

4 OVER THE SEA TO SKYE

Without exception or interval, the mass of the Scottish Highlanders have always lived a life of as great penury and privation as can be imagined or endured.

“Men, sheep and deer”
Edinburgh Review, vol. 106 (October 1857), p. 470.

Of all the places in the British Isles which might be expected to play a major part in a social revolution, the Isle of Skye, in the Hebrides, must come low on the list. Yet Skye was to witness the first stages in a great revolt which not only swept the Highlands and radically altered the character of the area, but also served to connect the Irish Land War with an urban movement which appeared first in Glasgow and moved from there to most of the great towns of Britain.

In 1880, while the Irish Land War was at its height, the people of Skye were living a very isolated life. Their numbers had long been declining at a rate of about 100 a year, and currently stood at about 16,000, of whom the majority spoke only Gaelic. They were fishermen and crofters; several contemporaries spoke with some amusement of their “amphibious” existence. The crofts on which they lived were exceedingly poor. The plots were small and barren, and the doors of the tiny hovels were often the only apertures through which light could enter, or smoke from their peat fires could leave. They were ill-fed, ill-clad, unwashed — and, not surprisingly, they were often prematurely aged.¹

Conditions in the other Western Isles, and in parts of the adjacent mainland, were similar. In the view of one qualified contemporary: “The people of the western islands were quiet and law-abiding, very simple and easily led, fairly contented with their circumstances, knowing and caring little for the outside world, their food oatmeal (chiefly imported), home potatoes, and fish, their money chiefly from home and east coast fishing and the sale of their young cattle and few sheep.”²

Much of this seems redolent of conditions in Ireland, but there were some important differences. There was very little tradition of revolt. Disturbances had occurred in Lewis in 1874, and a

radical Inverness newspaper, *The Highlander*, was vigorous in its advocacy of land reform;³ but the area as a whole was remarkably quiet. The Hebridean crofters were even more isolated than the Irish peasantry. In most of the Isles, including Skye, they were Presbyterians adhering to the very strict Free Church of Scotland.

In Skye, as in most of the Western Highlands, the system of "runrig" had persisted down to the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Arable fields were sorted periodically by lot between the crofters, while pasturage on which they grazed black cattle was held in common. Some extremely primitive features remained in the economy of Skye long after the abolition of runrig. Even in the 1880s, at least one Skye landlord extracted his dues not only in money rent, but also partly in servile labour, reminiscent of mediaeval serfdom.⁴

The next stage of the story is described by Sir William Harcourt, Home Secretary in Gladstone's 1880 government, and the member of the Cabinet who at that time was principally responsible for the affairs of Scotland: "Presently the proprietors discovered that these worthless hills could be turned into gold by converting them into large sheep farms. The proprietors became first rich, then extravagant, and finally bankrupt, and with half a dozen exceptions, the great Chiefs — the Seaforths, the Glengarrys, the Clanronalds — of the West and the small lairds have disappeared, and the land has passed into the hands of strangers. I think that, from the latitude of Ullapool to that of Oban, there is hardly a single ancient Highland proprietor extant except Kenneth Mackenzie,⁵ and all the islands north of Mull have passed into new hands except for the portion of Skye still held by Macleod and Macdonald. The result of all this, of course, has been to destroy all sense of feudal attachment, and the land has been dealt with on purely commercial principles, with the sole desire to extract from it the greatest possible amount of gold. For this purpose every acre of ground was subtracted from the crofters and the townships in order to enhance the rent of the sheep farms, and when it was found that deer forests yielded a higher revenue, the sheep had to give way to deer."⁶

The events which Harcourt was considering did not belong to the remote past, but to comparatively recent times; as Gladstone reminded his Home Secretary: "In point of moral title to live upon the land, enjoyed uniformly *ab antiquo*, I scarcely know how to distinguish between the chief and his followers. It was might, and

not right, which was on his side when, during the half century and more which followed the '45, he gradually found that rearing men paid him in a coin no longer current, and took to the rearing of rent instead, backed by the law, which took no cognizance of any rights but his. This was but four or five score years ago, and I cannot think that we have here a sufficient prescription against the legislature to bar it from redressing wrong . . .”⁷ Gladstone was referring to the “Highland Clearances” which took place at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by which many thousands of people had been evicted to make way for sheep; a process which reached its climax in the infamous Sutherland clearances of 1811-20. The legal ownership of the clan’s land had mattered little when the chief accepted a quasi-parental duty to his followers; it mattered much when their relations assumed an essentially financial character, and the Courts were willing to regard the chief as the landlord.

