

3. the Growth of Resistance.

‘Hardly a gentleman present or soldier came back without being hurt and several severely. One woman was shot and it is supposed mortally, another was badly wounded in the mouth and eye by a bayonet, and a young lad was shot in the legs. Their principal force of reserve, it was said, were armed and reported to be about five hundred’.

FOURTEEN HUNDRED feet above the village of Golspie on the eastern shore of Sutherland stands the monument to the first Duke of Sutherland. Quarried over four years from the side of the hill’s red sandstone, the plinth and pedestal stand seventy-six feet tall, while the duke (in a stone toga) rears upwards for another thirty feet. Together, they are visible for eighty miles. The monument was, according to contemporary press reports, designed by Burns and modelled by Francis Chantrey, with construction entrusted to one Mr. Theakstone.

The stone duke faces out over the sea with his back turned to the empty glens of Sutherland. In this sense, at least, the monster memorial is a fitting tribute to events in the nineteenth-century Highlands: and the carnival of land-trading and Balmorality so characteristic of those years.

In the spring of 1812, for instance, the Duke of Gordon’s 14,000-acre Glenfeshie forest was offered ‘adapted either for a summer-grazing to black cattle or for shooting-ground to a sportsman who might wish to preserve the tract for deer’. Little more than a year later, a number of new sheep farms on the Glengarry estate was being advertised to let. Shortly, it would be

announced that the first sheep and wool market at Inverness had been a glowing success: while it would also be reported that sheep-farming was growing so rapidly in the Highlands that Sutherland alone was already home to 100,000 Cheviots.

The wealth generated by this sort of success was available to landlords, recent or more established, for the pursuit of romance. Under the inspiration of MacDonnell of Glengarry, a number of gentlemen convened at Inverlochy to band themselves into a 'pure Highland Society, in support of the true Dress, Language, Music and Characteristics of our illustrious and ancient race'. In Skye, a 'magnificent mansion' was being erected on the shores of the Sound of Sleat by Lord MacDonald and his kelp profits (though with the end of the war with the French, the price of kelp would plummet - signalling a further round of hardship for the indigents who had gathered it). And the following summer Glengarry's Society of True Highlanders was dancing and feasting at Inverlochy, everyone attired in the 'globular silver buttons of their ancestry, with the highly finished pistols, dirks, powder-horns and other paraphernalia giving an air of magnificence'.

Glengarry himself had by now taken to wearing for his public appearances what he called the 'complete Highland garb, belted plaid, broadsword, pistols and dirk': and thus was 'the promised land of modern romance' launched on passage.

For the common people of the Highlands, of course, there was little on offer from this promised land except patronage and oppression. But in the face of it, popular disaffection with this new order remained unabated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

Indeed, the Kildonan dispute was hardly over when a new one developed at Assynt. It was formally concerned with the installation of a new clergyman by the landlord, in whose gift such an appointment lay: but behind it ran a swift current of more general anti-landlordism. As one agent of the Sutherland family complained to Loch, he had gone to the district with the new minister but they had been driven home by these 'mountain savages', who had also plotted to kidnap him and send him bound by the wrists in an open boat to sea. According to Donald Sage's chronicle of the period, the new minister's appointment among these 'savages' was a personal arrangement between himself and the Sutherlands.

'The people of Assynt were not consulted in the matter', wrote Sage, 'but they took the liberty of thinking for themselves. The mob which now assembled told them, through their leaders, that the only way by which they could escape broken bones was that each should get on his nag with all convenient speed, nor slack bridle till they had crossed the boundaries of the parish, for they were determined that the presentee should not on that day nor on any other day be settled minister of Assynt'.

As a result of this, a warship was ordered from Leith with 150 soldiers; and five leaders of the Assynt people were taken to Inverness, where one was sentenced to nine months in gaol. Once again, the authorities had triumphed. But by now, affairs in Sutherland were drawing attention far to the south.

As one Lord Pitmilley wrote: 'It was the object of Lady Sutherland to turn the mountainous districts into sheep pasturage, to bring the inhabitants to the coast, and set out portions of land for their convenience. At the same time, it was the intention of the Noble Proprietrix to introduce among the people regular habits of

industry. This object, however advantageous, was extremely unpopular, and the judicious attempts at improvement were thwarted in every possible way. So far did these prejudices prevail that in the years 1812 and 1813, open violence and riot ensued’.

Pitmilley added that even after these riots had been quelled, the ‘unreasonable’ opposition to improvement was not at an end. A new mode of attack was reserved, and ‘every attempt made to poison the public mind. Certain English journals, particularly a paper called the Military Register, teemed with the clamours of the disaffected. It contained attacks on the whole system of management and the most false and inflammatory statements of the mode in which the system was put in execution’.

