

Depopulation of Rural Scotland in the 1800s and its Impact on Tiree

**A debate between The Hon. D.H. Macfarlane M.P. & the Duke of Argyll,
conducted in the pages of *The Times* newspaper, 1882-1886,
with contributions by leader writers of *The Times***

Compiled by Nanette Mitchell & Keith Dash

Scottish-born The Hon. D. H. Macfarlane M.P., Member for Carlow, Ireland, in the House of Commons, was a staunch supporter of the rights of Scottish crofters against the determination of proprietors, such as the Duke of Argyll, to amalgamate crofts into larger land units leased to single tenant farmers, which would lead inevitably to the continued depopulation of rural Scotland. The agitation by Mr Macfarlane and others like him did not stop the depopulation trend, but it did help ensure the setting up of the Napier Commission in 1883 and the survival of a crofting system that exists in the Highlands and Islands today. It is clear from the tone of their correspondence that there was no love lost between Mr Macfarlane and the Duke of Argyll.

The Times, 16 October 1882.

[Mr. D. H. Macfarlane]

Depopulation in Rural Scotland

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - At the end of the Session pleading for a Royal Commission to inquire into the condition of the crofters I stated that depopulation was going on in rural Scotland, and especially in the Hebrides and other islands. A Scotch member of considerable experience and standing met my statement with a flat contradiction, accused me of ignorance of the facts, and resented the interference of a Scotchman on behalf of his own countrymen because he represented an Irish constituency. I had no right of reply, and so Mr. Ramsay's contradiction was allowed to pass uncontradicted. Since that discussion took place an authority has spoken who cannot be accused of ignorance or any other disqualification. That authority is the Registrar-General for Scotland, and what is his testimony? With your permission I will give two facts recorded by this high authority, which fully and completely bear out my statement, and refute, as fully and completely, Mr. Ramsay's contradiction. I asserted that the rural population of Scotland was diminishing, and the Registrar-General shows that in the ten years between 1871 and 1881 the decrease amounted to 40,484, equal to 3.96 per cent. of the whole. At that rate the rural population of Scotland would disappear in the year 1908. Between 1871 and 1881 the increase in the town population of Scotland amounted to 18.20, and in the villages to 15.73 per cent. While the whole population of Scotland has increased 11.8 per cent. the rural shows a reduction of 3.96, or, assuming that the natural increase would be the same in both cases, the actual loss of rural inhabitants in ten years has been 15.14 per cent. The Registrar-General does not carry his analysis of the census further back than 1861, or we should have found still more alarming results: but table II is remarkable enough. Between 1861 and 1881 the population of the mainland of Scotland increased by 657,781, and in the same period the islands lost, besides what they should have gained, 2,502. Mr. Ramsay has courteously furnished me with a statistical table of his own going back to 1750, and referring mainly to the insular parishes of the Western Islands. In 1831 the population

of these islands numbered 89,870. In 1841 this number had increased to 92,013 and from that time has steadily fallen off, until, in 1871, it stood at 78,084, a reduction in 40 years of 14,929, or nearly one-fifth. The most remarkable reduction is in Mull and Iona. In these islands the population has dwindled from 10,538 in 1831 to 6,441 in 1871. There are no statistics for deer or grouse for the same period, or it might show another instance of the survival of the fittest. It is only fair to mention that in Lewis, during the period referred to, the population has increased from 14,541 to 23,483. Even in this I doubt if the increase indicates an increase in the rural inhabitants, but only an expansion of the towns. I contend also that the reduction of 14,929 does not represent the total loss of cultivators, for a parish might show an increase of population after the tillers of the soil had vanished. I have not the figures for the same localities for the last census, but have only the broad fact that 40,484 of the peasant toilers of Scotland have been swallowed up by the towns and villages.

These figures are enough, but if confirmation were needed let those who doubt do as I have done during the recess. Let them steam round the islands of Scotland. Let them make inquiry on the spot, and keep an eye upon the hills that slope down to the water. They will see everywhere the ridges of abandoned cultivation, and the blackened stones of roofless dwellings. Wholesale evictions by force may now be rare, but as surely as the people were dragged to the sea shore half a century ago and sent away in ships, as surely are they now being pushed out of possession. They are going into the slums of the towns to breathe foul air, to drink vile drink, and to inhale demoralization from corrupt surroundings. They are fleeing from a condition of existence which has become intolerable. Their grazing ground has been taken from them, and they have no grass for the cow that gave them milk for their porridge or potatoes. The rent which the bare holding was not worth without the common grass of a hillside the poor crofter draws out of the waters near his home, or more likely, out of the depths of the North Sea.

It is easy to drive an agricultural population into towns, but it is impossible to send people back from the towns to agriculture. This process has been long since completed in England, to the grievous injury of the country, and there is, practically speaking, no rural population in this part of the kingdom equivalent to the Scotch crofter or the small tenants in Ireland. There are people who look complacently upon this operation, and speak of the growing wealth of the country as proof that all is well. I cannot agree in that opinion, for I hold that the man who produces food out of our own soil is a more valuable citizen than the worker in a factory, who earns the same amount, and lays it out in the purchase of foreign bread. That country is, in the long run, the richest that supplies the greatest proportion of its own necessities. Would not English landlords now welcome back the small farmers who held their own ploughs and were not above working with their own hands? They are gone and the big farms are on the landlords' hands.

Wise legislation has arrested this destructive operation in Ireland, and restored to the people of that country some of the rights of which they had been deprived. Bad as it has been in Ireland, I am disposed to believe that, on a smaller scale, as cruel injustice has been done in Scotland. They have borne it more meekly and in comparative silence. Circumstances and their insular position have made resistance and combination more difficult. But the Scotch crofter is now asking why, across the few miles of water that separate them from the North of Ireland, there should be, under the same Government, fixity of tenure, judicial rents, compensation for improvements, and the right of free sale, while he hangs on to his holding by a thread of tenure which

may be snapped by a notice of 40 days. What is the difference in principle or in theory between his rights and the rights of his Irish brethren that they should have so much secured to them and he nothing? What is right and just for the 600,000 tenants in Ireland is right and just for the smaller number in Scotland. The crofter has seen what agitation has done in Ireland, and the example will not be lost on him. He was once the joint proprietor of the land with his chief, who claimed from him no other rent than his aid in cutting the throats of his neighbours who happened to wear another coloured tartan than his own. The chief, who was the trustee of the clan, became, in a hundred different ways, all more or less villainous, the proprietor, and the people were cheated out of the land. Estates were confiscated and were given to those who ignored the rights of the people, and they were sometimes restored to the chief, but never to the people to whom they belonged. I have seen within the last week, in the public prints, that an American lessee of extensive shootings in Scotland had called upon the proprietor to evict the crofters whose presence interfered with his deer and grouse. Such is the condition of mind of some people upon the subject of the rights of landed property. The gentleman referred to has leased many large shootings for years, and it is not easy to believe that this is the first time he has made such a proposal. It is easy to believe that a person of his experience would not have made it now if it had not been successfully made before.

Is not then the case of the Scotch crofter one that not only justifies but demands inquiry in the national interest? I asked for a Royal Commission to inquire into the facts and the necessities of the case, but it was refused, on the ground that there was nothing to inquire into. Importunity will have to do in this case what it has had to do ever since the time of the unjust judge, and, as far as it lies in my power, it shall be done. I know very well the difficulties that beset Her Majesty's Government and the outcry that would be raised if Mr. Gladstone attempted to do for Scotland what he has done for Ireland. But let Scotch proprietors read the lesson that has been taught their fellows in Ireland. If half of what was done in 1881 had been done when the Devon Commission reported, or even in 1870, we should have had no land agitation, and the Irish tenant would have been content. Let the crofter, too, read the lesson, and when the next election takes place let him see that proper pledges are given to support a demand for a searching investigation into his grievances. If 40 Scotch members will press for inquiry it will be done. I am sure that my Irish constituents, in whose cause I have given hundreds of votes, will not complain if I give a little time and my vote for my own countrymen, whose case is now as hard, if not harder, than theirs was two years ago.

Your obedient servant,

62 Portland-place

D. H. MACFARLANE

The Times, 16 October 1882.

