigating persons riotously and feloniously to invade, seize upon, and drive away from the grounds of the proprietors flocks of sheep', thus daringly insulting the law, disturbing the public peace, threatening property, and placing its owners 'at the mercy of a lawless and seditious mob'. Unsurprisingly, they were all found guilty. Two were sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay (Scotland's loss, it might be thought, as Australia's gain): while other sentences included life imprisonment, banishment and various terms in gaol.

Subsequently, all the prisoners escaped from their captors and disappeared from history, as least so far as it was recorded by the authorities of the time. And if their people, or their descendants,

knew what became of them, they took good care not to speak about it too loudly.

For this careful silence, they had good reason too. In the half-century after Culloden, the economic basis of the old Highland society was increasingly challenged on two fronts; first, the demand for wool from the growing manufacturing centres of the southern cities; and second, the demand for industrial products made from seaweed, import of which products had been stopped by the wars with revolutionary and later Bonapartist France.

The booming demand for wool forced up its price to unprecedented levels at the turn of the nineteenth century, and served strongly to encourage the growth of sheep farming in the Highlands - for spectacular profits were waiting to be made by landlords and sheep-farmers alike. As a result, huge areas of the Highlands were earmarked for 'development' into sheep farms (once the native population had been evicted), while the 'competition for farms became excessive, and rents were given which were often extravagant'.

These were to be increasingly happy years, then, for the new or longer-established (and increasingly Anglicised) Ĺlites of Highland society. By August 1807, for instance, the coming-of-age of the eldest son of the Marquis and Marchioness of Stafford was celebrated at Dornoch, with two companies of the Sutherland Volunteers to 'fire volleys after each of the leading toasts': while the following summer the Inverness Courier was able to record that the Highlands were becoming 'a holiday resort for southern gentlemen'. A year later, the Journal could note: 'This place for some days past has been the resort of immense numbers of persons of rank and

fashion who at this season of the year generally visit the north for the purpose of viewing its beautiful and romantic scenery'.

Thus did the paper mark one more stepping-stone to the coming cult of Balmorality (for not many years earlier, the Highlands and everything associated with them had been perceived as a barbarian swamp of intrigue and sedition).

The times, however, were less than easy for the natives of this so-newly romantic land. Already, some thirty or forty vessels were arriving yearly in London with Hebridean kelp. For this vastly profitable trade, the common people were to pay in the way of eviction from the land, or semi-enslavement on the sea-shore in harvesting the seaweed. For a time, indeed, the landlords did their best to prevent emigration. That way, they secured for themselves empty and ready-made sheep-farms in the interiors of their estates, while retaining on their margins the recently-evicted inhabitants of these interiors - now improved to the status of a cheap labour-force for the gathering of kelp.

Emigration nevertheless went on. From Thurso, for instance, 130 natives were shipped out, bound towards Pictou across the Atlantic Ocean. Although they made the passage in a matter of weeks, they did not land in Canada, being wrecked off Newfoundland, and all being drowned. From Leith the following spring the Pampler sailed, with an emigrant cargo from the parishes of Farr, Lairg, Creich and Rogart: she too foundered, and all were lost.

Unsurprisingly, those who remained were as determined as before in their opposition to these new forces over which they commanded so little control. There was another sign of determined anti-landlord feeling, under guise of a religious grievance, in eastern

Ross and Sutherland. The appointment of local clergy was in the gift of the landlords; but trouble broke out when the Marchioness of Stafford imposed a new minister on those people who remained in Creich. Consequently, the minister was presented under protection of the military, 'when a riot ensued in which Captain Kenneth MacKay of Torboll had his sword shivered to pieces by stones thrown at him by an old woman of seventy'.

According to a memoir of the time, published many years later: 'The people were opposed to him, and his settlement was one of those violent ones. The parishioners rose en masse, and barred the church against the presbytery, so that the Sutherland Volunteers were called out to keep the peace. The people never afterwards attended Mr. Cameron's ministry'.