What Pitmilley meant by this was the popular attempt to thwart the Sutherland agent, and later tenant sheep-farmer Patrick Sellar. At the end of 1813, Sellar had leased land in Strathnaver for a sheep farm. This required the eviction of the glen’s existing inhabitants - including the burning of homes and, allegedly, at least one of their occupants. This time, the people turned to the courts of law, and raised money for a prosecution of Sellar, who was promptly lodged in Dornoch gaol until released on the instructions of the Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh. In April 1816, Sellar nevertheless appeared before the Circuit Court in Inverness charged with murder, oppression and real injury.

His lawyer talked at length of ‘the clamour which had been raised in the country, the prejudices of the people’: and added that ‘if truth and justice were to prevail over malice and conspiracy’, Sellar would ‘obtain an honourable and triumphant acquittal’. The contest in court, in short, was simply a ‘trial of strength between the abettors of anarchy and misrule, and the magistracy as well as the laws of

the country'. The jury was massively weighed in favour of the defendant (if its social composition was any guide) and found Sellar not guilty. The judge (none other than Lord Pitmilley) observed that he hoped that the result would 'have due effect on the minds of the country, which have been so much and so improperly agitated'.

In short, Sellar had won: and though twenty of his sheep had their throats cut, there was no be no further direct-action opposition recorded until 1820.

By the spring of that year Patrick Sellar had already retired as an agent for the Sutherland estates, but was keeping on his sheep-farming interests, from which he had already made a fortune. (Some years later he would buy himself an estate in Morvern for £30,000, suitably distant from the teeming clamours of Sutherland).

In the Highlands generally, the profitability of sheep-farming was pushing to new heights the price of estates, and accelerating the ownership of the Highlands by non-residents. In five years, for instance, the price of the Castlehill estate rose from £8,000 to £80,000: Redcastle, worth £25,000 in 1790, would soon go for £135,000: and Fairburn, with a rental of £700 at the turn of the century, by 1820 was worth £80,000.

Driven by the lure of these spectacular profits, the landlord of Novar, Hugh Munro, announced his intention in the spring of 1820 to clear the natives away from his estate at Culrain and put the land under sheep. Over five hundred people were to be evicted from the west bank of the Kyle of Sutherland and from Strathoykel. At the beginning of February Novar's agents therefore arrived to serve writs of removal, warning those who received them to be gone by Whitsun.

Strathoykel, however, was the place where the people had gathered for the great sheep drive of 1792: and when Novar's agents went to the glen they were met by a hostile crowd which drove them away. The sheriff-depute wrote in alarm to the Inverness Courier, that not only had the party been driven out by force, but that it had been threatened 'that if they returned their lives would be taken and themselves thrown into the Kyle. One of the witnesses who had run away from the terror was pursued and struck with stones to the danger of his life'.

The local gentry urged Novar to enforce his writs. Meanwhile, the sheriff-depute asked the Lord Advocate for five hundred soldiers and three cannon, as if seriously anticipating another Year of the Sheep. In the event, forty policemen and twenty-five militiamen, along with a party of local gentlemen, marched on the recalcitrant natives to enforce the writs. A riot ensued, in which one woman was shot dead. The Inverness Courier reported, 'A body of three or four hundred people, chiefly women, posted behind a stone dyke, rushed out upon the soldiers with a hideous yell and attacked them with sticks, stones and other missiles. Two or three of the women were severely wounded'.

And the new factor for the Sutherland estate wrote that the sheriff-depute's force had been, 'opposed by an overwhelming number of men and women organised and armed to give battle. Hardly a gentleman present or soldier came back without being hurt, and several severely. One woman was shot and it is supposed mortally, another was badly wounded in the mouth and eye by a bayonet and a young lad was shot in the legs. Their principal force of reserve, it was said, was armed and reported to be about five hundred'.

The sheriff-depute, his carriage overturned and his writs scattered, fled, to be pursued for four miles to the inn at Ardgay and much abused on the way. But the local minister of the Church of Scotland went among the rebels, counselling 'the madness and inutility of violence': and the short-lived rising came to an end.

The rising, however, served as something of a warning to the landlords that they should proceed warily, and take care to avoid publicity. James Loch wrote to his agent in Sutherland that 'every motion is watched and if you do anything at all which will occasion public observation it will be brought before the House of Commons'. Loch also instructed his agents that the burnings of houses should no longer be associated with clearing operations - but clearing, nevertheless, was still to proceed in both Sutherland and other estates.

Shortly after the events at Culrain, further evictions were planned for Gruids. It was reported that the Gruids people were 'mustering and preparing all sort of weapons', and making ready to 'oppose whatever species of force may be brought against them'. Sheriff-officers arrived with writs of removal: but they were 'literally stripped of their clothes, deprived of their Papers, and switched off the bounds of the Property'.

There were soon further disturbances at Achness: and again at Gruids, where the previous attempt to evict the people had clearly failed. For Achness, one hundred soldiers were made ready, as it was feared that the people there were to be reinforced by supports from Caithness and Ross-shire: while at Gruids the following year a sheriff-officer was again assaulted and deforced of his papers. One landlord's agent complained that the authorities were not strong enough to eject the Gruids people, and that the constables were

untrustworthy as 'they supported the general feeling of the natives'. Loch himself believed that there existed 'a regular organised system of resistance' to the civil power in the north of Scotland, and feared something like a co-ordinated and generalised rising against the landlords.