[*Leading Article*]

In his letter this morning on the process of depopulation he has discovered in rural Scotland MR. MACFARLANE apologizes for the intrusion of an Irish member into a Scotch question. He is a Scotchman of Caithness by origin, and asserts therefore the right to take the part of his kinfolk. No excuse was needed. A member for Carlow represents the Hebrides as he represents Connemara. He is doing his duty as well as exercising his lawful powers when he raises his voice for justice to any section of his fellow-citizens. Whether he chose the proper occasion last summer, or be entitled to adopt the character of the importunate widow in the next sittings or Session of Parliament, is a different matter. Advocates of rural causes are in the habit of forgetting that there are town constituencies with grievances and wants of their own. Agricultural grievances have been discussed and investigated with a vehemence and a prolixity which have usurped all the time and attention due to the rest of the kingdom. The Royal Commission MR. MACFARLANE desires to see appointed could be conceded only after much Parliamentary deliberation had been spent on the consideration whether so ponderous an instrument were required. When granted it would stir up the depths of Scotland, and England could not avoid being affected by the dust and commotion. After the world has been turned upside down in the interest of the Irish peasantry, is it too much to demand as an obligatory inference that a second tumult should on that account immediately begin on behalf of their insular neighbours in Mull and Iona. The urban voter may well think that his turn ought to have come at last. He has a hundred subjects for Parliamentary inquiry which have been long waiting their chance. MR. MACFARLANE will waste his admitted capacity, and diminish the authority he has fairly earned in the House of Commons, if he carry out his threat of forcing the Legislature to go into a topic for which, after the exhaustion of a cognate theme, it can for the present have no appetite.

But the subject of his letter is curious and important in itself, though it is not ripe for Parliament, or rather Parliament is not ripe for it. Official statistics confirm, what casual observation would have suggested, that the population of the north of Scotland actually living in the open country is fast diminishing. The diminution is most conspicuous, as might have been presumed, in the Western Isles. MR. MACFARLANE'S apparent conclusion that the policy and covetousness of the landlords are the sole cause is not equally clear. Proprietors in many districts are known to have been induced by the bribe of enormous rents for grouse moors and deer forests to evict their cottar tenants. In others the motive has been the wish to employ scientific methods of cultivation, or a persuasion that crofters with their petty holdings could by no industry extract a maintenance from the soil. Elsewhere, again, the owner has no direct concern with the tendency to depopulation. A change in the social system has often been the principal agent. Farmers are ceasing, as they have long ceased in England, to feed their labourers, lodging them in the miserable and untidy huts which used to surprise Southern eyes. Ploughman who once swelled the population of the fields now walk from the neighbouring village to their work. Even agricultural science and modifications in manners and in farming practice are not the only influences which MR. MACFARLANE should have joined to landlord and sporting rapacity and selfishness as depopulating forces. Hebridean crofters and country labourers on the mainland would in any event would have felt the impulse to seize the opportunities which migration and emigration are continually holding out. Scotchmen have always been a nation of wanderers. New facilities have stirred the propensity by the lonely shore

and on the bleak hill side. Tenants and labourers, as well as landlords, must have the inclination arrested which carries them abroad or to the towns before the rural resident population of the north of Scotland can be kept from the depletion that MR. MACFARLANE deplures. To anticipate, as he seems to anticipate, that the decrease will continue until there is left no rural population at all, is to assume that farming and its demand for labour will disappear in the country with the crofters. Neither by the year 1908 nor in any other year is there any reason to apprehend that the north of Scotland will be an unpeopled wilderness. To lament with MR. MACFARLANE the decay of population at present is not less premature, until it be proved that the region and the men who under the earlier conditions would have inhabited it are worse off wherever they are than they would have been had they stayed in their old dwellings.

We should not, like the persons stigmatized by MR. MACFARLANE, look "complacently upon the growing wealth of the country as a proof that all is well", if it were shown that the human heirs of this propensity were pining in wretchedness as exiles. On the other hand, we think a British citizen as valuable, though he be a "worker in a factory and lay out his earnings in foreign bread", as if "he produces food out of our own soil". The object in which the public is interested, so far as questions of land is concerned, is that British soil should return fair proceeds, and that British citizens should live in comfort and honour. Rural depopulation is a subject of congratulation, rather than bemoaning, if Scotch acres yield a larger profit through the absence of crofters, and if they who would in old times have been crofters procure a better subsistence elsewhere. The duty incumbent on the owners of property, and on public opinion which judges their conduct, is to keep both aims in view. A proprietor who, with an exclusive regard to the enhanced rent of a deer forest, banishes from their homes a population able to have existed in them decently and happily is open to all MR. MACFARLANE'S censures. Northern proprietors were once, as MR. MACFARLANE, though with unnecessary violence, remarks, trustees for their clans of the land they now hold in fee simple. Consequently, they are peculiarly bound to respect the custom of occupancy. No duty, however, is violated when a landlord insists that the tenure shall be modelled on a principle which will both do justice to the soil and rescue the occupants from a state bordering ever on starvation. A landlord in the far north or north-west is obliged to exercise rights of despotic sovereignty for the benefit at once of the land and its population. Provided his despotism be wise and paternal he may count upon the support of opinion. He not fear to be condemned on the simple testimony of the REGISTRAR GENERAL'S figures. Not all northern landlords are wise or paternal. Some treat their tenants as if they possessed no common rights with themselves. They have reduced their estates to a state in which they can be productive only so long as a particular fashion of sport endures. They have been neither thoughtful for others, nor perhaps in the end for themselves. Yet it may be doubted whether MR. MACFARLANE, with his eager wish to defend his western countrymen, would not practically be more unkind to them than the least scrupulous of the proprietors he denounces. To seek to crystallize them by legislation in their holdings, insufficient as they are and must be to supply a reasonable livelihood, is to do personal injustice in the name of abstract justice, and to entail destitution on a people for the sake of a theory that it is their birthright.

Depopulation in Rural Scotland

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - The letter of Mr. Macfarlane on the decrease of the rural population in Scotland, and especially in the Western Islands, which was published in *The Times* of the 16th inst., refers to a subject of very curious interest on which Mr. Macfarlane and the public seem to me to be very imperfectly informed.

A good many years ago I had occasion to investigate it with some care; and the results of my inquiry to the Statistical Society of London, in a paper which will be found in Journal of that Society for December, 1866. The general results may be stated shortly as follows:-

1. That before the close of the civil wars in 1745, the condition of the population in the Highlands, and especially in the Western Islands, was a condition of great poverty, and of frequent destitution amounting to famine.
2. That after the close of the civil wars, and during the remaining 45 years of the last century, there was a rapid and extraordinary increase of population.
3. That this increase was due to several concurring causes – to the introduction of the potato, to introduction of inoculation (which stopped the ravages of the smallpox), and to the artificial stimulus of the trade in kelp.
4. That this increase in population was without any corresponding increase in skill or industry as regards agriculture higher than the cultivation of the potato, or as regards any manufacture higher than the collecting and burning of seaweed.
5. That even with these alleviations and resources, the population was pressing hard on the limits of subsistence, was afflicted by recurring seasons of distress, and multiplying beyond any means of support which could be steadily relied on.
6. That in the statistical account of Scotland published in 1794 evidence will be found that in the island especially the necessity of seeking relief by emigration had come to be recognized, and that from some islands a considerable emigration had then actually taken place.
7. That the failure of the kelp trade due to economical causes, and to changes in the tariff, was one of the first events which revealed the unsafe basis on which the rapid increase of population had rested.
8. That the potato famine of 1846-47 was the next event which clinched the evidence; and that ever since there has been a steady advance in those natural movements of population, and in those changes of industry which are the first indispensable steps to a healthier system, and to the establishment of a more prosperous population.
9. That the introduction of sheep farming was a pure gain to the national resources – not tending to diminish the area of tillage where tillage could ever be desirable, but

turning to use for the first time that largest part of the whole area of the country which had formerly been absolutely waste.

10. That for the old wretched cultivation of the very small crofts there has been very largely substituted a middle class of tenants which has been, and now is, comparatively thriving.

