

9. The Movement Reforms.

‘For many years the Duke of Argyll has posed as the model Highland laird. If anyone ventured to say a word about the poverty of the crofters, the duke was ever ready to declare that they were a lazy lot and that their miserable condition was due to their own improvidence. As to their being rack-rented - there were no bounds to his indignation at such suggestion. But the idol has fallen. Fair rents have been fixed on the Ross of Mull’.

FROM AROUND 1890 the course of land agitation in the Highlands was complicated by considerations of economic change in the wider world, of political developments at a British level, and of an increasing identification of the land issue with the forces of organised labour and nationalism. The 1890s also witnessed a relative decline of the Land League from a mass campaign to a single-issue pressure group that still represented popular opinion in the Highlands, but the leadership of which was contested by radical liberals on the one hand and nationalists and socialists on the other.

This was hardly surprising. The land question was central to the early Labour movement. And this movement in turn - certainly in Scotland - saw itself in the context, at least, of some sort of assertive national identity in egalitarian form. As early as 1843, the Glasgow Herald was denouncing ‘noxious socialists’ at Glasgow Green. A few years later the Chartist, Fergus O’Conner, was telling the House of Commons that labour was the source of all wealth, while the Chartist convention of 1851 declared that land was the inalienable inheritance of all mankind; ‘the nationalisation of the land is the only true basis of national prosperity’. That same year advocates of land-

nationalisation could be heard on every street corner; and a year later still, the commissioner for mines was demanding that something be done 'to prevent the spread of socialism in the mining districts of Scotland'.

These ideas were clearly of a highly infectious nature. In the late 1840s, for instance, one Lanarkshire coal company imported some seventy starving tenants from Tiree, that crucible of unfettered Argathelian progress in the Inner Hebrides. 'Only one week did they work ere they struck for an increase of 4/-, which being refused, they marched away, led by a piper'. And by the time of the 1868 general election - despite the absence of direct workers' representation in parliament - the labour movement in Scotland was reportedly obsessed with the land question.

The political biographies of the land-agitators give some idea of the links between the land, labour and national movements. The Highlander Alexander Cameron, for instance, one-time secretary to Robert Owen and a founder of the Glasgow Trades Council, was a land-nationaliser. In Ireland in the later part of the century, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was calling for radical reform and opposition to absentee landlords: its proceedings were widely reported in the Scottish press. (One of its leaders, P. J. Smyth, MP for West Meath, had in the 1850s masterminded the escape of John Mitchel from his Tasmanian exile).

Henry George (who met Michael Davitt, the founder of the Irish Land League, in New York) met Parnell in Ireland before crossing to England to meet Labour pioneers like A. R. Wallace and H. M. Hyndman. He was, at least, an important influence behind the 1882 resolution of the Trades Union Congress in favour of land

nationalisation. George also met G. B. Clark, soon to be a leader of the Crofters' Party in the House of Commons.

In the still-mighty Liberal party, the increasingly powerful radical wing was calling for land-reform in the Highlands (and elsewhere). The Glasgow faction of these radicals included Charles Cameron, the crofters' champion and publisher of the North British Daily Mail; while in the Highlands Fraser-MacIntosh also enjoyed a long connection with the radical wing of the Liberals. The Scottish Liberal Association had in fact been formed to press for, among other things, land-reform in the Highlands.

John Murdoch's first article on the subject of the land had appeared in the Bolton Free Press in the 1840s. Through the editor of the New York paper Irish World, he came in contact with Michael Davitt. In turn Davitt, via Murdoch, toured the coalfields of Scotland proposing that the land be nationalised. When the miners of Lanarkshire formed a Scottish Anti-Royalty League and a Labour League, he endeavoured to affiliate them to the Scottish Land Restoration League. That restoration league ran six candidates in Glasgow in the 1885 general election. Murdoch was one of them, and he would later stand as a Land and Labour candidate in the Partick division, then home to many city-based Highlanders. During the famous 1888 Mid-Lanark by-election, he campaigned for Keir Hardie. A few weeks later the Scottish Labour Party was formed, with G. B. Clark becoming vice-president, along with Shaw Maxwell. At the same time, the Scottish Land Restoration League affiliated to the new party. R. B. Cunninghame Graham (who was to be first president of the National Party of Scotland in 1928) was president.