In 1813, there was further violence in the area, on a much larger scale. It was associated once again with the Sutherland family - along with their commissioner James Loch, their agent William Young, and their prospective sheep farmer, Patrick Sellar. The head of the family, George Granville Leveson-Gower, was Duke of Sutherland for just the last six months of his life. When he was 27 he married the 19-year-old Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland. She brought to the union two-thirds of the county, 1,735 square miles of the Highlands, along with the rents of the 25,000 people who inhabited them. Throughout their marriage this couple was to enjoy an annual income of around £300,000 (and an annual expenditure to match). In one year alone, £30,000 was spent on Stafford House, while other establishments were maintained at Lilleshall in Shropshire, Trentham in Staffordshire, and at Dunrobin Castle on the coast just north of Golspie.

This wealth derived largely from the efforts of the coal miners whom the Sutherlands employed in Staffordshire: for in 1803, the duke had inherited his father's marquesate and estates in both Staffordshire and Shropshire, along with the huge fortune of his uncle, the Duke of Bridgewater.

During the turbulent war which was shaking Europe at this time, the countess raised from her indigenous tenants a force of soldiery by the simple expedient of directing five hundred of them into her 'volunteer' Sutherland Highlanders: the sort of men of whom Eckermann was thinking when he described to Goethe, 'the Highlanders as he saw them that June day on the field of Waterloo, stepping forth erect and powerful on their brawny limbs, so physically perfect that they looked like men in whom there is no original sin'.

In the absence of these tenants from Sutherland, however, great changes were under way. They were accelerated by the arrival there of Patrick Sellar and William Young. Sellar, a lawyer possessed of all the fabled vision of his trade, had spent the previous three years as a procurator in Moray: but what he really wanted to do, was to make some serious money. Young, on the other hand, was on his way north at the invitation of the Sutherlands, to take up the post of estate manager for them. Two years earlier, in 1807, the countess had written of her husband that 'he is seized as much as I am with the rage of improvements'. Seventy years later old men could still recall, to the Royal Commission into crofting conditions in the Highlands, the names of forty-eight settlements cleared or people in the parish of Assynt alone.

When the same Commission visited Helmsdale, its first witness Angus Sutherland recalled: 'In the year 1815, when many

natives of the parish were fighting for their country at Waterloo, their homes were being burned in Kildonan Strath by those who had the management of the Sutherland estate. The people of the parish of Kildonan, numbering 1574 souls, were ejected from their holdings, and their houses burned to the ground. These burnings were carried on under the direction of Mr. Patrick Sellar, who was at the time under-factor on the estate, and who was also tenant of the land from which the people were evicted, and which their ancestors had held from time immemorial'.

Underlying these evictions was a clash of attitude that can still echo quietly in the Highlands of today. Sellar's view of the native inhabitants of the county was clear. As he wrote to the Lord Advocate, 'Lord and Lady Stafford were pleased humanely to order a new arrangement of the Country. It surely was a most benevolent action, to put these barbarous hordes into a position where they could advance in civilisation'.

Young described the people of Kildonan, who were in due course to be burned out of their homes, as a 'set of savages', adding that they were no better than banditti, implacably opposed to their being evicted, and who could thus only be turned out by force. Young also complained to Earl Gower, later second duke, of the 'unaccountable prejudices' of the people, and wrote to the countess herself to complain that a 'more provoking lawless set of people than many of the Kildonaners never inhabited a civilised country'.

The background to these bitter complaints lay in a refusal of the people of Kildonan to be 'improved'. In 1812, they had been given notice to quit. At the end of that year, the land they had indeed occupied from time immemorial was divided into three sheep farms, while eighty tenants were to be transplanted to plots beside

the coastal seashore. In the bitter January of the following year, agents for the intending sheep-farmers arrived to inspect the land in question, but were met by a crowd who told them that if sheep 'were put upon that ground there should be blood'. A shepherd was also cursed as 'one of these English devils come to the country', and warned that 'before Easter every shepherd's house would be set on fire and burned to the bare walls'. Another two shepherds (not for the last time) were force-marched to a meeting and insulted, interrogated, threatened - and then released with a warning to quit the district.