11. That the displacement of population by the introduction of great capitalists holding farms of very large value has not taken place in the Highland counties to an extent nearly equal to that in which it has taken place in the richer lowland counties. The statistics for farms in Argyllshire, for instance, show a great preponderance of farms of moderate size – a very large number of crofts, some of which are even now too small to afford full occupation or a comfortable living; and a very limited number of farms relatively large, but which would still be considered small in Berwickshire or the Lothians.

I have no time now, and you could not afford me space, to adduce the evidence on which these propositions rest. The paper I have referred to gives that evidence in some detail. But there is a great deal more to be added to it.

I cannot help being amused by Mr. Macfarlane singling out the decrease in the population of Mull and of Iona as especially distressing, and by his connecting the decrease of men there with the increase of grouse and deer. It happens that, as far as I know, there has never been any deer forest in Mull, although there are a few scattered deer, while in grouse, Mull is notoriously very poor. As regards Iona, if Mr. Macfarlane can find on it a single grouse or a single deer, I shall accept him as an authority on Highland depopulation. Nor do I believe that he would find it easy to persuade the crofters of Iona that their very moderate possessions ought to be further subdivided.

On some points of sentiment I sympathize with Mr. Macfarlane. I love the country and I hate the town. But the rural occupation which is limited to the feeding of two or three Highland cows, and the cultivation of a few acres of bad oats and treacherous potatoes, is an occupation which must sometimes pall. Not even the sun of Southern Europe can make educated men contented with a few strips of vineyard, or a little cluster of olive trees. The gravitation of the rural population to the towns is more marked in France than in any other country in Europe, and France is the paradise of a peasant proprietary.

My desire is to see a happy mixture of farms of all sizes, from the largest down to the *minimum* which can profitably occupy the whole time of a man and his family. The approach to this condition of things in many parts of the Western Islands is much nearer than is generally known. No country in the world has made such rapid advances in agricultural prosperity in the same period of time.

Your obedient servant,

Inverary, Oct. 18.

ARGYLL.

The Highland Crofters

Yesterday a deputation from the Highland Land Law Reform Association of London had an interview with the Lord Advocate (Mr. Balfour, Q.C., M.P.), to lay before him the cases of Highland crofters who have been evicted from their holdings in consequence of their having given evidence before the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the crofters' question. The deputation consisted of Mr. Macfarlane, M.P., Mr. G. B. Clarke, Mr. J. S. Stuart Glennie, Captain Campbell (Inverawe), Mr. J. M. Murray, the Rev. N. Mackneill, Mr. A. Watt, Mr. E. Cattamach, Mr. A. Macrae, Mr. Malcolm Macleod, and Mr. D. Murray, secretary of the association.

Mr. MACFARLANE, in introducing the deputation, said their object was to prevent vengeance being wreaked on the people of the west of Scotland for the evidence which they had given before the Crofters' Commission. He understood that in specific cases where special indemnities were promised steps had been taken against the crofters, and the landlords were widely using their power of eviction in cases where there was no arrear of rent. The deputation did not desire to oppose the law; they were endeavouring to prevent by every means in their power a possible clash between the law and the people if the latter were driven to desperation. They advised the people to submit to oppression and present suffering rather than break the law, but they wished the Government to take into consideration the hard case of these crofters. By the Compensation for Disturbance Bill of 1880 it was proposed to step between the landlord and the tenant, and in the case of holdings of less than £30 rental value it was intended that whenever a tenant should be evicted for arrears of rent he should be paid so many years' value of his tenant-right. It was not stated that the crofters were in arrears, yet the landlords were at the moment clearing their estates.

The LORD ADVOCATE observed that he should be glad to have information from the deputation on this point, because he had not yet had much information. He was glad to hear that the deputation disapproved of resistance to the law, because nothing could be more disastrous than the encouragement of a course leading to a breach of the peace.

Mr. MACFARLANE wished to call attention to what passed with regard to the Agricultural Holdings Act last year. It was required that six months' notice should be given, but in Skye notices had been issued in March giving 40 days' notice.

The LORD ADVOCATE said the Act came into operation on the 1st of January. He should say that where there was a provision for six months' notice under a statute it surely must mean six months' notice after the Act came into operation. With regard to a notice for Whitsuntide, the common removing term, the Act had not been in operation six months before Whitsuntide. How could the landlord give six months' notice for Whitsuntide under the Act when it had not been in operation for that period?

CAPTAIN CAMPBELL said that had been done to avoid the necessity of paying compensation.

The LORD ADVOCATE thought that, supposing the case was one of a lease where a longer notice was required, it would be a difficult proposition to maintain in any court

of law that a notice required to be given before an Act was passed or before the Act came into operation. In the case of any outgoing six months after the Act came into operation it would clearly be the duty of the landlord to give notice under the Act. Supposing the term was in the middle of the year, six months after the 1st of January, notice would be required by the Act.

CAPTAIN CAMPBELL asked whether a new Act did not supersede and override previous legislation.

The LORD ADVOCATE replied that undoubtedly that was the effect of an Act from the time it became operative. Mr. Macfarlane had suggested that notice should have been given six months before Whitsuntide.

Mr. MACFARLANE explained that his contention was that no notice could be given under the Act until the 1st of January.

The LORD ADVOCATE thought that the Act could not be construed as rendering any removal at Whitsuntide impossible. That would mean that the Act was a statutory renewal for a year of all yearly leases.

Mr. MACFARLANE said that was how the Act was understood. He then called upon Dr. Clarke.

Dr. CLARKE said their first object was to call attention to the fact that a number of delegates were now being evicted, or had had summonses served upon them, in consequence of giving evidence before the Crofters' Commission; and, secondly, to state that they had formed a number of associations and a great number of branches to obtain for the crofters the same rights and privileges that the State had given to the cottier farmers of Ireland. Referring to summonses which had been served, Dr. Clarke said the reason given for serving them was that the tenants belonged to the Highland Land Law Reform Association. If this course was not stopped there would be rioting and practically civil war. Feeling was very strong among the big fishermen and crofters, and they said that the State had armed them and drilled them, and they would use the power that was given to them to defend themselves. A captain of Volunteers at Caithness had told him that the men were quite prepared to defend themselves. They said that giving evidence before a Royal Commission or being a member of a political organization was no crime; and if these men were evicted from their holdings for acts of that kind, the association would no longer be able to prevent organized attempts to break the law being carried out.

The LORD ADVOCATE said this was a very important matter, and a great deal depended upon precise and reliable information. He would like to have the names and numbers of cases in which there had been a proposal to evict where there was no arrears of rent and no violation of the conditions of tenancy, and where the reason was only the giving of evidence before the Crofters' Commission or belonging to a particular society.

Dr. CLARKE referred the Lord Advocate to a list published in *The Times* of Monday.

Mr. DONALD MURRAY said that Major Fraser had taken out summonses against tenants because they belonged to the Highland Reform Association, but had not been able to serve the summonses; and Lady Gordon Cathcart of South Uist had served a

summons upon a man because his son was the secretary of a branch of the Reform Association. The association had been trying to get these people to act in a constitutional way.

The LORD ADVOCATE. – I am glad that is so. Unfortunately there has been breaking of the law.

Mr. MURRAY. – Not since this association was started, except in resistance to summonses. The people were under the impression that the landlords were endeavouring to crush this movement out, and they said, and very justly said, that they would be obliged to take means to protect themselves.

The LORD ADVOCATE. – Do they refer to constitutional means or other means?

Mr. MURRAY replied that the people were perfectly willing to take constitutional means, but if the landlords took unconstitutional measures the tenants would do likewise to protect themselves.

Mr. STUART GLENNIE said the question was whether the Government were not prepared to take means to stop evictions from holdings merely because the persons had given evidence before the Crofters' Committee.

The LORD ADVOCATE said it was now suggested that the Government should interfere to prevent removings, whether rent was due or not, and whether there had been or not an assurance that no action would be taken.

Mr. MACFARLANE. – I do not think that the protection should be limited to crofters who received a promise of indemnity, because I should have thought that to give evidence before the Royal Commission should carry with it indemnity.

The LORD ADVOCATE said the Government had no power to alter contracts between landlords and tenants.

