THE HIGHLAND SCOTS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The Highlanders who came to Australia in the nineteenth century were mostly outcasts of a peasant society crumbling away on the very periphery of the British world. The distinction between Highland and Lowland Scots had not diminished: it was a cultural, economic and linguistic difference which became more pronounced with the industrialisation of the Lowlands at the end of the eighteenth century. Both sorts of Scots came to Australia as part of the great exodus to many parts of the British Empire. Scotland, in relative terms, has probably lost a higher proportion of its people through emigration than any other European country. Many, of course, came to South Australia and their contribution to the making of the colony remains palpable in many of its institutions. Most of the Scots who came were Lowlanders, from the central industrial belt of Scotland, and from the modernised agricultural counties south of the Highland line. Their reputation was high and they were widely considered the best type of emigrants. Less well known were the smaller contingents of Highlanders who arrived in harsher circumstances, mainly in the 1850s, and whose experience as migrants is the subject of this paper. For most of these people the migration to the colony of South Australia was a second, even a third,

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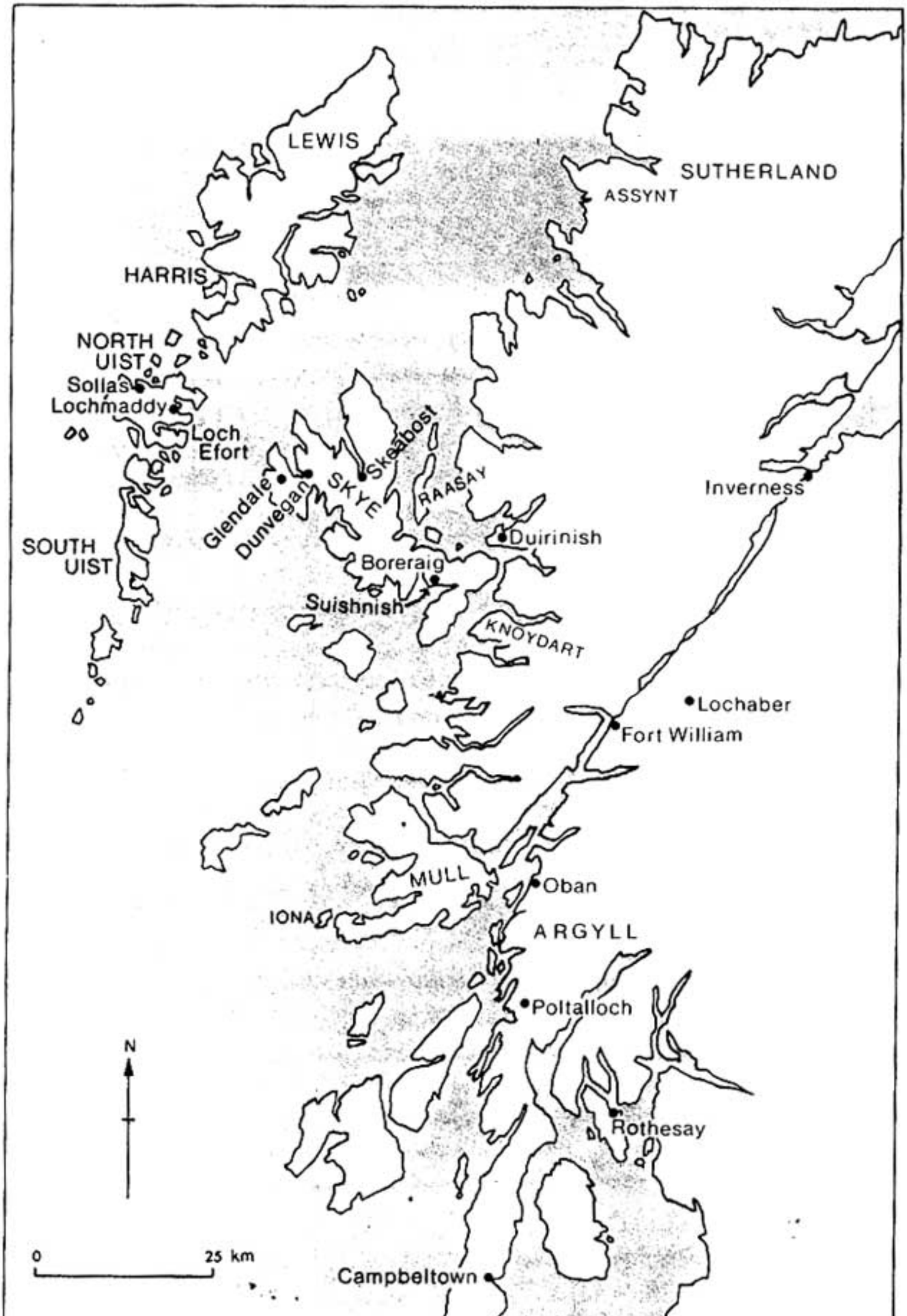