Within a year of the Mid-Lanark election, the Scottish Liberal Association was demanding radical changes to the Crofters' Act and

expressing the opinion that 'Home Rule should be granted to Scotland, so that the Scottish people should have the sole control and management of their own national affairs'. The first chairman of the Scottish Home Rule Association had been John Stuart Blackie. From 1892 it was Erskine of Marr, a notable nationalist and Highland champion in the coming years. Meanwhile, the Fife People's League was demanding nationalisation of the land and Home Rule; and a string of Labour leaders continued to identify crofters' rights with wider socialist aspirations, in the context of Home Rule.

On the economic front, meantime, the last decade of the century was marked by a downturn in sheep-farming and a rise in deer-afforestation. Even by the 1880s, the end of the boom-times was in sight for many sheep-farmers. Not least, this was on account of the rapacity with which they had exploited hill grazing land throughout the nineteenth century - in effect, profiteering from value accumulated in the land over many years of sustainable agricultural practices.

Growing foreign competition, and the deterioration of land consequent on these decades of over-stocking and over-grazing, meant that by the 1880s prices were down to sixty per cent of what they had been in the 1870s - and less than half of what they had been ten years earlier. Many farmers were desperate to get out. By the mid-1880s, sheep were disappearing from large stretches of the Highlands, while estate income from sheep-farming went into free-fall.

In the 1870s, thirty new deer-forests came into being, and by the early years of the following decade there were no less than ninety-nine of these so-called forests in the Highlands, covering two million acres. No longer did they comprise, as in the early years,

high and largely barren land. Now, they encroached on low-lying and relatively fertile land that could have sustained crofters; but the sporting tenants could pay more rent, or the sporting owners could simply do without any tenants at all. Thus by 1912 the land under deer in the Highlands comprised an astonishing three and a half million acres.

In terms of British politics, the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the next were witness to slow, if irreversible, changes. In the Liberals, Gladstone slipped from view at last, and Rosebery beat-off Harcourt to succeed him. Campbell-Bannerman took the leadership in 1899; while important names of the near future, among them Asquith and Haldane, were already coming to the fore.

The Liberal party was still the principal home of radicals. The breakthrough of an independent Labour party was still some way in the future. In the Highlands, particularly, the Liberals enjoyed a wide measure of popular support. This support, allied to the agitation of the radicals outwith Liberal ranks, tended to ensure that Liberal administrations were sympathetic to the crofters' cause. In turn, a number of Conservative leaders would also come to the view that there was a case for state intervention in the Highlands in the same cause.

Thus in 1890 the Walpole Commission recommended expenditure on a comprehensive fisheries infrastructure among other things; and within two years £240,000 had been earmarked for investment in the area. The Crofters' Commission, meanwhile, was reducing rents by up to fifty per cent around the Highlands, and cancelling much of the crofters' arrears. And in 1892 the government gave the new county councils the power to acquire land

for smallholdings (though in the event these powers were largely worthless).

In the same year - and much more importantly - the government established the Deer Forest Commission, with a view to identifying lands deer which could be used for land-settlement purposes. The Commission reported in 1895. It took the view that in the Highlands there were 440,000 acres suitable for the extension of existing holdings and a further 790,000 acres appropriate for the creation of new crofts.

In the 1895 general election, both major parties promised the Highlands a land-settlement programme. And in 1897 the government established the Congested Districts Board (CDB) which was charged with making more land available to crofters. It managed, however, to create just 500 new holdings in the first seven years of its existence. In 1907, the Scottish Secretary John Sinclair, Baron Pentland from 1909, attempted (in an echo of Henry George) further reform with a land valuation bill: it was, however, instantly destroyed by the House of Lords.

Nevertheless, 1911 finally saw the Small Landholders' Act on the Statute Book (it came into operation on All Fools' Day the following year). The Act abolished the Crofters' Commission (a new one not being re-established until 1955), along with the CDB. The duties of the former passed to the Scottish Land Court, and of the latter to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland.

The Act re-designated crofters as smallholders and extended to the rest of Scotland many of the provisions of the original 1886 legislation. It also gave the Board of Agriculture a budget of £200,000 and some land-settlement powers. But it was inadequately drafted, and its details were something of a magnet for obstructive

landlords and their lawyers, however. Much use was made of the right of appeal in the Act, by way of special case, to the Court of Session. In the first five years, twenty such cases were heard.