In Skye, there had been some clearances — one writer claimed that about 3,500 people had been affected⁸ — but these were confined to certain parts of the island, and most districts had no such traditions. For the greater part, the Skyemen still lived where their ancestors did; but their condition differed from that of earlier times in that they had even less land from which to obtain food.

The estates of Lord Macdonald of the Isles, whom we have already noted as one of the few surviving “old proprietors”, play a large part in our story. These estates were extensive in the island, and among them were lands in the district known as the Braes, about six miles from Portree. The local hill, Ben Lee, had once been common pasturage, but early in the century it was taken from the crofters for use as a market stance and cattle pound. Nevertheless, the crofters were permitted to graze their cattle there until the middle 1860s, when Ben Lee was let, and the crofters were excluded from it.⁹ By the early 1880s, we find Lord Macdonald in rather poor health, and spending most of his time in the South of France, while his visible representative on the island was his factor, Alec Macdonald. According to one report, this factor was “also factor for other absentees, so that he controls about four fifths of the island. Besides this he holds all the offices, and is pretty much everything else that gives any influence. He is bank agent, justice of the peace, solicitor, distributor of stamps, chairman or clerk of all the school boards in Skye, chairman of the parochial boards, hotel keeper, captain of the

volunteers, and Parliamentary agent for the Conservatives, and to crown all, the sheriff's officer is one of his clerks."¹⁰ Although Alec Macdonald was a controversial figure in his capacity as land agent, it is interesting to note that he was also a landlord on a smaller scale in his own right, and apparently there were no complaints at all from tenants on his own land.¹¹

In 1881, some Skye fishermen landed at Kinsale, Co. Cork, and caught the highly infectious ideas of the Land League.¹² Irish Gaelic was still widely spoken in the south-west of the country; the language is sufficiently close to Scots Gaelic for communication to be possible. This may have provided a significant bond of sympathy between Goidels on the two sides of the Irish Sea. At Martinmas 1881, the crofters of the Braes refused rent, giving as the reason (or excuse) the Ben Lee episode of seventeen years earlier. A lengthy appeal from Alec Macdonald¹³ produced no effect, and evictions were ordered. On 7 April 1882, a sheriff officer attempted to serve notices of eviction, but was met by a crowd, mainly of women. The officer was compelled to burn his own papers, and his assistant was ducked in the local burn. The Glasgow police authorities, without consulting the Government, ordered the despatch of fifty or sixty police to Skye. Ten days after the earlier incident, there occurred what contemporaries knew as the "Battle of the Braes". A hostile crowd — again mainly of women — assailed the police with stones. In the *mêlée* several women were injured, at least one very seriously, and William Ivory, Sheriff of Invernessshire and several other Counties, seems to have been spattered with mud. None of the police, however, sustained injuries of any gravity, and they succeeded in their main objective, which was the capture and abduction of five men who had been ringleaders of the earlier disturbances. These five crofters were returned to Portree a few days later on bail, and were met with great jubilation. Some weeks afterwards, they were brought to trial. The serious charge of deforcement (roughly the Scottish equivalent of "resisting an officer of the law in the execution of his duty") was abandoned, and on the lesser charge of assault they received small fines, which were promptly paid by a sympathiser.¹⁴ Sheriff Ivory, who had considerable executive and discretionary powers in the Highlands, became an intensely controversial figure in the area, and remained so until his resignation four or five years later.