The Scottish Highlands

tragedy to add to the personal catastrophes which had already overwhelmed them in their homeland. Devastation and confusion in Scotland was followed by destitution and humiliation in South Australia. The fact that some survived and prospered is a tribute to their human fortitude.[1]

There were two main types of migrant to Australia from the Scottish Highlands. Both reflected the worsening circumstances of economic life and opportunities in the north of Scotland in the early 19th century. The first type was comparatively well placed usually men of capital, often able to migrate with servants and kinsmen, and wealthy enough to buy land and stock in the colony. These men were from the middle and upper strata of the old society of the Highlands, men whose status in the Highlands had been eroded, or who could see little chance of attaining a comfortable life in the north of Scotland. The old semi-communal economy and society was, by 1800, in the middle stages of decline; it was being replaced by commercial agriculture and sheep-farming. The old system of peasant farming, together with its elaborate class structure and clan loyalty, was in decay. The ranks below chieftain, especially the tacksman class, were without a function; effectively they had been rendered redundant by economic and social change. Many had already left the Highlands for America, England, and by the 1820s, for Australia. In a similar position were the younger sons of the landlord class, men who could see little opportunity for advancement in the Highlands; so also were those who had served in the regiments in the Napoleonic Wars and had returned to the Highlands to find little respect paid to military or clan status. Australia received many half-pay officers from the Highlands who were able to set themselves up with greater independence in the colonies. Among these better-heeled Highlanders, there was a small sprinkling of clan chiefs whose emigration represented the final abdication of the old system in the Highlands. Many of the old patriarchal families in the Highlands were able to convert their estates to sheep farming and reap very lucrative rental increases. But some estates were extremely poor and quite unable to sustain the financial burdens placed upon them burdens such as aristocratic prodigality, generations of accumulated debt, and peasant populations which required repeated relief from the famines which descended upon them in each of the decades of the 19th century. In these circumstances some chieftains simply sold out their estates and tried to re-establish themselves elsewhere, even Australia. There was an element of desperation in this flight of chieftains from the

Highlands, and most of them were never able to recover their lost status and simply dissolved into the colonial population.

Much more desperate was the plight of the second type of Highland migrant to Australia — the numerically much larger group of people who may be regarded as refugees from the Highlands. These were a destitute peasantry who could only reach Australia by charity or by credit. Their circumstances were most similar to those of the Irish in the mid 19th century. The context from whence they came was bleak. After 1815 the Highlands, especially in the west, was one of the most chronically depressed areas of the British economy. Most of the old sources of income had collapsed: the cattle trade was in decline, kelp and fishing were depressed, the old domestic industries broken by southern competition. At the same time the landlords were converting most of the territory of the Highlands into sheepfarms and either sweeping the people to new settlements on the coast, or clearing them out altogether. Employment opportunities declined still further. Meanwhile population continued to grow and the people became increasingly dependent on the unreliable potato. This was the classic pattern making for catastrophe — a declining economy and an expanding population vulnerable to subsistence crisis. Famine and extreme privation occurred at various moments in the nineteenth century and was particularly savage in its effects on the congested population on the west coast of the Highlands and in the islands of the Hebrides. The worst famines were in 1836-7 and in 1847-51, which was the Highland equivalent of the terrible events in Ireland. Famine is the most brutal 'push' force in international migration and the Australian colonies received Highlands refugees from both famines, mainly in the periods 1837-41 and 1851-56. In both phases the emigration was associated with two other pressures. One was the eagerness of many landlords to get rid of these people who were burdens on their estates, i.e. by clearances; the other was the philanthropic effort made by many people (not excluding some landlords) to help the destitute Highlanders to emigrate from seemingly hopeless economic circumstances. The Highland Scots who arrived in South Australia in the 1850s were familiar with both landlord eviction and public charity.