Thus in the spring of 1821 soldiers were sent towards Achness and Gruids. Again, if understandably, opposition collapsed, with the local agent of the Sutherlands boasting that 'they are completely cowed and I am certain that we shall have no more trouble'. Plots of land on the barren northern coast were made available. The local agents of the estate were instructed (in an uncanny echo of events at Knoydart 130 years later), 'Let the less guilty have lots on their signing that they are sorry for their conduct and that they acknowledge the kindness of Lord and Lady Stafford': for as Loch himself observed, 'it would produce a great sensation if any set of people were wandering about without habitation'.

By then, the clearances of Sutherland were all but completed: while for the Highland gentry, life in general was better than ever.

In Edinburgh, the newly-formed Celtic Society, whose principal object was 'to promote the use of the Highland garb in the Highlands', hosted a dinner under the patronage of the ubiquitous Glengarry. Walter Scott was a guest and happy to sing for his supper an appropriate tune: he remembered 'with delight' how he used to 'cling round the knees of some aged Highlanders' and listen to the tales and traditions of 'that romantic country'. A year later, Glengarry was to appear in London at the Coronation of George IV, dressed in what he called 'the full costume of a Highland chief' - complete with a brace of pistols.

When the same monarch appeared in Edinburgh shortly afterwards in a justly famous development of that same 'traditional Highland costume', sixty-five synthetically 'traditional' Highlanders were there to meet him (the expense of the trip, and costumes, being borne by the Sutherlands). Within weeks, Glengarry was hosting his new sport of Highland Games, where three cows were torn limb from limb at a rate to the competitors of five guineas per limb: a pastime transmuted to our own gentler times as the doubtless equally-traditional entertainment of haggis-hurling.

Not for the last time in Highland history, the gentry assumed for their romantic antics a popular consent and acclaim that was deemed to encompass, as appropriate, joy or grief at the usual rites of passage. They ensured it too, by paying handsomely for it. When Lady Vere presented Lochiel with an heir, for instance, the gentry dined in private while 2,000 lesser 'clansmen' were supplied 'plentifully but not improperly' with whisky: great rejoicing was reported.

When Thomas Alexander Fraser attained the high eminence of his coming-of-age, no less than one hundred gentlemen dined in his honour, while for the lesser 'clansmen' there was free beef, with ale and whisky 'liberally distributed'. The rejoicing, it was reported, was tumultuous: though we may be sure that it was in no way improper. When the Sutherland's eldest son married Lady Howard at London's Devonshire House, the union was reportedly celebrated with 'great rejoicings' (in those few parts of Sutherland not now occupied by sheep).

And in 1828, when Glengarry (who by now was never seen in public without a retinue of kilted 'clansmen') killed himself in Loch Linnhe, 150 gentlemen dined at his funeral: 1,500 others, 'plentifully

supplied with bread, cheese and whisky', were said to have 'grieved greatly'. A few years later, when the Duke of Sutherland was laid out in Dornoch Cathedral, 'heartfelt grief' was reported on behalf of the thousands who came along for the vast quantities of bread, meat and (especially) drink that had thoughtfully been laid-on in expectation of their loyal and tumultuous mourning.

Underlying these events, of course, was a brisk trade in Highland property, which would continue from the year of the disturbances at Gruids and Achness right through for another twenty years. In 1829, for instance, the Sutherland family acquired the Reay estates for £300,000. These lands included the parishes of Tongue, Durness, and Eddrachilis, the land running to 400,000 acres. Some years later, the Duke of Gordon's lands in Badenoch were also transferred: while after Glengarry's death in 1828, his estates - heavily in debt - changed hands too. In 1840, Edward Ellice bought Glenquoich for £32,000 and Lord Ward got the lands of Glengarry for £91,000. (Twenty years later, Ellice bought Glengarry for £120,000).

MacDonald of Clanranald, in the quarter century from 1813, sold land to the value of over £200,000. In 1840, Colonel Gordon of Cluny got the island of Barra for £38,000, and Lord Abinger purchased Inverlochy for £75,000. By 1825, Edinburgh lawyers had acquired four estates in Ross-shire: and in March of the same year, Sir William Fettes paid £135,000 for Redcastle and Ferry - which had, forty years earlier, changed hands for just £26,000.

That year too, MacKenzie of Seaforth bought Lewis for £160,000; while in 1831 Waternish in Skye went to Major Allan MacDonald for around £13,000. A Mr. Baillie, who sailed under the dignifying penant 'of Dochfour' took Dochgarroch for £10,000, which

Corriemoney went to a Colonel Pearce for £13,000. In 1834, Glendale in Skye was sold for £8,600. A fortnight later Torbreck went for £23,000 and Aberlour for £15,000, respectively to the trustees of colonel Baillie of Leys and Mr. Grant 'late of Jamaica'.