Mr. MURRAY wished to know, in the case of a crofter who had no written agreement between himself and the landlord, whether the landlord had the power to give only 40 days' notice.

The LORD ADVOCATE. – According to the law of Scotland, any one having a holding such as a crofter is held to be a tenant from year to year, and, of course, it would have the notice appropriate to the nature of the tenancy. Prior to the time of the Act coming into operation the notice would be 40 days, but when the Act has come into operation it will be six months. Between the first of Whitsuntide and the passing of the Act, however, there is not this six months.

After some further conversation the deputation withdrew.

The Highland Crofters

Yesterday a deputation of Scotch landowners had an interview with the Lord Advocate (who was accompanied by the Solicitor-General for Scotland, Mr. Asher) at the Home Office with reference to the statements recently made by a deputation from the Highland Land Law Reform Association of London and also in a letter appearing in *The Times*. The deputation consisted of the Duke of Argyll, Sir Reginald Cathcart, Mr. Donald Matheson of the Lews, Mr. W. Peacock Edwards (representing lady Gordon Cathcart and other Highland proprietors), Mr. Alexander Macdonald (representing Lord Macdonald Major Fraser of Kilmuir, and other proprietors in Skye).

The DUKE of ARGYLL, in introducing the subject, said – In the first place, I had better explain the nature, origin, and object of this deputation. Your lordship will, no doubt, have observed in *The Times* of last week that there was a very conspicuous paragraph headed "Penalty for giving evidence before the Crofters' Commission". That paragraph contained a direct charge against several West Highland proprietors of proceeding by eviction and other measures against certain crofters and cottiers on account of the evidence which they had given before the Crofters' Commission. Now I wish for myself, in the first place, to state my very strong feeling and opinion that is perfectly true that before the Crofters' Commission a great many of the crofters and cottiers stated things which were not strictly correct against proprietors, and we are bound to remember that many of those persons spoke under great excitement, and also under the manipulation of external agitators. But, on the other hand, I must express my very strong opinion that the impolicy and injustice, and, I will add, the iniquity of accusing any proprietor of having committed such an act, without an adequate investigation, is quite as great as would attach to the act of the proprietor himself. It is the duty of those who make statements on this subject carefully to investigate the facts, and it is the highest breach of public duty and of morality to make accusations of this kind which have not been carefully examined. Now, I have further to say that, with those feelings, I read with very great pain these things in *The Times*; and there were two or three circumstances which immediately struck me. First of all, there was the accusation against one or two proprietors. In particular, one accusation of this kind was brought against Lady Gordon Cathcart, whose liberal and generous management of her estates is well known over the whole of Scotland. There were other proprietors alluded to in whom I had the same confidence that they were incapable of doing such an act. In the second place, I could not help observing that in the narrative, apparently translated from Gaelic, published in *The Times*, there was internal evidence that the alleged action of the proprietor was not in respect of any evidence before the Commission; and in the third place, I thought that in the narrative itself there were very clear indications that those who had written it had committed illegal acts under the instigation of outside agitators. Under these circumstances, I have a third opinion which I wish to express to your lordship, and which is this – that it is the public duty of every man who knows accusations of this kind to be false to come forward and contradict them. It is quite possible for such statements, uncontradicted, to greatly prejudice the public mind against proprietors, and this I hold to be considered a serious difficulty in the way of the Executive Government performing its duty. His Grace further observed that under these circumstances he considered it to be his public duty to make some investigation into the facts. He had done so, and had found that the allegations made were untrue. Therefore he suggested

to Mr. Peacock Edwards and one or two agents of the other proprietors concerned that it was their public duty to come forward and to give to these statements as public a contradiction as the accusation had been made public through an interview with his lordship. That was the history of this deputation.

SIR REGINALD CATHCART said, with reference to the paragraph which appeared in *The Times* of the 21st of April entitled "Penalty for Giving Evidence before the Crofters' Commission", he made inquiries on the subject and he found that not one of the persons mentioned had been summonsed for giving evidence before the Commission.

Mr. WILLIAM PEACOCK EDWARDS said that he was very much astonished when he read the letter in *The Times*, as the most explicit instructions had been given by Lady Gordon Cathcart that no person on her estates should be prejudiced by anything said before the Crofters' Commission, and he himself communicated these instructions to the local officials. As the report of the Crofters' Commission had not then been issued, he ascertained that the statements thus made in *The Times* and again repeated in greater detail by a deputation to his lordship on the 23rd of April last were, so far as Lady Cathcart was concerned, entirely untrue, and that not one of the persons whose names were given to their lordships gave evidence before the Crofters' Commission. Having shown what Lady Cathcart had done for the benefit of the crofters, he pointed out that proceedings were taken against certain crofters in consequence of their unlawful acts in having threatened and ultimately taken forcible possession of land in the occupation of another tenant and violating conditions of tenancy – proceedings which were rendered absolutely necessary in the interests alike of proprietors and of the crofters themselves. He attributed this conduct to the advice of the Highland Land Law Reform Association.

Mr. ALEXANDER MACDONALD said he appeared for Lord Macdonald and for Major Fraser, and, having denied the truth of the statement in reference to the so-called threatened evictions, said that in the cases on the estates he managed all the summonses were issued for arrears of rent – in the majority of cases even two or three years' rent were due. They did not want to remove one single tenant in Skye if they paid their rent, and these summonses of removal were merely directed to recover rent. Every year, on the occasion of crofters being summoned to remove for arrears, sensational but very misleading statements appeared in the newspapers, under headings such as "Evictions of Crofters", "Landlords' Tyranny and Oppression", and such like, whereas the truth of the matter was that the so-called evictions or threatened evictions were first notices or warnings to the crofters that unless payment of rent were made removal would follow, summonses for removal being used in place of ordinary summonses for debt, owing to the great difficulty of identifying the crofters' stock of cattle. He denied that any crofter had been served with a notice of removal because he had given evidence before the Crofters' Commission.

Mr. MATHESON (of Lews) said it was the object of the proprietors to do what they could to benefit the poor crofters, and that the action of agitators in sowing discontent and suspicion among them was greatly to be deplored, for it would hinder the carrying out of the remedies which were much needed at the present time.

The LORD ADVOCATE, in reply, said – I have to thank the deputation for the information that they have communicated to us. It is, of course, of the utmost importance to the Government that they should be fully and accurately informed in

regard to all matters which are proceeding. They are receiving information from those who take different views, and are weighing and dealing with them as may seem right and just.

The deputation then withdrew.

The Times, 8 May 1884.

[*Mr. D. H. Macfarlane*]

The Highland Crofters

To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir, - I introduced, on the 23d of April, a deputation to the Lord Advocate, and in so doing said that their object was to prevent vengeance being wreaked upon people who had given evidence before the Royal Commission. I then referred the Lord Advocate to the gentlemen of the deputation for evidence, and pointed out that even if rent was due these people were in the same position as those for whose protection the Compensation for Disturbance Bill of 1880 was introduced.

In *The Times* it is reported that another deputation was waited upon the Lord Advocate, introduced by the Duke of Argyll, to protest against some statements made in *The Times*, and also by some members of the first deputation. The allegation to which exception is taken is the one that some Highland proprietors were evicting crofters because they had given evidence before the Royal Commission. Did any one imagine that any laird or factor would avow or admit that this was the reason? Of course not. It is only a coincidence, almost as strange as the coincidence of the accident to Mr. Weller's coach at the very spot where he had been warned to be so careful of the voters. But surely it is drawing too heavily upon the public credulity when a factor over several large estates in Skye says – "It is perfectly possible that some of those in arrears may have made strong statements before the Crofters' Commission, but whether they did or not I cannot say". Sir Walter Scott makes one of his characters indignantly deny that there was such a thing as imprisonment for debt in Scotland. When a debtor was ordered by a Court to pay his debt, and did not obey, he was imprisoned for contempt of Court and not for debt. Crofters are not evicted because they gave evidence, but because, coincidentally, they owed rent or had broken some rule of the estate. There is one practical suggestion made by the land agent, who did not know whether his tenants had given evidence or not, and that is that those who think that there are any defects in the land laws of Scotland should come forward and pay up the arrears due to the landlords. If they accept this proposed compromise he promises to withdraw the notices. Perhaps some of the "agitators" may think that it would be better to remove the chief cause of arrears rather than adopt this kindly suggestion.