The Highland migrants, therefore, came from an economy and society in the throes of great strain: from a Malthusian crisis superimposed upon a long term economic decline. South Australia was the reverse: an expanding economy that required more labour and capital than could be generated locally. The Highland Scots were a

small but not untypical part of the great exodus from the overpopulated fringes of Western Europe in the mid-19th century, refugees from the re-adjustment of the European economy.

II

In each of the Australian colonies there was a fair sprinkling of Highland Scots of substantial means, men with some capital who paid their own passages and set up a new independence in Australia. They were particularly attracted by the belief that a family's fortunes could be founded or retrieved in the Antipodes. Almost all the regional histories of Australia provide examples of these Highland pioneers. For example, in East Gippsland, at Bairnsdale, the community was dominated by a group of Highland graziers and patriarchs known as McMillan's 'Highland Brigade'. They were led by Angus McMillan of Glenbrittle in Skye who migrated in 1837, paying his own expensive passage, and settled as a large pastoralist among previous migrants from Skye. They saw their task as a great mission to civilise and colonise southern Australia — McMillan said he was 'only an instrument in the hands of the Almighty', and it was he who led retributive attacks on Aboriginals who wrought a terrible and murderous revenge.[2]

South Australia was particularly advertised to attract such men of means, respectable people of middling incomes who were feeling the pinch of economic circumstances. In 1834 there were many enquiries regarding land grants to officers in South Australia. Colin Campbell, of Lochbuie in Mull, expressed the feelings of many of such people in a letter he wrote from Oban in April 1839 about his prospective migration to South Australia. Campbell saw his future thus:

> Here [in Mull] we cannot live tho' suffering severe privations, occasioning trouble to our friends. No doubt we must suffer hardships at the commencement where we are going but by care and frugality we expect to get forward, and the children who are a burden to us here, will be of the greatest benefit to themselves and us in that Colony.

Campbell apparently borrowed money with the help of relatives in order to buy land from the South Australian Colonization Commissioners.[3] This was one way of disembarrassing a family of surplus relatives in the 1830s. Angus Maclaine of Ardtornish in South Australia used to write back to Iona in Scotland to stress the need for hard work for any Highlander in South Australia. He told one that 'If Alexander, your brother, comes here let him forget all the habits of India. Here he must look sharp after every sixpence — live roughly, do

everything for himself that the boys do for you in Iona, at least he need not look for personal attendance. Yet if he possesses a high spirit he will learn to like the country well. All who resolve to be so can gain an independence here'.[4] This was a clear case of the footloose Highlander looking for 'an independence'. The brothers Scott, John and Charles, described as 'sturdy Highlanders', arrived from Scotland in 1838 and carved a fortune in the Tatiara district. They probably possessed initial capital to buy land and stock, but their success owed as much to the great perseverance and energy which motivated men of this background. In the same area settled also the Macleod brothers, of whom John was described as the eleventh chief of Raasay, of the clan Torquile. His career pattern was in the familiar mould: it seems that he had been an officer in the 78th Highlanders, a widower who had sold up his Scottish estates and, joined by his younger brother, set up at Nalang.[5]