At an all-night meeting in the Kilearnan mill, the suggestion was also put that 'the men of the strath of Kildonan ought to rise' to stop the farmers, and 'that both sides of the strath ought to rise'. Young wrote to his superiors in alarm, claiming that 'the natives rose in a body and chased the valuers off the ground and now threaten the lives of every man who dares dispossess them'.

Young believed that the eyes of the Highlands were on them, 'to see how the war will end', and added that 'all our movements are watched and everything we do is improperly construed'. As a result, civil warrants instructing the people to get out were obtained in the courts and agents sent to serve them. But they were followed by a hostile and threatening crowd and were 'apprehensive of their lives'. The sheriff-substitute, with Sellar and Loch, met a crowd of 150 men in the Kildonan schoolhouse, and were told that the people had a right to the land because of promises made to them at the time the Sutherland Highlanders had been raised. Sellar, the trained lawyer, replied that the assurances only ran until 1808 and were therefore void - though those who had enlisted on the basis of the promises were still on active service abroad.

Young later told his employers: 'Their answer was, it may well be so but we will hold the land until the men are delivered to us again'. Sellar also wrote to the countess, reporting that: 'I returned on Tuesday night from the parish of Kildonan where I am sorry to say we did not succeed in our endeavours to make peace with the rioters. That is to say, the most daring fellows being entirely hostile, the people refused to sign a Bond retracting their threats and obliging themselves to keep the peace, and their orators declared that they were entitled to keep possession of their grounds and would allow no Shepherd to come to the Country. At the same time the Eyes of the People of the other parishes are watching us. We find Spies hanging about our dwellings from Lairg, Rogart and from Assynt. Could there be any hope of success in so desperate a project, I am satisfied that the rioters would find friends in every Quarter'.

The people later attempted to reason with Young and the estate authorities, sending a messenger with a letter of proposals to the sheriff-substitute. Having delivered it, however, the messenger was promptly gaoled at Dornoch. At once there was talk of rescuing him and there were rumours that 1,800 men from the Reay country in the north west, and also Caithness, were going to 'assemble and drive the sheep out of the country'.

Sellar wrote again to the countess, having 'ascertained that the whole population feel desirous of success to the rioters, knowing that they have one common interest in the exclusion of strangers'. He continued, 'Even the people of Armadale, finding that our purpose is to cram the property full of people, make common cause with the rioters, and have their communication with the people of Kildonan'.

Once again the services of the soldiers were called upon. The Sutherlands told Loch that they were 'fully sensible' of the propriety of the 'very fair, just and liberal arrangement which you proposed for the settlement of the people', and asked him to go cautiously before he had 'recourse to the last extremity of forcing them into submission'. They also, however, 'gave their Authority and approbation to any measure you may hereafter find it necessary to adopt to carry your proposed arrangements into full and complete effect'.

The people petitioned the Prince Regent, sending with the petition a delegate, William MacDonald, who was a former recruiting sergeant for the Sutherland regiment. Young wrote to the countess, asking that she use her influence to make sure that the delegate's army pension be withdrawn from him - 'for it will not be MacDonald's fault if a rebellion does not follow'.

While MacDonald was in London, however, the soldiers arrived and the leaders of the people were arrested. Understandably enough, opposition collapsed. By the end of March 1813, the soldiers were withdrawn, those people arrested were released and proceedings were dropped. Sellar explained that if a judicial enquiry had followed the trouble, the results would have been 'more unpleasant than anything at present before us'.

Defeated, 700 people applied to emigrate and by July more than 100 had left the estate. The removals went ahead and within two years around 100 men from the strath were working as fishermen out of Helmsdale. Kildonan was given over to sheep: its native people lived on the barren shores of their county; and on the banks of Canada's Red River, near Winnipeg, in an area which is still called Kildonan to this day.

And in 1815 one James Sutherland led another party of people from Kildonan and Upper Farr to the Red River. His great-grandson was to be Angus Sutherland, the Land League leader of years to come, and one of the 'Crofter Members' elected to parliament in the great anti-landlord agitation of the 1880s.

By 1815, then, a pattern of resistance had been set. But there were many years of conflict - and defeat - still to come.