I am rejoiced, however, to see that the Duke of Argyll, in his remarks in introducing the deputation, deprecates arbitrary eviction. It marks a great change when Scottish lairds think it needful to explain, and almost apologize for turning the people out of their homes. It is not long since they held that to be one of the rights of property which it was Communism to dispute. Cannot a man do what he likes with his own? He can sell his sheep and cattle, and may he not evict his own people? In the old time when every additional sturdy clansman added to his own importance, and increased

his power of robbing his neighbour, the laird or chief bade them increase and multiply, and there were no "estate rules" against marriage. But when that good time came to an end and they were no longer so valuable as sheep or deer he began to rob them, and very soon, as the author of the "Biglow Papers" says, "converted public trusts to very private uses".

The laird is now entitled by law to do all that he is doing. If he is ashamed, it is because his nature is better than the law. Legally he can clear every inhabitant off his "property" and turn it into a deer forest, or into a howling wilderness if he likes. Considering his power, perhaps we should be astonished at his forbearance, and admire his benevolence. It may be that his natural humanity has been stimulated by the agitation which has swept through the Highlands and in its course, like the barque of the Lord of the Isles, has "wakened the men of the wild Tiree".

You have not space for the evidence, but let people who doubt look at page 440 of the report of the Royal Commission, and they will find two cases of eviction at Tobermory which fully prove that vengeance has in some cases been wreaked for evidence given.

Your obedient servant,

D. H. MACFARLANE.

The Times, 15 October 1884.

[*Mr. D. H. Macfarlane*]

The Highland Crofters

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - In October, 1882, I was enabled by the courtesy of *The Times* to call public attention to the depopulation of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and to urge the appointment of a Royal Commission to verify or refute the statements made by myself and others. It is no longer open to any one to deny, as was done when I first moved for a Commission, that the Scotch rural population has a grievance or many grievances. It must now be taken as proved that there is a land question in Scotland which will have to be dealt with. If we take into account the composition of the Royal Commission, the case presented to them must have been one of pressing necessity to have induced them to put forward proposals so revolutionary in their character. I say nothing as to the merits or demerits of their proposals, but it cannot be denied that they amount to a revolution of the land system in a considerable portion of Scotland.

When I wrote to you two years ago it was to tell what I had seen with my own eyes in Skye and other parts of the Highlands. I have just returned from a cruise, extending over seven weeks, among the western Highlands and Islands, and I ask for a portion of your space to tell once more what I have seen and noted in those parts. It is well that the rulers of people should know what the people think, what the people want, and what the people have determined they shall have. I have seen something of the attitude of the Irish tenants before the Land Act of 1881 was passed, and I say that their feeling upon the subject was weak and vacillating in comparison with the determined spirit of the people in the Highlands. The Highland people are convinced that their cause is just, that their demands are just, and they are determined to seek redress by every lawful means until they obtain it.

I attended a meeting in the town of Dingwall, in fine weather in the middle of the harvest, called to consider the question of Land law Reform. It was attended by between 2,000 and 3,000 people, and a more enthusiastic meeting I never saw. But it is not to the numbers attending this meeting that I desire to call attention so much as its composition. There were ministers of all denominations from distant parts, and there were delegates from the outermost islands, who had come there at great inconvenience, and, to them, great cost, to speak in the name of those who sent them. Did these people travel so fast at the bidding of "agitators" and did they pay their own expenses there and back at such a busy season without reason? They came there as serious men with a serious object, and I venture to say that no such meeting, no such significant gathering, has taken place in Scotland for many a year. It is said that some nonsense was talked at that meeting. If there was not it must have been an exceptional and extraordinary meeting indeed, and different from all other meetings in all other places. The nonsense passes away, but the sense remains, and the justice of a cause is not to be measured by the standards of its most foolish adherents. I do not know if there was much folly at this meeting, but if there was, although it is to be regretted, the just cause will survive it.

And now, with your permission, I will tell what I have seen during the months of August and September in Scotland. I visited a great many places, and conversed with a great many people, but I will confine my remarks to two or three localities. It is no exaggeration to say that the state in which the mass of the Crofter population live is a scandal to a civilized nation and a disgrace to the proprietors on whose lands these people "meanly grub this earthly hole in low pursuit". The question of the better housing of the poor in our great towns is before a Royal Commission. It is surrounded with difficulties, but in the country and in the Highlands there is only the will wanting. How proprietors who live on their properties can enjoy their own existence with their fellow creatures living in abject poverty in hovels unfit for decent pigs around them is to me a mystery. They do not appear to recognize (of course there are exceptions) that they have any duties or responsibilities for the well-being of these people. Their whole aim has been to establish and maintain what they call their "rights" and to ignore the duties attaching to their position. Slowly in some instances, but surely in all, the people have been ousted from the best land and sent down to the sea shore, as the Royal Commission says, to make a living by "fishing, without experience, boats or nets". This system has resulted in a compression of the people on poor patches, while the surrounding area would have enabled them to live in decent comfort. And they were, and are willing to pay as much rent as the big farmer to make room for whom they have been ousted. They are paying for these miserable patches as much rent as can be got for the best farms in Norfolk, and they are offering the same for the adjacent land, but it is denied to them. Let any one who wishes to see an example of this pay a visit to that most beautiful Highland loch, Loch Hourn, and judge for himself. He will see on the shore of that loch in a place called Camus Bane a long line of miserable houses, extending about a quarter of a mile, and behind the houses the wretched strips of land running up to the base of the hill upon which they are supposed to grow their corn and feed their cows. A few acres of hillside have been lately fenced off and presented to them to feed their cattle. I was told by an intelligent native on the shore, who did not at the time know who I was, that the hill land thus presented would feed three or four cows, and the population of the village considerably exceeded 100. If the spectator, who is supposed to be looking at this place, is on the water, he will see on his right a stone wall dividing the crofts from the good land, and if he inquires he will find that there the farm of the big farmer begins.

If he carries his eye along the shore, to his right he will see a considerable area of good land all included in the holding of the big farmer. This is the sort of thing to be seen in scores of places, and is the result of the system of treating land in the occupation, or what was in the occupation, of a native population, as a commercial commodity to be put up to auction and knocked down to the highest bidder. Political economists of the highest order, like the Duke of Argyll, maintain that if a farmer from the south or the east or the north happened to take a fancy to a glen in Mull and offers something more than the hereditary inhabitants are paying, or are willing to pay, the proprietor is, upon sound commercial principles, entitled to clear the whole population out of their native glen. I have no desire to be unjust to the Duke of Argyll or any one else, but I believe this to be what he and others hold to be the right of proprietors; and it is so, for the law gives it and has enforced it over and over again, and is engaged in enforcing it now in Skye and elsewhere. Have not notices been served on scores – I might say hundreds – of tenants since the 1st of January last to quit their holdings in 40 days, although the new law which came into force on that date requires a notice of six months? As I was the author of that clause, it seemed to me incredible that this could be done, and I took the opinion of Mr. Horace Davey, Q.C., M.P., and published it, in the vain hope that the opinion of so eminent a lawyer would induce factors and lairds to refrain. But it was useless, and the Sheriffs' Courts have decided against the people. I do not know if the judges in these courts are land agents, but a return which I obtained last year shows that 14 out of a total of 34 Sheriffs' clerks are. The people have appealed, and if they can find the means they may succeed, but the costs will half ruin them. Surely they might have waited six months and curbed their eagerness to get rid of the people. If they can all be disposed of by regular course of law in six months, whether in arrears or with rents fully paid up, what more could the commercial dealer in land desire? This, Sir, is the law; and I have no hesitation in saying that it is an unjust law, a wicked law, made by the strong against the weak, and used by the strong to defraud the weak who were once their co-partners. I maintain the proposition that if a laird could double or treble or quadruple his rent-roll by evicting the native population, he is not entitled by the law of justice, whatever he may be by the law of the land, to do so. Their right may be, and often is, far older and more valid than his, and the inheritance of an estate or the purchase of an estate should not include the right to depopulate whatever area it may include, be it a square mile or a county. Such sentiments may shock political economists and dukes and lords and lairds who, while despising humble traders in the ordinary stock of marts and shops, are not above dealing with their immense estates on the principles of the shopkeeper. The highest price he can get is the costermonger's principle, and the land in Mull or Skye is to be put up, notwithstanding its occupation by hereditary cultivators, for as free sale as a barrel of herrings in a shop in Tobermory or Portree.