In the immediate aftermath of the Braes "battle" — as Lord Lovat told a Conservative cabinet some years afterwards: "agitation spread rapidly, grazing lands were seized at Glendale" — Glendale is on the opposite side of Skye — "and those who protected them assaulted. Interdicts were obtained, and disregarded. Additional police were sent. A few days later a messenger-at-arms attempted to serve summons for breach of interdict; some 2,000 people turned out and drove messenger and police out of the district. The Procurator Fiscal of Skye, having gone to Dunvegan to make investigations, was forced to retire before the mob."¹⁵

Eventually forces were landed from a gunboat in February 1883, and four particular crofters were ordered to surrender. They agreed to stand trial, but refused to go on the gunboat. After a good deal of official muddle, they travelled unescorted to Glasgow, where they announced their presence to the authorities and were eventually arrested. They were then conveyed to Edinburgh for trial, and sentenced to two months' imprisonment each.¹⁶ From this incident, the recognised ringleader of the crofters, John Macpherson, acquired the *sobriquet* "the Glendale Martyr", and was much in demand at land reform meetings all over the country.

Apparently through the instigation of men from Skye,¹⁷ activities by crofters rapidly spread into other districts. In Skye itself the rents were not paid, and there was a further deforcement at the Braes in the late summer.

How, and by whom, was this agitation being led? There was nothing in the Highlands remotely comparable with the "conspiratorial" tradition which had evolved among the Irish peasantry over centuries, and which each generation learnt from its predecessors. Nor would the crofters have had the money, or the organisation, necessary for an impressive campaign. It has been suggested that the credit — or blame — resides with a body called the Highland Land Law Reform Association which operated from Inverness; but the HLLRA categorically denied responsibility, and even declared that they had not acted illegally, or counselled illegality, at any time.¹⁸ It is much more likely that the main organisational effort came from Ireland — at first from the Land League, later from the National League. A middle-class body, the Skye Vigilance Committee, had been formed in 1881, and administered a fund of £1,000 granted by the Land League to resist evictions in the Highlands.¹⁹ Gladstone's Lord Advocate, J. B. Balfour, attributed "the spirit of lawlessness" in Skye to two

men: John Murdoch, former proprietor of *The Highlander*, and "an Irishman named McHugh, said to be an agent of the Land League".²⁰ Some of the publications circulated on Skye appear to have been printed in Dublin, and Catholic influence is certainly suggested in "cartoons showing mitred ecclesiastics crushing a snake marked 'Landlordism'".²¹ At this time the crofters' most impressive advocate in Parliament was Donald Macfarlane — a man who, albeit of Scottish origin, was currently sitting for an Irish constituency. Whether through a fraternal interest in the welfare of Celts on the other side of the Irish Sea, or through a desire to embarrass the Government by creating a political "second front", the Irish were plainly doing everything they could to foster the Highland revolt.

Parliamentary pressure was mounted for a Royal Commission to investigate the crofters' grievances. The establishment of this body — the "Napier Commission" — damped down "direct action" for a considerable time, even though the spring of 1883 was a time of great privation in the Highlands, through crop and fishing failures.²² When the Report eventually appeared, in the middle of 1884, it drew a gloomy picture of Highland conditions, and decided that the most general complaint was the small size of the holdings.²³ Another serious grievance which the Commissioners recognised was that, for technical reasons, the Agricultural Holdings Act of 1883 had proved of very little value in securing compensation for improvements (such as they were) in the crofting areas.

A few radicals maintained consistent pressure on the Government to bring forward legislative proposals. Unfortunately most MPs did not give the matter much attention, and in the course of an important debate on the subject the House was "counted out" for want of a quorum.²⁴ Interest was largely confined to a comparatively small number of Scottish MPs — largely, but by no means exclusively, from Highland constituencies — and some of the Irish, notably Donald Macfarlane. Some percipient observers began to point out that a baleful moral would soon be drawn if violent behaviour in Ireland produced redress, while generally lawful behaviour in Scotland did not.

Public sympathy was soon canalised into political activity. The HLLRA was reconstituted at a meeting held in London in 1883, and received the support of at least four MPs, including Joseph Chamberlain's henchman, Jesse Collings. Another very active figure

in the Association was J. S. Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University and a friend of Gladstone. The objects could be described as the "Three Fs", plus more land for the crofters.²⁵ In August 1884, we find them holding an enthusiastic meeting at Portree, addressed by Donald Macfarlane, and also by the Conservative MP and organiser, John Gorst—who was currently much at loggerheads with the leadership of his party. Early in September, the basis of the organisation was broadened further at a meeting in Dingwall, which attracted a great deal of public attention in the Highlands, and resolved that the various interested organisations should "unite on a common platform to make the question of land reform a test one at the next election."²⁶ The Association served thenceforth as the main coordinating body for political action in support of the crofters' claims.