While a family fortune might be rescued in these ways it was never possible to replicate in the colony the clan community that had been relinquished by the migration from the Highlands. One effort of this sort, in South Australia, appears to have been given very serious consideration, though the details now are lost. I refer to the Poltalloch Station on Lake Alexandrina. The name derives from an estate owned by the Malcolm family in Argyllshire. Neil Malcolm inherited the Scottish estate in 1837 and two years later he paid £4,000 for a special survey in the colony of South Australia. His intention, apparently, was to create a community of his destitute Highlanders in the colony, in close settlement on the shores of Lake Alexandrina. Very little is known about the circumstances of this project but it is fairly certain that the Malcolms sought not only a profitable adventure in Australia, but also a relief of the crofter population on their Highland estate. In the event the Highlanders refused to migrate — which was probably just as well because Poltalloch, South Australia, was hardly destined to support a peasant style of agriculture. Instead the Malcolms established a pastoral station under agents which they expanded considerably in the 1850s, and then sold in 1874 to the Bowman brothers. An enterprise that had started as an emigration scheme turned into an absentee investment business.[6]

III

The establishment of the colony of South Australia coincided with the deepening crisis of the Highland economy, especially the famines of

1836-7 and 1847-51. As early as 1816 Highland lairds had made enquiries about the possibility of transferring the redundant people they cleared from the sheeplands to New Holland, but at that time it was regarded as too expensive. Such queries were formulated in this way: '. . . whether steps could not be taken in conjunction with government, of affording some of these mountaineers a comfortable settlement either at the Cape or New South Wales or in Van Diemens Land, as the Government might fix.'[7] At that time landlords' attitudes to the promotion of emigration remained relatively tentative, and they were sensitive to the criticism that they were compelling their kinsmen to emigrate. In the 1830s the tone of the discussion changed, and the gravity of the subsistence crises came to be expressed in the first substantial emigration schemes from the Highlands to Australia. Reports of starvation in 1836-7 quickened plans for subsidised emigration both by landlords and the government. Most of the people were dispatched to New South Wales, but a few came to South Australia at that time. Some Highland landowners had been converted to Wakefieldianism and thought seriously of buying land in the new colony on which to settle their people. Like Neil Malcolm, the Duke of Sutherland expressed 'some intention of purchasing land in South Australia for the purpose of enabling the surplus population of this Estate [in Sutherland] to settle as colonists in that Country . . . . The Duke's object being to benefit the people of this District it was his wish to apply the profits he might derive from his being one of the Company to the object of aiding others to follow the example of the first colonists'.[8] For a short time South Australia looked remarkably attractive as a destination for both labour and capital. In 1838 it was reported from the northern Highlands that 'the present feeling of the people of the coastside is in favour of Australia, there being a dread of Canada in consequence of the loss and suffering which many of the people from this Country endured there during the late commotions'.[9]

Popular feeling towards Australia blew hot and cold in these years. Reports from some of the Highland emigrants of 1838 were so unfavourable that they continued to act as deterrents to further emigration a decade later: producing 'a very decided strong prejudice against Australia in the minds of the people — which will not easily be removed'. It was said in 1847 that some Highlanders would prefer to be paupers at home, rather than live in Australia.[10] The appeal of South Australia was not at all enhanced by reports from Adelaide in 1850 which told of atrocities committed against females aboard emigrant

ships headed for the colony.[11] On the other hand there were also favourable accounts. In his pamphlet *The Population of the Highlands of Scotland, their deterioration and its cause*, published in Edinburgh in 1857, Angus Maclaine recollected a migration which has little other record:

> Some of the poorest Highland cottars were enabled to find their way to South Australia many years ago. There I saw them to be natives of the 'Long Island' by the age of their clothes. I can bear witness that, if they brought any portion of their apathy with them into the colony, it soon vanished. Nutritious food, ample wages, the sure prospect of independence not too distant, and of an easy old age unvexed by care, revived and strengthened their minds and bodies. Lethargy and dependence gave way to activity and hope; they obtained the highest rates of wages; gave satisfaction to their employers, and soon were lost sight of in the mass of hardworking operatives. This is only one instance of many in Australia, where Highlanders have always done well.[12]

Regardless of such exaggeration, it is clear that the greatest deterrent to emigration was distance and expense. All the problems, for the ordinary Highlander, were eventually overcome by a combination of famine, clearance, gold, propaganda and philanthropy.