In the July of 1835 Mr. Baillie (this time merely 'of Bristol') took land in Badenoch for £7,000; then, in October, at the sale of the Cromartie lands in Ross, Fannich made £6,500 and Lochbroom made over £9,000. A few years earlier such prices would have been considered ruinous, and the editor of the Inverness Courier attributed the rise in estate prices to the prosperity of sheep-farming and 'the passion entertained by English gentlemen for field sports'.

By now, intensive sheep-farming was indeed facing competition from the growing rage for deer-forests, as these entirely treeless stretches of empty mountain were - and are - known.

Thus in 1836 the Earl of Aboyne was reported to have acquired the Glengarry estate for the purposes of sport. In the spring of that same year, the sporting rights over huge areas of Sutherland were on offer, including the rights over the districts of Armadale and Strathnaver (their natural fertility having been brought to the edge of ruin by intensive over-grazing by sheep).

The following year twenty-five square miles around Achnasheen and Loch Fannich were advertised for sporting purposes. In April 1837, Glenelg went for nearly £80,000; and Geanies in Ross went in June to Murray the banker for £60,000. A year later the new owner of Glenelg bought Glenshiel for £25,000; the late Sir Fettes Redcastle's lands changed hands for £120,000; and in 1839 Achany in Sutherland went to James Matheson. And a year after that, 20,000 acres in Argyll were advertised as being suitable for use as a deer-forest; while estates that were not selling

or not for sale were nevertheless enjoying a vast increase in rental income as the scramble for profit from sheep, sport from deer, and status from mere association gathered way.

To the Highlands in these years the rich and romantic poured in a fashionably kilted stream. By 1826 alone, 'the number of fashionable personages' who had visited the Highlands was 'beyond all precedent', with every shooting lodge filled. Soon the Lord Chancellor, on his way north for a free holiday with the Sutherlands at Dunrobin, would be calling on the Duchess of Bedford at her autumn sporting quarters. A month later he would progress south again, having collected at Bedford's lodge the company of 'Mr. Edwin Landseer, the distinguished artist'. (A handful of Bedford's bastards, it has since been acknowledged, had been sired by the bold artiste himself. Not for nothing did her duke record that he'd bought her the place 'to gratify her passion for the heather').

At the same time, Lord Southampton took the shooting, hunting and fishing of Lochbroom: Lords Loftus and Jocelyn were hunting at Flowerdale, while the Duke of Bedford was entertaining Badenoch; and the Duke of St. Albans and Lord Frederick Beauclerk were pleased to appear at the Inverness Meeting 'in full Highland dress'.

Meanwhile, times were less entertaining for the common people of the Highlands. By now, the kelp industry was in ruins and in the outer Hebrides alone some four to five thousand people were on the edge of starvation. By 1828, as a result, hundreds were leaving the west coast ports for the Americas. On the 4th of July that year, two vessels sailed from Lochmaddy, bound towards Canada, with 600 souls aboard. A brig had earlier left Harris for the same destination, and another was 'daily expected to sail from

Canna'. Arrangements were also in hand for the departure of several hundred people from the MacDonald estates in Skye, bound towards Cape Breton. The emigrants were to provide their own food: but 'Highlanders, it is well known, can exist on very little when necessity requires them to do so. Thus for somewhat less than £4 they will reach the promised land'.

By April of the following year, the 'fever of emigration was raging' in Sutherland. Vessels had been organised to sail about the end of May, and 300 people had already secured a passage. In early June, a shipload of emigrants sailed; and a fortnight later two brigs tacked away from Cromarty towards Quebec, carrying another 300 people. And in the summer of 1836, while the gentry of Lochaber met at Fort William with a view to encouraging the further departure of their small tenants to the colonies, the Brilliant sailed from Tobermory towards New South Wales, with 100 passengers from the area of Strontian, 100 from Coll and Tiree, and yet another 100 from Iona, Morvern and Argyll.

For those that remained, conditions worsened. That winter two-thirds of the people in the southern Hebrides were without food. In Inverness four prominent and wealthy townspeople reportedly received threatening letters signed 'Swing'; and a seditious placard signed 'Meal Mob', calling on the common people to assemble the following night, was fixed to a church wall. The authorities, alarmed, 'took precautionary measures' and offered the fortune - to a hungry man - of twenty guineas for the identity of the organisers.

By summer, conditions in the Hebrides were desperate, 'a more deep and universal distress prevails than was ever remembered'. And by 1836 the people of Lewis were in a 'lamentable state of dearth and destitution': while the following

spring destitution was raging across Skye; 'we know not that the history of the British people ever presented such a picture of severe, unmitigated want and misery as is exemplified by the case of the poor Highlanders'.