Simultaneous with these developments, the established currents of nationalism and socialism continued to run strongly through the land-reform movement in the years before the Great War. Nationalism was reflected primarily in the demand for Home Rule. It was a demand that found a ready audience in sections of the Liberals, as well as in the various groupings attempting to form an independent political organisation of the industrial working class. The first Scottish Home Rule Association, for instance, which ran from 1886 to 1918, published during the 1890s a dozen pamphlets arguing its case. In 1912 the Young Scots Society published its *Sixty Points for Scottish Home Rule*.

In 1892 John Stuart Blackie published from Glasgow a slim pamphlet, *The Union of 1707 and its Results*, while in the pre-war years another eighteen titles, some of them very substantial, also appeared. Pro- Home Rule periodicals in circulation in this period included the *Scottish Review*, *Scottish Patriot*, *British Federalist*, *Fiery Cross*, the *Scottish Nationalist*, the *Young Scot*, *Guth na Bliadhna*, *Scottish Nation*, *Scotia*, *Alba* and the *Thistle*.

Prominent nationalists included G. B. Clark and Cunninghame Graham, who helped bring to an active and overt sympathy for Home Rule both Highland leaders of land-reform and leaders of the labour movement. The Scottish Home Rule Association included in its leadership the likes not just of Clark, Fraser-MacIntosh and Alexander MacKenzie, but Cunninghame Graham, the miners' leader Robert Smillie, and Keir Hardie. Another was the future Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, secretary of the London branch

for a number of years, and from the early years of the new century an activist in the ranks of the new Labour Party.

For Labour, meantime, the process of growth was slow but steady in these years. In the early 1890s the Independent Labour Party was founded, with Keir Hardie as chairman; but though it ran twenty eight candidates in the 1895 general election, not one was returned. Not until 1900 and afterwards, with the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, did Labour start to make major strides as a parliamentary party independent of the Liberals - traditional haven for Radicals. In the 1900 election the Labour Representation Committee returned just two members (one of them Hardie); in 1906 it returned thirty, however, having become the Labour Party with Keir Hardie as chairman.

The Highland land question in these years, therefore, and as a direct result of the crofters' agitation, became part of mainstream British politics, and an organic part of the reform movement in Britain. The crofters might not have won popular ownership and control of the land under deer; but at least they had won the argument in favour of it.

As early as 1879, after all, Gladstone had conceded that the compulsory acquisition of the land was 'an adequate public object - admissible, and so far sound in principle'. And some years later, Rosebery would admit that further legislation on the crofting question was needed, and would promise that a future Liberal government would indeed meet crofters' demands for more land.

In the same period both English and Scottish land-reform associations, with radicals of various hues in their leaderships, were targetting the punitive taxation of land values, notably at local levels. Their agitational paper *The Single Tax* first appeared in 1894.

Associated with the movement were established names like Clark, Cunninghame Graham and Shaw Maxwell; while great Labour names like Tom Mann and Sidney Webb also helped lead the movement towards the new century. By 1895, the Scottish Land Restoration League was pressurising Glasgow City Council to apply land taxation within its boundaries. And in the Glasgow municipal elections of 1896, of the seventy-five candidates no less a number than forty-nine were land-taxers.

Against this complex and fluid background, the Highland Land League began to disintegrate, its traditional functions dispersed upon a wider stage of political affairs. In Morvern, for instance, the district branch of the League stopped meeting in 1889 and collapsed altogether three years later. At length, the same sort of this was to occur elsewhere.

But public opinion in the Highlands remained strongly in favour of the aspirations that the League had represented, and that favour did not expire overnight. In 1889, an entirely Highland executive (signalling the end to all vestiges of Edinburgh and London influence) was elected, basing itself in Dingwall. It at once began to prepare for the elections to the new county councils, scheduled for the following year. But in the general parliamentary election of two years later, John MacKay, one of the League's founders, stood as a Liberal Unionist against Angus Sutherland who was running as a Liberal and Land League candidate; while no less a figure than Fraser-MacIntosh was also opposed to behalf of the Land League.

And at the League conference the following year a split was inevitable. G. B. Clark forced the issue by denouncing Liberal domination of the League. The Liberal J. G. MacKay of Portree won the presidency by one vote, however, at which Clark and supporters

walked out. They reformed the Highland Land Law Reform Association (by which title the Land League was formally known until it adopted, in 1886, the name that everyone used anyway). Clark was supported by D. H. MacFarlane, who had been re-elected as MP for Argyll the previous year, along with J. Galloway Weir - a founder-member of the 'old' Highland Land Law Reform Association, and who had replaced Roderick MacDonald as Ross-shire MP in 1892. This new Association, however, lasted only for three years. By this time the Land League itself was foundering too. (In 1909, the League was re-constituted as an open arm of the Labour movement by Thomas Johnston, with G. B. Clark as president).