I have before me a written statement by and on behalf of the cottars and fishermen of the townships of Mannel, Balmartin, Balmoe, and Balliphuil Tiree, which puts their cause so forcibly and so temperately that I give it in their own words. I cannot guarantee its accuracy, but I have no reason to doubt the facts as stated. I may say that when I was in Tiree I was informed that three or four large farms comprised the bulk of all the land that was worth having for agriculture or grazing, and that as many thousands had to live on the balance. Here is the case as put to me in writing:-

"There are at present in the above-mentioned townships upwards of 70 families comprising above 400 individuals who are entirely destitute of land, arable or pastoral. In an island like this, where no work of any kind is prosecuted save the tilling of the land, fishing, and kelp-making, this means that all these must depend for

subsistence solely on the produce of their labours at the fishing. It might be by great dint of perseverance that the heads of families might eke out a living for themselves and those dependent on them had they such facilities as would insure the safety of their lives and success in their labours, but the circumstances of this island are such at present that for all the above mentioned families there is not the least possibility of obtaining the scantiest livelihood in this manner. There is no harbour at any part of the island to which the boats may run in course weather. . . . Having no land, nor cattle, nor work whatever to engage them, the men, though most willing to work, have to pass the winter idly. This they consider a great misfortune, seeing that it necessarily brings want in its train."

They go on to say that there is a large farm in the neighbourhood which, if divided, would, in conjunction with the fishing, keep them in comfort. They will be or have been told that there are plenty of large farms in Manitoba, and that they had better go there. If the statement I have quoted is true, and I challenge its contradiction or correction, there are in four villages in this small island 400 persons without land. Who are these people, and where did they come from?

It seems unlikely that they are immigrants, for what special inducement would people have to go to an island where there is little or no work? Are they natives of the island who have been dispossessed of their holdings, or their descendants? If they are either one or the other, their case is a cruel one, and it is a remarkable example of the practical consequences of the theory that a man may do what he likes with his own. It is easier to collect £1,000 from one man than £2 each from 500, and this is one ground upon which such things have been justified. It is easier, too, to emigrate one man than 500. Let the big farmer go to Manitoba, and let the 500 remain. There is a system in force, or rather a system has been permitted, on a large number of properties in the Highlands, if not all, which has done much to put a premium upon eviction and injustice. I have not been able to find any condemnation of it in the report of the Commissioners. I refer to the practice of allowing factors and land agents to acquire large farms for themselves and their relatives. It is a terrible temptation to a local Ahab, if he is possessed of absolute power, to evict as many Naboths and add their vineyards to his own as he pleases. I have no doubt this permission, accorded by or unknown to absentee proprietors, has worked much injustice and cruelty, and is another instance of the neglect of duty to which I have already referred. If the lairds have not always been unjust and cruel themselves, they have in too many instances allowed others to be both unjust and cruel. For generations it has been borne with a meekness that has been too abject to be admirable. The people whose bravery has been established on a thousand battlefields have submitted "to the little tyrants of their fields" until they were reduced to a condition of serfdom intolerable even to their meek and loyal spirits. I could tell you the same story of Glendale, in Skye, where the people are huddled together and beg in vain to be allowed to pay rent for the surrounding land. I have seen the place and the land there that would go far to make them comfortable; but the laird will not allow it. The proprietors say that the reason of the wretched condition of the people in the Highlands is mainly due to insufficient holdings. It is a true statement in the main, and why, where there is land, is not this cause removed by giving them more? It is said that they are too crowded. So they are, and so might a house be if those who were formerly distributed all over the house were crowded into the garrets. This is a true parallel to the crowding in the Highlands. Let them be distributed again as far as possible, and if there is not room enough let the surplus take another house – in Manitoba if they cannot do better nearer. But while there are houses which once belonged to the people empty, or with

one or two when there is room for 50 or 100, there is no need to drive the people away. Putting aside the question of right or of wrong, is it policy to do or permit it?

Look at the description in the *Graphic* a week or two ago on the way Highland regiments are recruited. Where are the brave, stalwart Highlanders who used to fill them? Political economy has wasted them, and as Scott said 50 years ago, with a prophetic foresight which fell upon deaf ears, "If the hour of need should come – and it may not be far distant – the pibroch may sound through the deserted region, but the summons will remain unanswered". The time has come, and those who lift their voices to proclaim that wrong has been done and that there is still a remnant of a noble race to be saved are nicknamed "agitators", "carpetbaggers", and whatever other names may occur to anonymous writers, who think, or rather say, that whatever is is right. The "agitators" think the law which has permitted, and even abetted, the wrong that has been done to the Highland people should be changed. The Royal Commission think so too, and even the heir to a county, once infamous in this matter, who has a seat in Parliament, thinks some security should be given and the holdings enlarged. Agitation, the impending enfranchisement of the crofters, and the difficulty of letting large sheep farms, combined, have done something and will do more.

It is much to be regretted that legislative interference should be needed between landlord and tenant, but there are greater evils. Landlords have brought it upon themselves, and if there is trouble in store for them in Scotland they only are to blame. There would be no need for any law if every man would do what is right. Lairds have enjoyed free will long enough, and it is found to be incompatible with the welfare of the people or for the common weal of the nation, and must be, as far as is needful, taken from them. If Rob Roy were alive now, and lived on or near the property of the Duke of Portland, he might perhaps call himself Macgregor, but he would not be allowed to do so with "his foot upon his native heath", for fear of disturbing his Grace's game.

This is the sort of abuse of the rights of property which enrages a people and endangers even the just and legitimate rights which but for such excuses would never be assailed. Land restoration leagues seek nothing better than such noble patrons and promoters of their plans. One such duke is worth a dozen Henry Georges. The Highland Land Law Reform Association is charged with promoting lawlessness in the Highlands. The charge is not merely untrue, but is the very reverse of the truth. The Association has done all it could do to impress upon the people that their agitation should be conducted constitutionally and lawfully. I told them so in every speech I made in Scotland, and if it had not been for the restraining influence of the Association the people would have gone much further than they have gone. Truth is said to be stranger than fiction, and it is certainly less abundant; so I have no expectation that this statement will prevent the refutation of a single false charge, but I think it right to make it. I cannot at the present moment ask for more of your space.

I am, your obedient servant,

62, Portland-place.

D. H. MACFARLANE.

The Times, 20 October 1884.

[*The Duke of Argyll*]

Highland Crofters

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - In *The Times* of yesterday I see a long letter from Mr. Macfarlane, M.P. for Carlow, on "Highland Crofters". I shall not here notice such parts of that letter as refer to other estates than my own, further than to say that, having, like him, spent some time this year on the western coasts and among the islands generally, I see a great many assertions made in respect to Skye, at least, which I know to be very wide of the truth.

But in this letter I confine myself to what he says of my own estate of Tyree, which he says he has visited, and respecting which he repeats, on hearsay, statements which are altogether untrue. He says he was told that "three or four large farms comprise the bulk of all the land that is worth having for agriculture or grazing, and that as many thousands had to live on the balance". This is an excellent, and, indeed, quite a typical specimen of the reckless falsehoods picked up by the Highland agitators from anonymous sources, and generally much embellished by themselves.

There are some 30 farms in the island of Tyree of which the whole but a very few are divided among crofters and small farmers below the £100 line of rent. These crofts and small farms comprise by far the largest portion of the whole area of the arable land in the island. I have not beside me at this moment an exact comparative statement of the acreage as given in the last survey. But I have an older table which gives it roughly; and from this it appears that the farms divided into crofts, and small possessions up to the above limit, include about 2,500 acres of arable land, while the larger farms have altogether somewhere less than 450 arable acres. Besides this immense preponderance of the arable land in the hands of small tenants, they have also a very large proportion of the old "outfield land" or green pasture. Of this class of land, which is often the best pasture and grazing in the island, the same class of crofters and small farmers seem to possess about 2,000 additional acres, exclusive of "link land", which is very fine grazing, and other pasture of a rougher kind.