Unsurprisingly, the oppressions of the period inspired further episodes of overt direct-action against the landlords. In the summer of 1839, there was trouble on Harris. A sheriff and soldiers marched to Borge on the west coast and arrested five tenants. Thereafter, open resistance crumbled. No legal action was taken against the people - it was scarcely required. Still, one member of the gentry observed that its absence did encourage 'resistance to the law' - and within just two seasons, Lord Dunmore and his guests on Harris were shooting 'ten excellent stags, some of them twenty stones in weight'.

A year later, there was again trouble from the turbulent indigents of Culrain. The landlords claimed that a strong body of eviction agents was deforced and put to flight, with the buildings of the chief agent fired and twenty head of stock lost in the blaze. And in the autumn of 1841, there was serious conflict in Durness, centred on the activities of one James Anderson. Anderson, in line with the long-established policy of the Sutherland estate, had encouraged the remaining natives to settle on tiny patches of land close to the shore, by which means he could engage them in his fishing activities at the lowest cost to himself: while ensuring that they slowly fell into a condition of debt-slavery.

Without warning, Anderson had cleared Shegra the previous year; and in August 1841 he announced that it was his intention to evict 163 people in Durness at two days' notice. In September, therefore, a party composed of sheriff-substitute, procurator-fiscal,

sheriff-officers and special constables met with 'stout resistance', in which the women took a 'leading part'. The authorities were put to flight and took refuge in Durine Inne, but the inn came under attack that same night and they were swiftly driven away. The sheriff, Lumsden, recorded that his party had been 'deforced, assaulted, threatened with instant death, and expelled at midnight' by what he called a 'ferocious mob', and reported that no consideration would induce any of his men to return to Durness 'without the aid of military force'.

Lumsden said that he feared a connection with the previous year's trouble at Culrain, and he reported rumours of a generalised rising in the whole district of Tongue. The sheriff wrote to the Lord Advocate demanding infantry to help in the capture of the leaders of the people: and the rumour of the request was enough to invite a popular surrender, with the women involved dispersing to Eddrachillis. Their minister arbitrated, in a manner appropriate (some said) to the nineteenth-century Church of Scotland in the Highlands: he apologised and repented on behalf of his parishioners, and in exchange for their apology and repentance, Anderson was pleased to delay their eviction proceedings for six months.

No criminal prosecution followed. Again, the landlords had won - though the failure to pursue in the courts those who had stood against them, albeit briefly, may well have been a measure of their awareness of their unpopularity. The previous Christmas, after all, there had been a Chartist speaker in Inverness: even the Inverness Courier, 'the organ of the oppressors of Sutherland', had been moved to report his presence. (The Courier had also thought it of relevant interest to its Highlands - and overwhelmingly landowning -

readership to report the killing, earlier, of twenty Chartists in Wales during their attempt to seize Newport).

The landlords continued to demand that their redundant indigents, once barbarous, so recently profitable, but now rather worthless following the collapse of kelp and the growing demand for sheep farms and deer forests, be briskly emigrated. In the early days of 1841, therefore, Henry Baillie, MP for Inverness-shire, brought before Parliament the need for a 'general and extensive system' of emigration to relieve the destitute poor in the Highlands. He wanted the Treasury to find £3 a head to ship 40,000 Highlanders to Canada, thus liberating farms and forests together from the threat to progress which the continuing presence of these indigents was perceived to present.

And by that summer, the official committee on Highland emigration was claiming for the western Highlands and islands what it called an excess of population of between 35,000 and 80,000 people. A well-arranged system of emigration was of primary importance for the relief of destitution, the official committee said, for destitution had been so severe in the 1830s that many thousands would have starved had it not been for relief handouts.

Worse, however, was to come. Five years later, with the failure of that year's potato crop, destitution was 'practically universal' in the Highlands. In June 1846, the people of Harris found their potatoes - by now their staple foodstuff - to be uneatable, and they were beginning to exist on scavenged shell-fish, and sand-eels. Within two months, the total failure of the crop was 'everywhere realised', and distressing reports were 'pouring in from every quarter'. Still on Harris, the poor went to the seashore and gathered limpets, cockles and other shell-fish: and 'by digging in the sands of

Scarista, they get a species of small fish called sand-eels. On these and these only do the subsist’.

By August, it was reported from Inverness that the blight was ‘fast spreading its ravages over this and neighbouring counties’. Black and withered shaws appeared in days; the blight seemed to touch potatoes of any seed, in any land, without warning. In Inverness, the Town Provost called emergency meetings; in Portree, Lord MacDonald also chaired meetings which decided to ask for aid from government; while in Glenmoriston the blight had created ‘havoc in the entire glen’. In Knoydart, Skye, Lochalsh and Kintail, every field was infected; and in Easter Ross too, where the crop was turning into a rotten pulp.

The famine in the Highlands accelerated the process of emigration throughout the following years. From Gairloch and Torridon, 200 made their way to Canada. In early 1847 the Duke of Sutherland sent 400 people from the Reay country to Montreal - while proposing to ‘make the same liberal arrangements’ the next year as well.