The combined effect of the Dingwall meeting, the interest aroused by the Royal Commission, Henry George's second visit to the British Isles, and a very substantial increase in some rent demands, produced a further spate of "direct action" among the crofters towards the end of 1884. This time again Skye was the centre, and public attention was drawn to the village of Kilmuir, a mile or so south of Dunvegan, on the estates of a certain Major Fraser. The police were not able to control the situation as they had been a couple of years earlier; at the end of October a contingent from Inverness was driven back violently.²⁷ A few days later, notices of eviction were threatened, and for some time large crowds with cudgels appeared in the ports of Uig and Portree, determined to resist. The situation was so menacing that the Lord Advocate instructed the Procurator-Fiscal of Skye that no arrests were to be made in connection with the recent deforcement.²⁸ Eventually a landing was effected at Uig by a force of twenty police, and a number of marines which one authority sets at no fewer than 250, supported by a gunboat and a steamer. A second gunboat was soon brought to control the Skye disturbances. The landing was timed carefully, so that the Sabbatarian crofters would be at church, and unable to interfere. On the following day, a similar show of force was made at Staffin, another disaffected part of the island. Apparently the crofters, in spite of their intense dislike for the police, held the marines in high regard. A promise of redress for grievances seems to have been received, and within a few days the Skye agitation had died down. Yet more than half a year elapsed before it was considered safe to with-

draw the two gunboats from the island.²⁹

On this occasion, Skye was not alone. There was a deforcement case on the large island of Lewis which was sufficiently serious for a contingent of eighty marines and a gunboat to be sent to Valtos to arrest the ringleaders.³⁰ Crofters on the peninsula known as Black Isle, on the Moray Firth, declared "that they (would) insist on their ancestral rights and pay only the original value of the land, and that if concessions (were) not immediately granted they (would) unite with other associations to bring their views to an execution."³¹ Land on the island of Tiree, which was included in the County, and belonged to the Duke of Argyll, was seized by crofters for allotments.³² The Duke was well-known for the trenchant and persuasive logic with which he defended landlordism; yet even the Whiggish *Scotsman* somewhat tarnished his image by revealing the appalling conditions which prevailed on Tiree. The situation in North Uist was sufficiently serious to require the personal attention and presence of Sheriff Ivory,³³ and there were many other cases of rent strikes and physical seizure of land throughout the Isles.³⁴

It gradually became obvious that something would have to be done to allay the crofters' grievances. A very representative body of Highland proprietors met at Inverness in the middle of January 1885, and decided to offer the crofters more land, long leases and proper compensation for improvements.³⁵ Nevertheless, Harcourt correctly recognised that there would soon be strong pressure for legislation — adding that: "What we do in this matter will be the 'letting out of the waters' and . . . it must be in the end the prelude to the opening of a new land question which will not be confined to the West Highlands."³⁶

Meanwhile, trouble in the Isles continued — there was another deforcement case at Glendale, for example. In spite of considerable administrative and technical difficulties,³⁷ the Government decided to bring in a Crofters' Bill, to implement some of the Napier Commission proposals. The Bill was introduced in May; but in the following month the Liberals fell, and Lord Salisbury formed a minority Conservative administration.

When at last a General Election was held, just before the end of the year, special excitement and interest surrounded the constituencies of the "crofting areas" in the North-west Highlands.³⁸ In county constituencies everywhere the effect of enfranchising

rural workers was to set a large and politically unknown quantity on the register; nowhere was this more important than in the crofting areas. It was inevitable that these crofters should notice that their Irish counterparts had already secured a great deal of success through the Land Act of 1881 and the Land Purchase Act of 1885, and seemed poised to gain a great deal more. Why should Scotsmen be denied what Irishmen had been able to win?