But though the nature of the organisational representation of popular grievances was to change substantially from the 1890s onwards, the substance of those grievances did not. The crofters, after all, had not enough of the land, while the cottars had little or none of it. And while growing millions of acres were under deer, the aspiration was still 'the land for the people'.

Land agitation therefore continued throughout the last ten years of the nineteenth century, characterised by demands and forms of struggle that were by this stage known intimately to the common people across the Highlands. For the previous fourteen years, after all, anti-landlord agitation had been incessant on the mainland and in the islands, as the government's 1888 return of agrarian offences committed since 1874 makes very clear.

The report fruns from an assault and breach of the peace at Bernera in 1874 through to the case of Hugh Kerr drawing a sentence of sixty days for deforcement, mobbing, assault and breach of the peace in 1888. Between these, respectively the first and last entries in the return, appear many others: malicious

mischievous in Uist, deforcement and assault at Braes, mobbing and rioting at Rogart, assault at Dunvegan, deforcement at Valtos, rioting at Glendale, breach of the peace at Stoneybridge, mobbing at Waternish, deforcement in Lochs, breach of the peace at Uig, breach of interdict at Rogart: along with a catalogue of similar incidents in the years between at Tiree, Gruids, Kilmuir, Argyll, Creich, Clashmore, and at Park, Aignish and Borge on Lewis.

However, by 1888 - though the extraordinarily public wrangle between Sheriff Ivory and the Valtos crofters Norman Stewart and John Beaton was still exercising the mind of parliament - the prevailing orthodoxy, in Westminster if not in the collective consciousness of Highland landlordism, was that if the Highlander could not be entirely repressed or driven or bribed into emigration, the government had better look to the matter with a view to doing something about it. Emigration remained dear to the authorities, as might be expected. A government plan to arrange 'a colonisation scheme for the crofters and cottars of the western Highlands and Islands' was proposed; and the reports of the commission that was charged with the scheme record its success, or otherwise, in the further depopulation of the Highlands over the sixteen years from 1890.

Of course emigration, whether funded by the state or the landlords, did not commend itself as a solution to anything in the view of the crofters. The state accordingly set about informing itself and its agencies via a series of public enquiries on the exact nature of social affairs in the Highlands of Scotland. The first of these was an official report on the condition of the Lewis crofters, which was followed within two years by another high-level committee on enquiry into 'matters affecting the interests of the population' of the

area. And at the turn of the century a further study was published, comparing social conditions on Lewis with those prevailing in the early 1880s.

But no report of the period, official or otherwise, caught the flavour of the continuing land question in the Highlands quite as well as that of the Deer Forest Commission. In many ways similar in nature and importance to the Napier Commission, it found that around two million acres of the Highlands were under one hundred or so deer-forests. Among these could be found that of the Duke of Sutherland, with 145,000 acres under deer in that county (the Duchess had another 35,000 acres in Ross-shire); that of Lochiel with 32,000 acres in Inverness and Argyll; that of Lord Lovat with around 80,000 acres in Inverness-shire; that of Lord MacDonald, by now down to a paltry 10,000 acres of Skye; that of Lady Matheson (resident by now in the south of France), with 34,000 acres in Lewis; that of Munro Ferguson with 3,000 acres at Kildermorie; that of A. J. Balfour with 36,000 acres at Strathconon; and that of the Duke of Portland with 36,000 acres at Langwell in Caithness.

The efforts of the commission emphasised the extraordinary extent to which the land surface of the Highlands was increasingly dedicated to the recreational destruction of red deer. In its report and appendix, the commission suggested ways by which such land could be dedicated (or re-dedicated) to crofting use. Just one page of the appendix indicates, for instance, that the commission thought suitable for new or enlarged crofters' holdings about 14,000 acres on E. S. Bowlby's estate of Knoydart; while in Arisaig over 2,000 acres were thought suitable for new holdings; and on Lord Lovat's estate in north Morar, almost 700 acres of the Bourblach grazings were nominated as suitable for addition to existing crofters' land.