The following year the barque Liscard hauled away from Loch Hourne with 300 people from Glenelg, Scotland, bound towards the community of Glenelg, Canada: their landlord had generously ‘provided the means for emigration’. A month later large-scale emigration was reported from Gordon of Cluny’s estates in the southern Hebrides. The Tusker took 500 men from Loch Boisdale for Quebec, and other 250 were ready to follow them: the colonel was reported as having ‘willingly supported’ the emigration.

In the three years from 1847, some 1,000 people left from the Scourie district of Sutherland alone, in which transportation the Duke was pleased to have invested to less than £7,000 of his own miners’

money. Sir James Matheson paid 1,000 people to leave Lewis in 1852. In the same year, the Highland Emigration Society despatched 2,500 sturdy Highlanders to Australia. In the summer of 1851 emigrants sailed from Scrabster to Quebec. In July, a ship set sail from Loch Roag in Lewis; by then, 1,000 people had already left the island. The following month Colonel Gordon was 'supporting' the departure of 1,000 people from South Uist, and of another 500 from Barra.

A year later the Georgina stood away from Greenock with 500 emigrants, bound for Australia. The Rev Dr MacLeod, on the day before they put to sea, addressed them in Gaelic, 'this being the only language they understood'. Two months after that, 400 people - mostly from Skye - departed from Birkenhead, also for the Antipodes. That winter the Captain Baynton sailed from Argyll for Australia, carrying 730 people from Skye, Harris and the Uists. In 1853, the 255-ton brig Countess of Cawdor cleared Inverness with a walking cargo of emigrants on the first day of August; she arrived at Geelong two days after Christmas.

Some of these emigrants were to return abruptly whence they had come. In September 1853 an emigrant ship outward bound from Liverpool for Quebec was driven ashore on the western coast of Vatersay and 360 were drowned; but the process went on unhindered. Just a month later 100 people of Lochaber left for Australia; their landlord, Lochiel, paid one third of their expenses and promised not to pursue his erstwhile Lochaber tenants for any arrears of rent they might have left behind them. Soon afterwards the David MacIver was sailing from Birkenhead with 400 emigrants, a 'considerable number' of whom were 'natives of the Highlands'.

Popular hunger did not, however, disrupt unduly the lives of the Highland elite, most of whom in any case increasingly spent their time far from the northern and western estates. Already, the landowning class in the Highlands was showing a taste for breeding within the gracious confines of its own lordly bedclothes. In the year following the famine, the second Duke of Sutherland's second son the Marquis of Stafford, married at Cliveden Miss Hay MacKenzie of Cromartie. Later, Sutherland's daughter Lady Constance would marry Earl Grosvenor, heir to the Marquiss of Westminster: while two years before the famine, Lady Elizabeth Georgina, Sutherland's eldest daughter, had married the Marquis of Lorne, only son of the Duke of Argyll.

We may suppose with no undue confidence that, throughout the Highlands, popular celebrations of these great unions, if tumultuous, was in no way beyond the borders of strict propriety.

Nor did the famine interrupt the prerogatives and responsibilities of commerce. In 1844, James Matheson bought Lewis for £200,000 of the profits he had made from drug-dealing on a gigantic scale in China. In the next 30 years he was spend another £400,000 on his insular property - some of it on a plan to extract oil from peat, but much of it on the construction of a mock-castle at Stornoway. A year later, in 1845, the Marquis of Salisbury bought the island of Rhum, recently cleared, 'in order to form a shooting ground or deer forest': and in 1855 Sir John Orde bought North Uist. Thus, 'the whole of the Hebrides has changed hands within the last quarter of a century'. That same year, Kilmuir in north Skye went to Captain Fraser for £80,000: his name was one of which much would be heard, and even more said, in the years to come.

Distant echoes of the outside world began to reach the Highlands with a degree of frequency. In the winter of 1847, the cobblers of Inverness formed what the authorities identified as an illegal combination, and declared a closed shop. Four of their leaders were promptly arrested. They were judged at the spring Circuit Court by none other than Lord Cockburn, who had in his younger days been the advocate for Patrick Sellar.

In April 1846, the centenary of Culloden went largely unremembered (at least in public) though part of the dyke behind which the Jacobite line had taken position for a time was still in place. By that summer, hunger-riots were spreading across the eastern Highlands, as the failure of the potato-crop grew imminent, and as corn-merchants stock-piled and exported meal too expensive for the common people to buy. Already a series of riots, extending over several days had shaken Inverness, concerning the export of potatoes.

Several waggons were turned back; the provost's windows were broken; one cart-load was overturned on the pier and the cart thrown into the harbour. At one point 5,000 people were involved in the disturbance, including naavies working on the Caledonian Canal. Two hundred special constables were sworn in, a detachment of the 87th summoned from Fort George, and a number of leaders arrested. The riot 'arose from a fear of scarcity and high prices', it was reported; and as another, smaller, disturbance occurred at Tain, twenty rioters were remanded in custody, of whom three would later be gaoled.