At that time, the political parties had very little formal organisation in the North of Scotland. Many of the candidates in that area who were described as "Liberal" or "Conservative" do not seem to have been adopted by any recognised local body, or to have received endorsement from the national leaders or organisation of the parties. Scotland was overwhelmingly Liberal, and a large proportion of the Highland proprietors still ranked as Liberals — although they were not always much of a recommendation for their Party.³⁹ The candidates who challenged them are occasionally described under some designation like "Radical" or "Independent Crofter", but the use of these labels does not seem to have caused either friends or foes to consider them disentitled to the alternative appellation "Liberal". There were fourteen cases in Scotland where "Radicals" of one kind or another challenged the more traditional type of Liberal candidate, and contests of this kind were particularly common in the Highlands. Only one of the six "crofting" constituencies did not experience a contest between rival Liberals.

In Argyll, the former Liberal MP (a son of the Duke) was not standing again, and there were two possible Liberal candidates. The local Liberals selected Donald Macfarlane,⁴⁰ who had been such a prominent defender of the crofters in the old Parliament. Both Liberals went to the poll, but Macfarlane won a comfortable majority over an Independent Conservative, and the second Liberal fared very badly. In Caithnessshire, the former MP, Sir Tollemache Sinclair, had come under considerable criticism long before as a "Tory at heart".⁴¹ He withdrew in 1885, but his son, Clarence Sinclair, defended the seat. Against him the crofters' movement set forth one of their leading figures, Dr G. B. Clark. Although he was a man of very "advanced" views indeed, Clark's campaign does not appear to have extended far beyond a demand for the "Three Fs".⁴² At least one of Clarence Sinclair's meetings concluded amid utter uproar, and the return of Dr Clark seems to have taken nobody by surprise. In his speech on election, Clark

commented — probably with justice — that “. . . he was specially indebted to Sir Tollemache Sinclair, to whose efforts he believed he chiefly owed his large majority.”⁴³

In Ross & Cromarty, the land reformers achieved what was perhaps their most spectacular triumph. The “orthodox” Liberal defender was R. C. Munro-Ferguson of Novar, a young landowner who had only been returned in the previous year at a by-election under the old franchise. Novar must have startled some of his Whiggish supporters by giving general assent to Chamberlain’s *Radical Programme*.⁴⁴ A certain Dr Macdonald was set against him as a “crofters’” candidate. The Conservatives did not contest the seat, and Novar’s return was confidently predicted. In fact he was defeated by a majority of five to three.⁴⁵

Before the 1885 election, the only Conservative seat in the area had been Invernessshire, and the MP was retiring. As in Ross & Cromarty, there was a crofters’ candidate — C. Fraser Mackintosh — who opposed an “orthodox” Liberal, Sir Kenneth Mackenzie. Again the intervention of the “crofter” was doubly effective. Mackenzie was driven to adopt a platform which, on land questions, was “a little in advance of most of the Liberal Party”;⁴⁶ while these concessions were not able to prevent Mackintosh capturing the seat, and pushing Mackenzie into third place.

In the most northerly constituency of all, Orkney & Zetland, the pattern was rather different, for the defending Liberal MP, Leonard Lyell, did not encounter opposition from advanced land reformers, and was comfortably returned in a straight fight with a Conservative. It has been claimed, however,⁴⁷ that Lyell should properly be included among the “crofter” group himself. A similar claim has also been made for MacDonald Cameron who sat for Wick Burghs.

Only from Sutherlandshire could the traditional Highland Whigs derive any satisfaction at all, and even there it must have been somewhat qualified. The defending MP was the Marquis of Stafford, heir to the Duke of Sutherland. Stafford, like those other Whigs who faced opposition from “crofters’” candidates, was forced to make great protestations in the radical direction, and practically supported the “Three Fs”.⁴⁸ He alone was able to hold his seat.

The overall result from the crofting constituencies could leave nobody in doubt as to the popular will on the question of land reform. Nor could there be much doubt that the *Northern Ensign*

correctly described the general political situation in the area when it speculated: "Landlords may desert the Liberal ranks. Of late a good many have done so, and no doubt there are more to follow."⁴⁹ While the main defection of the English Whigs from Liberalism took place after the Home Rule split of 1886, the movement was already marked in the Highlands before the end of 1885, and before Home Rule had become a serious political issue.