By 1848 many Highlanders were pleading with their landlords for passage money by which they might flee the potato famine. Charles Trevelyan at the Treasury pointed out that the Australian colonies provided 'advantages and facilities' which would complement the needs of the lairds and their people. In New South Wales and South Australia, he observed, 'The demand for labour . . . is very great. Wages are very high, and the entire expense of the Passage, and of food during the voyage will be paid by the Colonial Government for such qualified Emigrants as offer themselves for some time to come'. The demand for labour in Australia multiplied in the subsequent gold boom. Meanwhile Scottish landlords were increasingly willing to help bear part of the expense of emigration as an opportunity for further clearance of people from the interior glens. The Highland problem, its Malthusian crisis, was being solved in a robust and desperate way, and the flow of its people to Australia (and North America) was in due proportion.

The needs of the Scottish Highlands were not in exact accord with those of the colonies. The colonies sought young, healthy single migrants rather than large extensive families loaded with pauperised dependants both young and old. Contrariwise the people did not wish to see their families disintegrate, and the landlords had no wish to be left

with the decrepit while the healthy departed. The normal process of colonial selection was against the systematic emigration of Highland families.

IV

News of gold was an overwhelming force for the change in attitudes to Australia. In 1852 it was reported from the north-west Highlands that there was a great deal of talk among the people about 'the Gold Diggings' — and it was said that 'The tenants now read Newspapers much more than they did and they are wonderfully well informed in regard to this discovery lately made in New South Wales'.[13] Gold compounded the labour shortage in South Australia and diverted migrants from the colony. Recruiting agents, reportedly, 'could only promise to land our people [of Sutherland] at Adelaide in Portland Bay [sic] in South Australia. This was a disappointment to our people whose affections were set on being landed at Melbourne, and they could not be persuaded that these other parts were as favourable as Victoria.'[14]

The recruiting propaganda on behalf of Australia in the Scottish Highlands was particularly enticing. Euphoric letters of previous migrants were reproduced and circulated among the West Highland population. Thus, George Murray wrote back to Brora in Sutherland in May 1853, to say that 'I bless the day that we came here, we will be respected here like men which was not the case in the old country.' And Kenneth Gunn of Dornoch told his widowed mother that 'this is a great new country from end to end, and every day, yea every hour brings round its own quota of wonders.' He apologised for enclosing as a present a mere £50. Thousands of migrants, he said, arrived all the time, 'and immediately as they arrive on these golden shores they are well fed, clad and paid.'[15]

Most of the attractions of the antipodes to a prospective Highland migrant were encompassed in a letter written from Adelaide in 1847 by W. P. Mackay who had left Sutherland two years before. His letter was widely publicised in the northern newspapers. He wrote that 'The time has now arrived when emigrants from Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Orkney and Zetland, may get a free passage from their own country if they choose . . . [to] this country, which is replete with plenty. Here is no starvation, no seizing your goods for taxes, no begging for work, but plenty of good meat at 2d. per lb., bread 6d. per loaf. The poorest Zetland fisherman, were he here, could actually live more sumptuously than the best gentry in these islands; for here, on 30s. per week