At the same time (ominously, for it was still spring) potato pits opened in Lochcarron were found to be mostly rotten. By the winter there was a riot in Granton-on-Spey, where special constables were

sworn-in to defend the dealers from the meal-mob - for the dealers had refused to sell in small quantities to the villagers. Soon, hunger-disturbances were reported from many parts of the Highlands. Speculation in the south had increased the price of grain to 'a very grievous extent' and - added to the daily shipment of grain away from the Highland ports - had 'very generally alarmed the least informed classes on the shores of the whole northern counties'.

In Ross-shire, there had been 'riotous demonstration to keep the dealers at home'. In Inverness, carts of meal had been turned back at the Waterloo Bridge, and attempts had been made to raid meal-stores. At Evanton, a large crowd prevented the shipment of grain - and the Inverness Courier printed a long list of disturbances, or threatened disturbances, across the Highlands. There were further meal-mob riots in many places, including Beauly, Rosemarkie and Balintraid; and in Avoch soldiers were called from Fort George to put down a riot in the village. At the beginning of March 1847, riots occurred in Ross-shire, many of them in Invergordon and the surrounding area; 100 soldiers were summoned to guard strings of waggons coming to the port with grain after country people had broken into the granaries, to mix various corns and render them unfit for sale (though still edible). In Castleton and Wick there were riots too, and that spring and summer the courts were busy as a result.

Meanwhile, from 1843 the Disruption had overrun the Church of Scotland and torn it apart in the Highlands. Lay patronage, the power of a landlord to appoint as minister a man politically suitable to the landlord cause, was not popular, as the events of the previous years had shown. There were precedents from Clyne, Creich, Assynt, Croy and Kinlochbervie: and in the year of the Disruption the

people of Rosskeen too resisted the induction of a new minister. At Tongue, the church bell-rope was cut, the keyholes in the doors blocked; and at Farr the hammer of the bell was removed and 'the church otherwise opprobriously treated. The Duke of Sutherland had refused sites for Free Churches. That autumn, at Invergordon, a force of soldiers was landed to repress the 'Church rioters'; however, 'apprehensions were made without resistance'.

At Logie and Resolis in the Black Isle, crowds armed with sticks and stones prevented entrance to the churches, incensed at the introduction of new ministers. At Resolis a woman was arrested and gaoled at Cromarty, but she was freed by the mob from her underground cell; her gaoler, on the arrival of the mob, locking himself in another cell. In many places throughout the Highlands, indeed, the landlords were to resist the new Free Church. That resistance can only have encouraged the growing opposition to landlordism in the four decades after 1840. And from that year, certainly, there was a continuing and relentless trickle of landlord-centred direct action across the Highlands.

In 1842, trouble flared at Glencalvie, on the Kindeace estate in Ross-shire. A sheriff-officer was sent to warn away 100 people but his papers were taken from him by a party of men and women, and burned before his eyes. Three days later, the sheriff-substitute and the procurator-fiscal visited the place, but the natives were not intimidated and again they deforced their visitors. The same month there was a great demonstration at Fort William by small tenants and cottars against an attempt to squeeze money from them to pay for roads primarily used by the carriages of the gentry; 500 of the Lochaber poor marched to the town led by pipers; while that

summer the women of the 300-strong community of Lochshell, in the parish of Lochs in Lewis, drove away an eviction party of officials.

The following year, a party of sheriff-officers was deforced at Balcladdich in Assynt while attempting to evict one John MacLeod, and were driven away by perhaps 50 people. The sheriff gathered a force of thirty special constables, marched to Assynt, and arrested the leaders of the action. In 1845, notices of eviction were served on between two and four thousand people in Ross and Cromarty alone. The matter was raised in the House of Commons and the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, went so far as to condemn the proceedings, though he was sure that they had been what he called exaggerated. The editor of the Inverness Courier replied that, on the contrary, the numbers were an underestimation of those involved.

The following month, the case of Glencalvie was also raised in the Commons. The Lord Advocate announced to the House that the facts of the case had been greatly exaggerated and the people (whose landlord was at the time in Australia) had been offered money to help them emigrate. The dispute was reported in the newspapers of the day, and not just the Courier: one John Robertson covered the story for the Glasgow National, and the Times send a special correspondent to the north. Their presence and reports underlay, at least partly, the mildly apologetic and certainly defensive excuses given to parliament by the government's spokesmen.

The factor of the estate, however, pressed ahead with the plan to evict people from the land for which they had paid £55 in rent, though the Times special correspondent reported incredulously that 'for the same land no farmer in England would give [more than] £15

at the utmost'. Of the people themselves, Robertson wrote, 'They are exceedingly attached to the glen. Their associations are all within it. Their hearts are rooted to the heather'.