By now, the 'eviction mania' of earlier years was passing, largely as a result of the Crofters' Act (while small victories were also being recorded in the courts with regard to rights-of-way). Still, however, the Oban Times could report that the threat of summary eviction was continuing to 'cast its evil blight over the peaceful inhabitants of Lismore and the humble tillers of the soil around Loch Nell'. In this case, a portion of the Barcaldine estate had been purchased by a Mrs. Ogilvie of Sussex, following the departure of two farmers. While she had 'only entered into possession in November', her effort to 'oust her tenants on the estate have been vigorously prosecuted and persistent'.

By the 1890s, nevertheless, the traditional sort of unfettered eviction was increasingly a thing of the past - the great bulwark of the 1886 Crofters' Act serving to preserve the crofting community from much of the tyranny of earlier decades. Indeed, a new rhythm had entered the anti-landlord agitation in the Highlands. It was reflected notably in the fate of the Land League (a pre-eminent example of an institution falling necessary victim to its own success). The League had blossomed as a response to agitation rather than as an inspiration of that agitation. Though it won widespread support very quickly, it was in essence a single-issue campaign, serving as a focus for indigenous agitation on the ground. It shared, as an organisation, in the victories of the 1880s; and as a result of those victories it was prey to the pressures and strains of any successful single-issue campaigning organisation. The logic of its existence led it to develop towards a formal, party-type association, thus provoking questions as to its stance with regard to the established parties. It was driven, or at least its leaders were driven, to involvement in national issues; and hence national issues became

an issue in League politics. Unsurprisingly, it could not, in the form it had established during the 1880s, survive the pressures of the complex historical situation of which it was part.

Nevertheless, it continued to run parliamentary candidates. In Argyll, D. H. MacFarlane, who had won the seat in 1885 and lost it the following year, took the seat back in 1892 as a Liberal/Crofter (though he would lose it again in 1895). In Caithness Dr. Clark, under one banner or another, held the seat from 1885 through the elections of 1886, 1892, and 1895. Clark lost the nomination for the seat for the 1900 election as a result of his support for the Boer in South Africa, however; and in that election the land-banner was formally carried by F. C. Auld, founder of and candidate for the Land Law Reform Association of Caithness.

In Inverness-shire, Charles Fraser-MacIntosh, who had held the seat in 1885 and 1886, was replaced for the 1892 election by D. MacGregor, candidate of the Inverness-shire Land League. But from 1895, when it was lost by the crofters, until the end of the Great War, no further candidate stood in the name of the League.

In Ross-shire, Dr. MacDonald had represented the seat in 1885 and 1886. From 1892 J. G. Weir, standing then as a Liberal/Crofter but afterwards simply as a Liberal, held the seat in 1895, 1900, 1906 and 1910. On his death in that year, Ian MacPherson (who would later write an introduction to a reprint of Alexander MacKenzie's famous history of the Highland clearances) took over.

In Sutherland the electoral record of land-reform candidates was patchy. Angus Sutherland had contested the constituency in 1885 without success. Though he did win it the following year and held it until 1892, he then resigned it. J. MacLeod took it as a

Liberal/Crofter in 1894 and held it the following year as a simple Liberal; but in 1900 he was beaten - by one of the Leveson-Gower family. In short, both the scope and form of anti-landlorism changed during the 1890s, partly as a result of increasing government interest in Highland affairs and Highland votes - signified by the tour of inspection of the Scottish Secretary, Lord Lothian, in the autumn of 1889, which was inspired by a view to improving the lot of the inhabitants of the Highlands.

The very public activities of the Crofters' Commission also helped adapt the nature of agitation; and indeed, the depth of the agitation. Commission proceedings constituted an important element in crofting affairs throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century, and in particular for the early part of that decade, with its first rulings firing expectation and morale throughout the Highland area.

But still the fabric of Scottish affairs remained at times strangely suggestive of earlier days. In the first month of the century's last decade, for instance, the MP for the Partick constituency of Glasgow died. Educated at Rugby and Balliol, an Edinburgh advocate married to the daughter of the landlord of Morvern, he was none other than Patrick Sellar's son Craig - in whom, it may fairly be said, the manifold blessings of clearance, 'improvement' and 'constructive hobbyism' had most generously been invested.