(labourer's wages) a man may have meat every meal, bread cheaper and better than in all Scotland.' He spoke glowingly, and for his readers incredibly, of peaches, figs, grapes, melons and wine in profusion. He spelt out the dream further: 'To the mechanics and farmers of Caithness I would say, take your ploughs, harrows, and farming implements, and tools, and come here as quickly as possible. You, in a few years, will be independent. You may buy a section of 80 acres for £80, fence it in, build a house, plough, sow and reap. In a few years, yes, in one year, you may pay your family's expenses with the growth of wheat and potatoes.' Nor was this all for, as he pointed out, 'You can worship as you think proper here. Religious sects of all kinds and persuasions are on an equal footing. Government will give them aid, if they petition, either for building churches or schools, and also aid teachers. Here are no taxes, the taxes being raised on goods imported.'[16] To the Highland Scot it must have sounded like paradisial music. But in reality it was a description rose-tinted by conditions of boom in South Australia, by a man who had landed on his feet and with some capital to give him a start. Yet there was some momentary truth in even the most sanguine reports. Thus a migrant, ex-Badenoch, wrote in 1851 that 'Both money and labour are certain of handsome returns if properly employed' in Australia. He said that he had met many of the migrants who had left the Highlands in 1838-9, 'and I find them, with only one exception, in very comfortable situations. Some have died. Many of those who landed in the country without anything but their healthy Highland constitutions, are now proprietors of considerable importance, and some of them squatters of 25,000 sheep. Some of them have large arable and grass farms working five or six ploughs.'[17] There is no need to doubt the veracity of such reports. But they misled in the sense that they suggested that success was very general and that buoyant economic circumstances were permanent and invariable. The actual experience of many Highland migrants was a grotesque contrast with the dreams spun in the Highlands by well meaning but successful kinsmen in Australia.

V

The migrant requirements of South Australia in the early 1850s were particular. The colony had suffered severely from the outrush of much of the labour force to the Victorian goldfields. Moreover, it could gain little from the expensive subsidisation of new immigration if the migrants simply rushed into Victoria once they landed in this colony.

South Australia had a clear interest in migrants who were likely to take root. It was argued, credibly enough, that family migration was likely to be more stable than single, particularly if the families possessed a strong cohesion in relation to other groups with whom they emigrated. In effect there seemed to be a complementarity of interest between the Scottish Highlands and Islands and Australia, but notably South Australia.

The initiative that joined these interests was mainly that of the Highland and Island Emigration Society, formed early in 1852.[18] This body was devoted to the solution of the continuing destitution of the Highlands by way of wholesale emigration. It was the logical answer of the school of thought which rejected the idea that poor relief was at all beneficial to either the recipients or the country in general. Its philosophy was expressed most clearly by a Mrs Neave who, looking back on the worst years of the famine and the charitable distributions of oatmeal and potatoes, claimed that 'The mistaken humanity of Relief . . . has converted the people of Skye, from the clergy downwards, into a mendicant community . . . the only immediate remedy for the present state of things in Skye is Emigration.'[19] Skye was one of the most chronically famished parts of the Highlands. The Society itself was dominated by Charles Edward Trevelyan (Assistant Secretary for the Treasury, 1840-1859), and he allied himself with Sir John McNeil (Chairman of the Board of Supervision for the New Poor Law in Scotland) and Sir Thomas Murdoch (Chairman of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners). In Trevelyan's words the purpose of the Society became that of transferring 'the surplus of the Highland population to Australia', and he even envisaged the exodus of possibly 40,000 Highlanders in this way. The scheme required very considerable donations from the British public which was sympathetic to the plight of the West Highlanders; it required some assistance from Government; it sought financial assistance also from the colonial emigration authorities. It was devised in the belief that the migrants would promise to repay, 'to the last penny', their passage money once they had established themselves in Australia; such returns would then be used to finance further cycles of migration. Most particularly the Society required Highland landlords to pay one third of the cost of the emigration which, it was evident, would be of families rather than individuals. Landlords who did not pay would not be relieved of their paupers. This was the most controversial aspect of the entire scheme. Trevelyan appealed to the self-interest of the lairds; effectively

antipodean emigration was a substitute for clearances which had become extremely odious to the British public. In associating itself so closely with the landlords, the Society gave the appearance of actually promoting clearances. Landlords' agents (the factors) were frequently employed to organise the recruitment of emigrants and this connection led to allegations of compulsion and cruelty of a sort commonly associated with the process of clearance. The historian of the Society has written that 'There were undoubtedly a number of most brutal and heartless evictions' in the course of the organisation of emigration.[20]