When the Liberals returned to office at the beginning of 1886, many people favoured a Scottish equivalent of the Irish Land Act of 1881. This treatment, however, was less appropriate to the situation in the Hebrides than to that in Ireland. In December 1884, Donald Cameron of Lochiel told Harcourt that: "The Irish Land Act . . . has not proved a success among the very small tenants in the west, whose condition most nearly resembles the Skye or Lewis crofter. I mean, it has not made them any richer, save by the few shillings taken off their small rents . . . Even if this were not so, the abuse in Ireland which brought about legislation . . . was the fact that almost all improvements on Irish estates were the work of the tenant, and were frequently, on a change of tenancy, taken possession of by the landlords. In the Highlands, on the contrary, there are no improvements worth the name, except in the very rarest instances. As may be seen in the evidence before the Royal Commission, custom, which in Ireland dealt with improvements worth hundreds of pounds, in Lewis or Sutherland deals with the doors and windows of the miserable crofter's cabin — a species of tenant-right which may be calculated in pence, not even in shillings, but which is jealously maintained by the tenant and scrupulously respected by the proprietor."⁵⁰ From the testimony of this particular Highland proprietor (incidentally, a Conservative MP at the time), it is evident that most Irish peasants were prosperous by comparison with the Scottish crofters.

The Government's remedial Bill was brought forward in February 1886 by G. O. Trevelyan, who held the relatively new office of Secretary of State for Scotland. It proposed two of the "Irish Fs" — Fair Rent and Fixity of Tenure — for the low-rented crofters, but did not include Free Sale of the tenant-right. Some provision was also made for crofters to acquire land compulsorily in order to enlarge their holdings. The body which would administer the measure was known, rather confusingly, as the Crofters' Commission. The area to which this legislation

would apply was limited to "crofting parishes" of Argyll, Invernessshire and the more northerly counties. The "crofting parishes" concerned in fact comprised 151 out of the 163 civil parishes in the seven counties; most of the exceptions were in the south of Argyll. Attempts were made to extend the area further, but were resisted by the Government. On the other hand, the scope of the Bill was extended in certain other features — notably in connection with compulsory powers to acquire land to increase the size of holdings and grazing areas.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it obviously failed to give even moderate satisfaction to the Crofters' MPs. Their attitude ranged from that of Dr Macdonald who considered that it was "simply tinkering with the question" to that of Macfarlane, who thought it would actually make the crofters' position worse.⁵² On the Third Reading, it was formally opposed by some at least of the Crofters' MPs, who obtained considerable support.⁵³ The passage of the Bill through the Lords was easy, as the Conservatives did not oppose it, and it received Royal assent in June.

As we shall see later, the Highland "Land War" was by no means over; but the obscure peasants of the Western Isles had already attracted an enormous amount of attention in the great towns of Scotland. It is very easy today to underestimate the depth and the extent of this concern. When one peruses the Scottish newspapers of the time, however, it becomes more clear. On several separate occasions, from 1882 until the end of the decade, the Hebridean disturbances provided one of the main items of news almost every day for months at a stretch. Many thousands of residents in the Scottish towns were Highlanders either by birth or by recent extraction, and found it exceedingly easy to identify their sympathies with kinsmen and friends who still lived in those parts.

Signs of great interest appeared right at the start. In 1882, no fewer than 45,000 signatures were obtained in Glasgow for a petition on the subject of the crofters' grievances, and this may have played a large part in securing the establishment of the Crofters' Commission.⁵⁴ This general concern with the crofters and their interests persisted for a very long time; nearly nine years later, Chamberlain told Balfour that "the condition of the crofters interests very deeply many voters in the Scottish constituencies, especially in the West".⁵⁵

Very soon, aggrieved workers in Glasgow began to see that the problems of the Hebrides were not unconnected with their own

troubles. In November 1884, Shaw Maxwell (later an important figure in the ILP) carried with a large majority a resolution which he submitted to the Glasgow Liberal "Six Hundred" "to petition Parliament forthwith for immediate fiscal reform, and the reimposition of the 4s. tax upon all ground values on the basis of current rental".⁵⁶

The influence of George's ideas is obvious; but even more striking was Shaw Maxwell's reported speech, which presaged the direction which the land agitation would take: "There seems to be an opinion, he said, that land reform was a matter for people in agricultural districts, and that the cities were only indirectly interested in the question. In his opinion the question of land reform was eminently a city question, and he was satisfied that its final settlement would be determined by the people of the great towns".⁵⁷

The same point was taken by Joseph Chamberlain in the following year in at least three speeches to English audiences. When rural labourers were driven from the land, he argued, they were huddled together in urban slums "until anything like decent and healthful dwellings becomes impossible".⁵⁸ The root of urban poverty was to be sought in the land problem.