In the month of his death, meanwhile, the executive of the Land League met in Dingwall to re-appoint Donald MacRae as organising secretary and to urge crofters to support land-reform candidates in the forthcoming county-council elections. On Lewis, the crofters of Lochs were reported to be making ready to take

possession for cultivation of the Park deer-forest. Elsewhere, reports were being received of destitution among crofters who had, or who had been, emigrated to Canada: 'The present position of many of the families sent here under the auspices of Lady Cathcart, speculative land companies and the government, should be a sufficient warning to those at home to stay and face the ills they know rather than come here and face the ills they know not'.

The districts referred to were at Cathcart and Wapella, to which Uist people had been driven prior to the appointment of the Napier Commission back in the early 1880s.

In February 1890, following the urging of the Land League executive, land-reform candidates in general swept the elections for the county councils in the Highlands. In Sutherland, Land League candidates took seventeen of the nineteen seats. League candidates also won every seat in the Hebrides, while in Skye they enjoyed a majority of two to one over their opponents. As a result, the League quickly began to use the new Highland councils as platforms for land-reform. All of them (except Argyll, the only one to have returned a pro-landlord majority) petitioned parliament to implement the Land League programme.

Within weeks of the election, the crofters of the parish of Canisbay in Caithness were laying claim to land in the district. On Jura, the Crofters' Commission held a court for local tenants, 'at which their chief grievance seemed to be the encroachment of the deer-forest and consequent restriction of their pasture and loss of stock-land'.

That April, a deputation to the factor for Lovat estates was led by one Hugh Fraser, president of the Lovat Land League. The deputation requested that the crofters be given the use of a local hill,

for which they were prepared to pay a reasonable rent. The factor refused on the grounds that the land in question was let to Lord Winborne; at which the crofters announced that they would simply go to the Crofters' Commission, 'who'll give us our rights, of which we were unjustly deprived years ago'.

That same month a Land League meeting in Uist was addressed by Donald MacRae. He urged all present to persevere in the agitation for more land and a further reduction in rent. At the close of the meeting, a committee for each township in the district was elected. It was announced that a mass meeting would shortly be convened, 'with a view to further action', and at which Donald MacFarlane would speak. Shortly afterwards the Duke of Sutherland announced that he was to clear the extensive sheep-farms of Melness, Siberscross and Clebrig and turn them into a deer-forest. On Knoydart, Baird announced the same type of plan.

Meanwhile, the Crofters' Commission had been busy on the Duke of Argyll's estate in the Ross of Mull. In the words of one report: 'The Ross of Mull crofters complained very much of rack-renting before the Royal Commission in 1883 and from the finding of Sheriff Brand's court it would appear that they were somewhat justified in their complaints. In the 47 cases in which fair rents have just been fixed the crofters got an average reduction of 39 per cent, and have had over 63 per cent of their arrears wiped off. For many years the Duke of Argyll posed as the model Highland laird. If anyone ventured to say a word about the poverty of the crofters, the duke was ever-ready to declare that they were a lazy lot and that their miserable condition was due to their own improvidence. As to their being rack-rented - there was no bounds to his indignation at

such a suggestion. But the idol has fallen. Fair rents have been fixed by the Crofters' Commission on the Ross of Mull'.

That June the MP for Ross and Cromarty, Dr. MacDonald, was addressing the annual meeting of the county association of the old Land League. And a matter of weeks later, some of his constituents on Berneray were raiding Borve farm on the island, knocking down a stable and burning out a stackyard, in a conflict that would run into the autumn (and return later in the decade).

The following spring, forty or fifty men raided Park deer forest, as they had threatened a year earlier, and began to prepare the once-cleared township of Ornsay for cultivation. Thirty two of the men were subsequently gaoled, but briefly. On the mainland fierce evictions, though rarer than before, were still taking place - as on the Brahan estate that summer, with assault on, and the deforcement of, an eviction party. In the Hebrides, meanwhile, Lady Matheson returned to Lewis 'for the first time in some years'.

From Lochcarron twenty crofters petitioned the Crofters' Commission for more land. The Lochcarron factor, called as a witness by the crofters' representative Donald MacRae, conceded that the land in question had been taken from the township fourteen years earlier, without compensation. In Lochs, meanwhile, as a result of the commission's decisions, the rents of forty eight small holdings in Ranish were reduced by over 41 per cent on average. And in Barra the commission had ordered an average reduction of 38 per cent on the holdings of 136 crofters.