I may add that there is not a single farm in the whole island that would be considered a "large farm" in any lowland county, or in most of the Highlands. There is only one farm, a dairy farm, up to the £500 line of rent.

As there are only 2,700 persons in the whole island, you can estimate the accuracy of Mr. Macfarlane's information when he tells the public that "as many (four or five) thousands" of persons there are of large farms are living on some small "balance" between the total acreage and that which is engrossed by these farms.

It is true that there are in that island, as there are in many parishes in the Highlands as well as elsewhere, a certain number of families who have no land, and who never had any. Mr. Macfarlane asks where these families come from. Let him ask this question of Lord Napier and Ettrick, who drew up the report of the Royal Commission. He will find his question answered on page 43, in the paragraph beginning at the foot of that page. I need only say here that for the most part they are utterly unable to stock or to manage even the smallest class of farm.

In conclusion I have only further to say that the principles on which I have conducted the management of my island estates have been fully explained in a letter to the chairman of the late Commission, which has been separately published, and is referred to in the report. Mr. Macfarlane's letter contains, both directly and indirectly, a complete misrepresentation both of my opinions and of my practice. Recent correspondence in your columns has shown that this kind of misrepresentation is systematic, and it can only be met by equally systematic contradiction.

Your obedient servant,

Inverary, Oct. 16.

ARGYLL.

The Times, 22 October 1884.

[Mr. D. H. Macfarlane]

Highland Crofters

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - The Duke of Argyll, in a letter to *The Times* this morning, referring to my letter published by you on the 15th, suggests I should apply to Lord Napier for information as to the landless families in Tiree and elsewhere, and gives a reference to page 43 of the report of the Royal Commission. I have turned up the page and find that the report speaks of the practice of subtenancy and squatting as one of the social problems in the Highlands, but I do not find that it throws any light upon the question put in my letter, as to where the 400 landless persons in Tiree came from. My question as to their origin is, therefore, unanswered. If they were subtenants they would have some land, and even squatters must have come from somewhere. I pass by the Duke of Argyll's charges about "falsehoods picked up from anonymous sources" as merely personal and not argumentative, and, therefore, uninteresting to the public. His Grace does not deny the fact that there are 400 landless persons in Tiree, nor does he notice the statement made by themselves, quoted in my letter, but he shows, in refutation of my charge, that these people constitute a seventh of the whole population, whereas I only made them out to be a tenth or a twelfth. His Grace then proceeds to show the public how untrustworthy my statements are by showing that whereas I had spoken of four or five thousand in Tiree there are only 2,700 in the whole island. I beg to offer, in all humility, an apology and an explanation.

I had before me a statistical table compiled by Mr. Ramsay, M.P., and in that table I found that the population of Tiree and Coll combined amounted to 5,833, and as Coll in the census of 1881 had only 643 inhabitants, this would have given Tiree 5,190. On referring again to Mr. Ramsay's figures I find that the population which had got into my head was the population of 1851¹, six years before the present duke succeeded to the property. In 1851, four years after that event, the combined islands had "improved" down to 4,818, which would still leave Tiree somewhere about 4,000. In 1861, 14 years after the succession referred to, a further improvement had taken place, and the combined population was down to 3,998. I am obliged to take the united islands, for Mr. Ramsay does not give the figures separately, but I think that my divisions of population must be approximately correct. If they are not, I shall be glad to be put right. I hope that this explanation will be satisfactory to his Grace, and that I may be pardoned for having made a mistake in the date of the statistical column

¹ This appears to be a typographical error for 1841. The 8th Duke of Argyll succeeded to the title in 1847.

to which I had referred. In 1841 Tiree had a population of about 5,000 and in 1881 2,700, and yet, in spite of this improved condition of affairs, in 1884 in four townships of that island there are 400 persons without land.

As the Duke has been good enough to give me a reference to the report of the Royal Commission, may I give one or two in return? On page 50 he will find that "the grievance of increased rent assumes a more prominent position in the instances of the Ross of Mull, Tiree, and Iona", the two last being entirely the property of his Grace and a large part of the first.

As the duke does not say what part of my statement about the island of Skye is "very wide of the truth", I am unable to deal with that portion of his Grace's letter, but I ask permission to refer to a table which will be found on page 77 of Appendix A of the report of the Royal Commission. It discloses a state of affairs in Skye which I commend to the special consideration of the public. It is a table of the number of "decrees of removing" obtained against the crofters in that island from 1840 to 1883, at an estimated cost to them of £3,840. Remember, it is not a table of notices of removal, but of decrees actually obtained by process of law. By this table it appears that 6,960 heads of families had decrees of removal against them in the period between 1840 and 1883, and, taking the families at an average of five, a total of 34,800 persons had, in the words of the footnote to the table, "the fact of the insecurity of their tenure impressed upon them". I hope that the fact may be impressed upon the public too. A reply to the disclosure made in this wonderful table by Mr. Macdonald, a factor, will be found on the next page of the report. Mr. Macdonald says that "the number of summonses issued does not, of course, show that all the persons summoned to remove were actually removed". Certainly not, or there would be no people in the island of Skye, but it does show that in 44 years a number nearly equal to the whole population twice told had been ordered to quit their holdings. Could a parallel to this have been found in the worst part of Ireland at the worst time in the history of the Irish land question? And this is the outcome of a system which it is a sin to denounce! One paragraph of Mr. Macdonald's letter of defence is so remarkable that I quote it in full. He says:- "I may be allowed to point out that changes requiring summonses of removal necessarily might frequently be required for the public benefit on improving estates. Such summonses or changes would not be required on estates where there was little going on". By "improving estates" I understand a removal of the people in favour of sheep, deer, or large farmers, and the "public benefit" to mean an increase of rent to the landlord. Estates where "there is little going on" I understand to mean those where the people are allowed to remain in their native glens and on their native hillsides. The public is beginning to think that they are most benefited where "there is little going on".

Your obedient servant,
62, Portland-place, Oct.20.

D. H. MACFARLANE.

The Times, 24 November 1884.

[*Mr. D. H. Macfarlane*]

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - By the rules of the House I was not entitled to reply to the speeches made in the course of the debate on Friday, the 14th. For this reason I was unable to notice the figures quoted by Mr. Arthur Balfour with reference to the distribution of land in the island of Tiree. The figures were, no doubt, supplied to Mr. Balfour to be used as a reply to my statements made in *The Times* last month. The advantage of this mode of reply is obvious, for it had an appearance of impartiality and the proprietor could not be held to be responsible.

Mr. Balfour said:- "The hon. member for Carlow had said that in the island of Tiree a great part of the land was divided into large holdings. That statement was untrue. The large farmers in Tiree had 5,700 acres of hill pasturage, and of the soil that could be tilled about 300 acres. The small tenants had 10,306 acres of hill pasture and 3,700 acres of tillage land, or more than 10 times the amount held by large farmers".

The above is the *Scotsman's* report, and it makes the case far worse than I had stated it to be, as I think I can show by a few figures. My original statement in *The Times* was that I was informed that "three or four large farms comprised the bulk of all the land that was worth having". I may say, in passing, that when reproving me for "misrepresentation" the Duke of Argyll converted, as his indignation increased, my "three or four" into "four or five".

The best test of what is "worth having" is probably the price that is paid for it. How does the case of Tiree stand that test? I am informed on what I believe to be good authority that the whole rental of the island, exclusive of shooting, is £5,360, and of this sum six tenants pay £2,658, leaving £2,702 to be paid by the rest of the population. The population in 1881 was 2,730, and, deducting the six who pay nearly half of the whole rental, we have 2,724 sharing land worth in rent a few pounds more than that held by the large farmers. The 2,724, according to Mr. Balfour, have ten times the area of arable land and twice the area of pasturage held by the large farmers, and yet it is worth only £44 more rent. Was I justified in saying that the large farms "comprised the bulk of what was worth having"? I leave the public to judge. The people have ten times as much arable land as the big farmers and they are only 456 times as numerous, yet they are not content.