At the General Election of 1885, the various ideas which had been implanted by Henry George, underlined by the Highland land agitation, and developed in a different direction by Joseph Chamberlain⁵⁹ exerted a massive influence not only in the Highlands but throughout the Northern Kingdom. In four or five constituencies of the Clyde area, candidates whose main plank was land reform stood in opposition to the recognised Liberals. All of them fared disastrously — and they must be regarded not so much as precursors of a great movement but as rather embarrassing enthusiasts for a movement which was already well established, and whose main activities took place within the Liberal Party and not in opposition to it. Nevertheless, the fact that they appeared at all is an indication of the depths of feeling which the land question was stirring. It has been claimed, probably correctly, that until 1885 or even 1886 the principal concern of Scottish radicals had been the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland;⁶⁰ but from the middle 1880s land reform became more and more dominant as a matter of public interest. The people who rioted at the Braes in the spring of 1882 could have had no idea whatever of the influence which they would exert within four years.

Notes-4

- 1 For a general picture of life in Skye, see *Glasgow Herald*, 20 April 1882; *Scotsman*, 21, 25 April 1882. For a somewhat different view, see Malcolm McNeill's report to Lord Lothian, October 1886. Lothian papers SRO GD/40/16/32 fo. 21 ff. ("McNeill's Report"). On the historical background, see J. P. Day, *Public Administration in the Highlands of Scotland* (see bibliog.).
- 2 Lord Lovat's letter to the Lord Advocate, circulated to Cabinet, 8 October 1885. CAB 37/16/54 ("Lord Lovat's letter").
- 3 James Hunter, "The politics of highland land reform 1873-1895", *Scottish Historical Review*, 53 (1974), at pp. 47-8.
- 4 *Scotsman*, 22 April 1882.
- 5 Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, Bart., Liberal candidate for Inverness-shire in 1880 and 1885.
- 6 Harcourt to Gladstone, 17 January 1885; circulated to Cabinet, 29 January 1885. CAB 37/14/7. For examples of clearances of sheep (and shepherds) in favour of deer, see SRO papers AF/50/9/5.
- 7 Gladstone to Harcourt, 19 January 1885, also circulated in CAB 37/14/7.
- 8 Alexander Mackenzie, *The Isle of Skye 1882-3* (see bibliog.), p. xli.
- 9 J. B. Balfour (Lord Advocate), 24 April 1882. Parliamentary Debate 3S, 268, col. 1246; *Glasgow Herald*, 20 April 1882, etc.; *Scotsman*, 20 April 1882.
- 10 *Irish World*, 20 May 1882.
- 11 James Cameron, *Old and New Highlands and Islands* (see bibliog.), p. 51.
- 12 Lord Lovat's letter; McNeill's Report. Lothian papers GD/40/16/32 fo. 21 ff.
- 13 Printed *in extenso*, *Inverness Courier*, 15 April 1882.
- 14 See *Scotsman* 19, 20, 21 April 1882; *Glasgow Herald*, 18, 19, 20, 21 April 1882; *Inverness Courier*, 18, 22 April 1882; *The Times*, 12 May 1882; *Justice*, 13 December 1884; J. B. Balfour, Parliamentary Debate 3S, 268, col. 1246. An extensive account is given by Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances* (see bibliog.), pp. 427-33, quoted at length in H. J. Hanham, "The problem of Highland discontent 1880-1885", *Trans. Royal Historical Society*, 5S, vol. 19 (1969), pp. 21-65. See also J. G. Kellas, "The Crofter's War 1882-1888", *History Today*, xii, pp. 281-8.
- 15 Lord Lovat's letter. An interdict is the Scottish equivalent of an injunction.