The Glasgow Weekly Mail noted during the last week of the year, 'on the whole of Lady Cathcart's Long Island estates which comprise South Uist, Benbecula, Barra and several small islands, there are 998 crofters whose cases have been dealt with during

various visits of the commission. The average reduction of rent granted over the whole is slightly over 30 per cent. They were due £27,338 of arrears, of which the commission have cancelled £20,967. A liberal concession of land is being offered to the crofter tenants on the well-known estate of Kilmuir in Skye by Mr. G. A. Baird of Stichill, who acquired the estate three years ago'.

In short, the balance of class-forces had changed in the Highlands by the 1890s, the work of the Crofters' Commission both encouraging expectation and stifling active protest on the scale of the previous decade; while the focus of agitation swung to the question, not so much of security of tenure, but of recovery of land from sheep and deer by means of formal political action.

The scale of direct action therefore dipped, though in the spring of 1892 there was trouble at Clashmore in Sutherland, with fences and dykes again destroyed, and the chief constable of the county writing in some alarm to his superiors in Edinburgh. That same month too, the crofters in the north of Lewis were meeting to demand legislation empowering the Crofters' Commission to increase holdings and give new holdings to those without any land at all.

At precisely the same time, the Duke of Portland was taking over the shootings at Dunbeath Castle, and boldly extending his deer-forest lands to almost 80,000 acres. And that August, on Skye a sheriff-officer and party attempting an eviction were assaulted and deforced in the traditional way. Back on the mainland, the Winans deer-forests were drawing attention again. Winans had not shot anything on them for five years, nor had anyone else been allowed to, and the deer were multiplying alarmingly. This was 'a novelty in congested populations', in the sardonic words of one report. 'There

can be no doubt as to the public scandal of so much land being kept uncultivated and useless', it went on, 'when thousands of crofters are being kept in poverty because of the smallness of their holdings. Some parts of the deer-forest might be tilled and large parts might be used for the grazing of crofters' stock'.

On Skye, meanwhile, Lord MacDonald was taking court action for eviction against five of his tenants in Snizort. Three of them were widows. And in Glendale a mass meeting of crofters and cottars was promising further united action with regard to the land question in the Highlands.

At Dunrobin, the Duke of Sutherland's funeral was proceeding to the tune of the usual lamentations (though his sons were absent on account of a small but splendidly vicious family tiff over who was going to get the London and North Western Railway shares). That October the Land League met, once again at Portree, for its annual conference; fifteen resolutions called for a radical reform of matters relating to the land question. It was also agreed to re-appoint Donald MacRae as full-time organiser.

In the previous three months the press, in particular MacKenzie's Scottish Highlander, had been keeping the land question firmly in the public eye. In July, for instance, the paper had carried front-page statements from its favoured candidates for the 1892 parliamentary elections. Among them was Fraser-MacIntosh, for Inverness, whose views were 'unchanged since the 1885 election on the subject of deer-forests, game laws and rights of salmon fishing in river estuaries and arms of the sea'. J. G. Weir was another, who had been unanimous choice as candidate by the Highland Land League.

That same month the paper was covering Lady Matheson and the crofters of Lewis, while in August it was reporting a case of deforcement in Skye, at Lynedale, and paying continuing attention to the fate of the crofters evicted to Canada from the Gordon Cathcart estates on South Uist. It reported legal action against Donald MacRae, along with J. G. Weir's tour of Lewis, as well as publicising a lengthy series then running in the People's Journal on the subject of 'men or deer in the Scottish glens?' The Scottish Highlander also reported further court action by Lord MacDonald against the crofters of Skye; tenant meetings at Glendale demanding more land; and the death, and legal battles accompanying it, of the Duke of Sutherland.

Along with a sideswipe at the Church of Scotland and its historical relationship with Highland landlordism ('the Established Church and the land question: better late than never'), the Scottish Highlander covered at length the September conference of the Land League. Stories telegraphed from Portree reported the presence at the conference once more of Mary MacPherson, the anti-landlord Gaelic poetess, and the absence (due to sickness) of Michael Davitt. A report also noted that at the 1885 conference in Portree there had been ten times as many people present, but added defiantly, 'no settlement of the land question in the Highlands can be regarded as final which does not clearly recognise and fully embody the inherent and historical rights of the Highland people to their native soil'.