The Duke of Argyll said in reply to my letter in *The Times*:- "There is only one farm, a dairy farm, up to the £500 line of rent". Is it true that "up to £500" means in one case over £1,200, and in another case, that of the sub-factor, over £600?

Your obedient servant,

November 19.

D. H. MACFARLANE.

The Times, 25 November 1884.

[*The Duke of Argyll*]

The Crofters Question

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - The figures quoted in *The Times* by Mr. Macfarlane in his letter of to-day, respecting the "statistics of occupancy" in the island of Tyree, are not accurate; while the argument he founds upon them is still more erroneous.

As nearly as I can calculate from the schedules of the survey, the facts are these:-

1. Farms divided into crofts at or below the £30 line, as drawn by the Commission, have a total of 10,398 acres, of which 3,798 are arable.
2. Small farms above £30 and below £170, some of which are held by promoted crofters, have 1,101 acres, of which 332 are arable.
3. Larger farms have a total acreage of 5,711, of which only 296 are arable.

As regards rental the crofter farms pay about £2,768, the small farms £543, and the larger farms £2,113. The crofters, therefore, pay a great deal less for their land than the larger farmers, in proportion to its extent. But the reason of this is not that their land is less "worth having", but that they have their land at a very much cheaper rate. Mr. Macfarlane assumes not only that the rents of crofters are determined by the highest competitive value, but also that this value could be the same for the same quality of land when managed by crofters and when managed by men of larger capital. Neither of these assumptions is true. The position of the crofters in Tyree has been greatly improved by the gradual consolidation of holdings which had been recklessly subdivided. Some of them have risen into the position of small farmers, while the cultivation of all has sensibly improved. But still they hold a large area of the finest land in the island at rates very much cheaper than larger farmers can well afford to pay.

Your obedient servant,

November 24.

ARGYLL.

The letters that follow were written during or after the 'Tiree Crofters' War of 1886'. In July 1886 there was an uprising in Tiree by islanders frustrated by what they saw as inadequate land reforms by the Government in response to Lord Napier's [Crofters' Commission report](#), released in April 1884. A group of islanders seized Greenhill Farm, drove off the tenant's cattle, and pastured their own cattle there. The revolt was put down peaceably by police and marines shipped in large numbers to the island. Eight islanders were arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned for participating in it. A day-by-day 'on the spot' account of the 'War' was reported in [The Scotsman](#) newspaper, and an account from nearby Oban was reported in [The Times](#).

The Times, 30 July 1886

[*Mr. D. H. Macfarlane*]

To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir, - It is stated in your leading article on Monday that the discontent in the island of Tiree is due to the policy of the Duke of Argyll in preventing the subdivision of holdings. It is asserted that "the plan followed was to consolidate the holdings by degrees and thus to create a class of small tenant farmers to take the place of the crofters". If this had been the policy and the practice in Tiree the condition of the people in that island would not have been so deplorable as it is.

In October, 1883, you were good enough to publish some letters of mine upon this subject and the replies of the Duke of Argyll. The statement I then made, and its accuracy was never seriously assailed, was that six tenants paid £2,658 a year of rent and the remaining population of 2,724 persons paid £2,702.

This is the kind of consolidation of which the people complain, a consolidation into large farms to the exclusion of the masses of the native population. I stated in 1883, and I repeat it in 1886, that the creation of large farms, made out of the small fields of the poor, is an injustice, that is an abuse of the rights of property which has inflicted intolerable cruelty upon the people of the Highlands, and an injury to the state that has permitted it. I do not propose to enter into the question of the policy or the necessity for sending a body of Marines to storm the defences of Gott Bay or a turret ship to bombard the fortifications at Scarinish. But the public should know that it is not against reasonable consolidation of holdings that the people of Tiree complain, but against a consolidation which is even more fatal to them than subdivision.

I am, your obedient servant,
62, Portland-place, July 29.

D. H. MACFARLANE.

The Times, 31 July 1886.

[*The Duke of Argyll*]

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - I hardly know how far it may be worthwhile to contradict anything said by Mr. D. H. Macfarlane. He has been "found out" by the County of Argyle, as he had been already found out by county Carlow. But as there are always sure to be some people who imagine that a man who has occupied the position of M.P. must speak the truth, I wish to explain that in his letter to you, published today on the Tiree case, he has failed to do so.

Your account of the management I have pursued for 40 years in that island was perfectly correct. Mr. Macfarlane's pretended correction is a tissue of very gross misrepresentations.

The small farm lately seized by violence has been a single farm always. A crofter took it, whom I am defending.

Your obedient servant,
July 30.

ARGYLL.

The Times, 6 August 1886.

[*Mr. D. H. Macfarlane*]

The Tiree Crofters

To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir, - The readers of *The Times* can have no special desire to know my opinion of his Grace the Duke of Argyll, nor do I suppose that they care much more than I do what may be his Grace's opinion of me. Assuming that to be so, I will pass by the railing of the Duke in his letter of 30th ult. with only one remark. Considering all the scandalous circumstances of his family disconnexion with the representation of Argyleshire, there is a peculiar grace in reference to my having been "found out". I hope that I have been "found out", and I am sure that some other discoveries have been made in Argyleshire.

The public, as I have said, has no interest in these personal questions, but the taxpayer has a very direct interest in the system which has led to a military and naval expedition to an island belonging to the Duke of Argyll, and to the circumstances which have driven a peaceful and exemplary people into a state of semi-rebellion. When "estate regulations" require the naval and military forces of the Crown, at a cost of may be several thousand pounds, those who pay for those forces are entitled to inquire into the cause. So long as the estate regulations were enforced by estate resources the public did not, unfortunately, as I think, interfere, but the case is different now.

The Duke of Argyll denies the accuracy of my statements (I pass by the rude insinuations of his language) so I will call a witness. Upon the 24th of November, 1884, in reply to a letter of mine which appeared in *The Times*, the Duke of Argyll wrote, with reference to Tiree as follows:-

"Small farms above £30 and below £170, some of which are held by promoted crofters, have 1,001 acres, of which 332 are arable. Large farms have a total acreage of 5,711, of which only 296 are arable. As regards rent, the crofter farms pay about £2,768 – the small farms £543, and the large farms £2,113."

What, then, is the difference between his Grace's statement and mine? The variation in the amount paid by crofters is £66, and the difference in our figures as to large farms is £545, and this is due to his excluding farms above £30 and below \$170, making between them 1,001 acres. If we add this £545 to the Duke's figures of large farm rent, his figures will correspond absolutely with mine. Unless we know, and his Grace is careful not to tell, how many farms are made out of the 1,001 acres, taking the rather wide range of between £30 and \$170, we cannot judge to which class this area of 1,001 acres really belongs. A good many £30 farms could be made out of 1,000 acres, but not very many "below", which I take to mean very little below, £170. I do not think that farms approaching to £170 rent should be called small farms in the Highlands, but I am sure that if the small holdings of near £30 rent had been many we should have been told the number. It is easier to rage than to argue, but the public will judge for itself, and they shall judge from the Duke's own figures and not from mine, although, as I have shown, there is no substantial difference between them.

His Grace says that large farms have a total acreage of 5,711, and small farms of 1,001-6,712, out of a total of 17,000, and that between them they pay £2,656; while the crofter farms pay £2,768, or a fraction over £1 per head of the population.

Let the public judge from these figures whether I was or was not justified in describing the consolidation of farms in Tiree as having been made for the purpose of creating large farms and not for the benefit of the people in general.

I say that consolidation of the same kind, carried out on the same principle to twice the extent that it has been would place the island in possession of about 30 farmers, and leave the 2,700 landless.

I asked two years ago if it was true that six tenants paid over £1,200, and one, the sub-factor, £600, and I ask it again; and if I am favoured with a reply I hope it will be such as will lead some people to "imagine that a man who occupies the position of a nobleman must speak the truth".

One other question I should like to ask. Was the rental of Tiree in 1851, £2,636, and is it now over £5,700, or more than double?

Your obedient servant,

S.S. Hiawatha, Oban, Aug. 3.

D. H. MACFARLANE.

end of transcripts