- 16 Cameron, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4.
- 17 McNeill's Report.
- 18 *Inverness Courier*, 25 April 1882; Dougal Cowen to J. S. Blackie, 4 February 1886. Blackie 2636 fo. 150. See, however, Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 50ff., for more detailed information about later activities of the HLLRA.
- 19 Kellas, *op. cit.*
- 20 J. B. Balfour to Gladstone, 7 September 1882. WEG 44,476 fo. 244; McNeill's Report. Murdoch's newspaper, *The Highlander*, ceased publication in 1881. A manuscript autobiography of Murdoch, which unfortunately only covers the period up to 1880, exists at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- 21 McNeill's Report.
- 22 Sir William Harcourt, 21 April 1883. Parliamentary Debates 3S, 278, col. 56; Robert Rainy to Blackie, 21 March 1883, on Assynt. Blackie 2635, fos. 39-40.
- 23 *Report into conditions of crofters and cottars . . .* P.P. 1884 xxxii, p. 7.
- 24 24 June 1884.
- 25 *The Times*, 30 May 1883.
- 26 *Inverness Courier*, 4 September 1884.
- 27 *Glasgow Herald*, 1 November 1884; see also Harcourt's statement of 30 November 1884. Parliamentary Debates 3S, 293, col. 539.
- 28 *Glasgow Herald*, 6 December 1884.
- 29 *Annual Register* 1884 (chron.), pp. 40, 42, 43, 49; *Glasgow Herald*, *Scotsman*, *North British Daily Mail*, November and December 1884 (many references); Lord Lovat's letter.
- 30 *Annual Register*, 1884 (chron.), p. 53. *Glasgow Herald*, 11 December 1884.
- 31 *Glasgow Herald*, 5 November 1884.
- 32 *Scotsman*, 5 November 1884; *Justice*, 1 November, 27 December 1884.
- 33 *Glasgow Herald*, 2 December 1884.
- 34 See police reports, especially for South Uist. Ivory papers, SRO GD/1/36/2.
- 35 *Scotsman*, 15 January 1885.
- 36 Harcourt to Gladstone, 17 January 1885, circulated to Cabinet, 29 January 1885. CAB 37/14/7.
- 37 See R. C. Munro Ferguson (Novar) to Rosebery, 9 March 1885. R. 10,017 fos. 1-4.
- 38 Here understood to mean Argyllshire, Invernessshire and all places north thereof— eight constituencies in all, two of them Burghs.

- 39 C. Innes to J. S. Blackie, 26 July 1883. Blackie 2635, fo. 31-2.
- 40 *Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1885.
- 41 *Northern Ensign*, 13 April 1882.
- 42 *Northern Ensign*, 16 December 1885.
- 43 *Scotsman*, 11 December 1885.
- 44 *Rossshire Journal*, 13 November 1885.
- 45 Compare, for example, *Rossshire Journal*, 20 November and 4 December 1885. Novar himself was less sanguine. Argyll to Gladstone, 4 December 1884. WEG 44,105 fo. 238.
- 46 Mackenzie to Blackie, 8 August 1885. Blackie 2636 fos. 71-2.
- 47 *North British Daily Mail*, 9 July 1886.
- 48 *Scotsman*, 4, 18 November 1885.
- 49 *Northern Ensign*, 23 December 1885.
- 50 Lochiel to Harcourt, 20 December 1884. Circulated to Cabinet, 29 January 1885. CAB 37/14/7.
- 51 Crowley, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20; Kellas, *op. cit.*, p. 285.
- 52 Macdonald, 8 March 1886. Parliamentary Debates 3S, 303, col. 195; Macfarlane, 10 March 1886. *Ibid.* 305, col. 679.
- 53 The Third Reading was carried by 219:52. Hansard does not publish the Division list, but Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 71, claims that all Crofters' MPs voted in the minority.
- 54 Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- 55 Memorandum on smallholdings, marked "A. J. Balfour", January 1891. JC 5/5 fo. 47.
- 56 *Glasgow Herald*, 20 November 1884.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Michael Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism* (see bibliog.), p. 38.
- 59 Compare J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, ii, p. 66.
- 60 Donald C. Savage, "Scottish Problems", *Scottish Historical Review*, 40 (1961), pp. 118-35.