Comment and correspondence relating to the conference continued throughout the autumn. The Scottish Highlander also campaigned for Land League county council candidates, carrying an 'address to Highlanders' by the League president on 'the man to vote for', with subsequent comment on the results. It then turned its close attention to the appointment of the Deer Forest Commission

(the proceedings of which it would follow closely in the coming years). It also monitored and reported the response to the appointment of the commission by both crofters and landlords - the latter very promptly convening in Inverness to discuss its implications.

Similar themes dominated throughout that winter and into the following year. In Kilmuir the people of the district 'were on the march for more land', walking in procession with pipers to the scene of a cleared township to demand it. In Inverness the Land League was setting-up a stream of crofter witnesses to appear before the Deer Forest Commission. In Glendale and Valtos crofters were demanding 'their rights' and more land. In Arnisdale, on the shores of Loch Hourn, the local branch of the League was also demanding land. In Argyll, the duke was evicting crofters. Throughout Skye, the people were busy appointing delegates to appear before the commission, its visitation to the island then being imminent. The dowager duchess of Sutherland was gaoled in Holloway, convicted on contempt of court charges relating to a who-gets-what struggle over the late duke's will. And the Scottish Highlander continued to publicise the record of the MacLeod landlords with regard to evictions in Skye, along with extensive coverage of the work of the Deer Forest Commission in the same island.

By mid-decade, while the authorities continued to concern themselves with land-agitation matters across the Highlands, the same themes of land-hunger and crofter militancy remained apparent. In January 1896, for instance, the Glendale branch of the League was still active, meeting to elect office-bearers and hear reports, with John MacPherson in the chair. The following month the House of Commons was yet again debating 'the crofter

question'. In March, Sheriff Ivory was once again falling-out with Inverness County Council, occasioning some acid comment. And by the end of April Lady Matheson, widow of the opium-dealer Sir James, was dead and buried at last.

In May, the Crofters' Commission was at work in Torridon. In June, the Duke of Sutherland was in the Court of Session with regard to salmon poaching, and 'Sir John Orde's Crowbar Brigade' was evicting tenants in Uist - a matter which would shortly surface in the House of Commons. In September there were further evictions in Badenoch, with houses reportedly burned down. In September also, the League met at Stornoway for its fourteenth annual conference, an event to which the Scottish Highlander gave extensive coverage.

Towards the end of the decade too, the land question and related matters continued to exercise public interest. By then, however, the leaders of twenty years earlier were quitting the scene. The death of MacKenzie came at the beginning of 1898, and that of Mary MacPherson towards the end of the same year.

The gentry, old and new, against whose doings both MacKenzie and MacPherson had so long campaigned, still traded in estates as before. Strathaird on Skye sold for £19,000 to the new owner of Eigg. The same laird would within months be in conflict with his Eigg tenants, whom he had 'migrated' from Galmisdale to Laig, and who were approaching the Crofters' Commission as a result. Meanwhile the Duchess of Sutherland visited the Hebrides, Andrew Carnegie bought Skibo Castle, and the bottled-sauce millionaire Perrins was busy turning Ardross Castle into a habitation suitable for a man of his resources and evident tastes.

But the causes and conflicts of earlier decades were still to be seen, albeit on a less generalised, or at least less acute, scale. Crofters in Wester Ross were still destroying deer-fences, and still being interdicted, and still calling on leaders of the land-reform movement (in this case Donald MacRae) to represent their interests. Elsewhere in the Highlands, crofters were raising Court of Session actions against their landlord. Dr. G. B. Clark addressed the Caithness Land League, to the effect that 'landlordism has performed no useful function and it is bound to go because it is a burden on the land'. And in the Black Isle there was a 'threatened agitation' following a meeting of the League: 'there has been a revival of the crofters' agitation in Ross-shireÓ.

Many other such conflicts occurred, if on a local scale, right through to the end of the century. But as a decade in the history of land-agitation, the 1890s represented something of an interregnum. It had opened in hope: and that hope had been sustained by the judgements of the Crofters' Commission, the findings of the Deer Forest Commission, and (in its closing years) the work of the Congested Districts Board. The price of this hope had been a downturn in agitation of a mass character, in a decade where the lines of development were more obscure and complex than before, and where the forward march of progress proved to be less obvious and less simple than it had earlier seemed.

Yet popular aspiration and expectation remained as high, or higher even, than formerly. Both, though, remained unmet by the end of the 1890s. For the land movement in the Highlands, therefore, the old century closed on a note of unrequited hope.

But the twentieth century which now opened did so on a new note - albeit a note in an older and familiar tune.