Temporarily, the authorities retreated. But within a year the people had been cleared, all 'removed peaceably' by Whitsunday - having left scrawled on the windows of the church in which they briefly took refuge some names, and the legends: 'Glencalvie people was in the churchyard here, May 24, 1845; Glencalvie tenants resided here May 24 1845; Glencalvie people the wicked generation'.

(The gable in which the inscribed window is set faces down the glen. Opposite the other gable is the graveyard, the inscriptions on its headstones themselves constituting a poignant if potted history of Highland affairs Robert MacKay, shepherd, Glasgow, accidentally shot 13 August, 1880, aged 47; Private C. A. MacLean, Seaforth Highlanders, 26 January, 1915, aged 17; William Smeaton or Ross, died of wounds, 24 April, 1916, and his mother Isabella Ross died 1935, aged 76; and George Munro Ross, born Glencalvie 1845, for thirty-four years keeper in Glencalvie Forest, and his son Thomas, died 1910, aged 19, of typhoid fever, Stoneyplain, Alberta).

Yet another defeat lay on the far side of the Highlands, at Sollas in North Uist. In 1849, Lord MacDonald decided to evict 600 or more people who were starving in the aftermath of the potato famine, with some families living for weeks on nothing but shellfish scavenged from the seashore. The government had made meal available for famine relief, though the people had to work 96 hours a week for their pittance. Some of the men worked on draining the landlord's land; and though the government made money available to the proprietors to be handed over to these men, many factors

withheld the cash in lieu, they said, of outstanding rent arrears. In Sollas, as elsewhere, 'the people were permitted generally to starve'.

Lord MacDonald was nephew to the man who had built the castle at Armadale, from which the Knoydart clearances could be watched in comfort; and though he was said to have been one of the less-bad landlords during the famine, he did have debts of £200,000, and he did wish that the natives would remove themselves to Canada. (Indeed, at that moment the Tusker was loading a walking freight of indigents at Lochboisdale, just a few miles away).

Thomas Mulloch of the Inverness Advertiser wrote that the rents of Sollas had been paid regularly until 1848, and quoted a MacDonald factor as evidence: but Sollas was foredoomed, he added, for it had caught the eye of two or three prospective sheep farmers. Thus in July 1849 the factor, Patrick Cooper, and the sheriff-substitute, one Shaw, went to Sollas with a party of officers to warn the people not to resist their forthcoming eviction. Cooper and his party were deforced, however, and anyone attempting henceforth to evict any tenant was threatened 'with instant death'. A few days later, a party of officials trying to serve writs was stoned and driven away from the place, and when these officials returned with twenty constables they were driven back.

The next day they tried again. As they approached Sollas, they came upon a party 300-strong, with warning flags flying (as they would fly in Skye thirty-five years later). Again, the authorities retreated across Uist to their base in Lochmaddy, and his lordship wrote from the castle in Armadale to the Home Secretary, asking for 'an armed force' with which to subdue his clansmen. The Inverness

Courier spoke for the Highland gentry when it suggested of the Sollas tenants, 'their conduct was very unlike what Highlanders might be expected to exhibit, and some mischievous demagogue must have been among themÓ. (Again, this was almost exactly what would be said of the Skye crofters three and a half decades later).

By 30 July, the Cygnet had arrived at Oban to collect the procurator-fiscal, the sheriff-substitute, thirty-three constables and one minister, MacRae, before proceeding to Armadale to consult with his lordship. The following evening they arrived at Lochmaddy, and on the morning of 1 August they marched in rain across the island to Sollas, where they found warning flags flying again, and a great crowd gathered. The factor appealed to the people to respect the law and their laird, and get away to Canada; and the minister MacRae did his best in Gaelic to pacify the people. By way of reinforcement, the police also seized two men and took them in handcuffs to Lochmaddy.

They returned the following day and simply moved into the houses of the people, emptying them of goods and possessions, and tearing away the roofs. At that point the people of neighbouring townships, the women in the lead, charged the police, and a running battle ensued. The police finally made prisoners of the leaders, or those whom they called the leaders: and the people finally agreed to leave for Canada the following year.

In September, four Sollas men appeared at the Inverness Circuit Court, charged with mobbing, rioting, obstruction, deforcement and police assault. The judge, Lord Cockburn, cautioned the jury that the case involved moral and political

considerations 'with which you and I have no concern. Your duty and mine is simply to uphold the majesty of the law'.

The jury found the accused guilty, but recommended the utmost leniency 'in consideration of the cruel, though it may be legal, proceeding adopted in ejecting the people of Sollas' - at which there was applause from the public gallery, not for the last time in a Highland court with regard to anti-landlord conflict. But Cockburn gaoled the men anyway, and committed to his journal the observation, 'the popular feeling is so strong against these (as I think necessary but odious) operations, that I was afraid of an acquittal'.

The following year, therefore, the district was 'completely and mercilessly cleared of all its remaining inhabitants'. Just before Christmas 1852, the Sollas people journeyed to Campbeltown to join the Harris and Skye emigrants aboard the *Hercules*. On Boxing Day, she stood away to the open sea.