The Society began vigorously, and in 1852 it dispatched 17 ships to Australia with 2,605 emigrants, of whom 411 came to South Australia. But the operations did not run smoothly; the revival of the British economy and unfavourable reports sent back by some of the migrants staunched the flow, and after 1855 the migration was reduced to a trickle. In 1855 South Australia took all 350 of the Society's total sponsorship, and in that year several hundred Skye people changed their minds about emigration when a shipload of potatoes and oatmeal arrived at the island. This was clearly a symptom of the sheer hunger that motivated the emigrations, and the varying attractions of Australia as a destination. The Society wound up its operations in 1858 by which time it had succeeded in getting about 5,000 Highlanders to Australia.

VI

Most of the Highland Scots who came to South Australia came from Harris, North Uist and Skye in the Hebrides, the islands off the north west coast of Scotland. It was the policy of the Emigration Society to keep together people from the same origins, and it was an acknowledgement of the close connections of kinship and community among the Highlanders. There is a controversy in modern Highland history about the circumstances of these people prior to their emigration to Australia: the argument focuses on the question of whether the lairds used the opportunity created by the Emigration Society to clear the people off their lands straight onto the emigrant ships. Professor Gordon Donaldson has decried most of this view, and writes that 'It has been firmly implanted in folk memory that much of the emigration from the Highlands was "compulsory" and that "clearance" and "eviction" commonly meant dispossessing tenants and shipping them off to America' or Australia. Much of this view, he maintains, is preposterous, and 'the truth is that people who had

experienced the miseries of life in the Highlands in the 1840s clamoured for assistance to enable them to leave the country.'[21]

It is not easy to demonstrate that all the people who came to South Australia were victims of clearances; they were certainly victims of some of the worst social conditions in the British Isles. To send these people to 'the golden shores of Australia' was, according to the *Scotsman* newspaper, the obvious and humane answer to the problem. Commenting on the departure of a hundred people from Lochaber, it said that 'There can be no better proof that emigration from parts of the Highlands is necessary than the fact that these people have voluntarily left possessions under one of the most indulgent landlords in the country. They found that even without paying rents they could not exist but in misery and wretchedness, and they consequently determined to take advantage of the only alternative left.'[22] Conditions in the islands were probably worse. Almost half the people on Lord MacDonald's estates in Skye were squatters who paid no rent at all, and almost the entire population was dependent on potatoes. Even before the famine it was widely recognised that the population of Skye was far greater than the island could support. In the 1830s the minister of the parish of Duirinish had written of 'the piteous wailing of want and of famine', and 'the said spectacle of a once moral people becoming, through the hardening and *animalizing* influence of grinding poverty, the reckless slaves of low passions.'[23] At the time of the famine writers bore witness to the misery, the degradation, the actual starvation of the people of the island. Robert Somers who was in Skye in 1848, wrote: 'The clothing, furniture and hovels of the people bear every mark of extreme poverty: the children are pale and emaciated; and the dirty and slovenly habits which characterise many of the women seem to aggravate the discomforts entailed by narrow means . . . . The first requisites of cleanliness and decency are wanting.'[24] One of the great problems in the western isles was the recurrence of potato disease for several years after 1846 which worked towards the progressive debilitation of the people.[25] In 1849 it was reported of the Skye people that they 'continue more than ever the victims of misery and want' and that 'the actual want of means wherewith to procure food and clothing is no less pressing in itself than apparent in the external aspect of the inhabitants.'[26] By 1852 the appearance of the people had greatly deteriorated and they were reduced to the level of the Irish peasantry. Their condition shocked some of the relief officials at the time. They were people caught in the grip of chronic land hunger. We know that only half of the families in

Skye had any land at all.[27] At one stage 13,741 out of about 24,000 people in Skye were on the relief lists.

The consequences of famine and the years of deprivation were written into the brief descriptions of the migrants selected by the Emigration Society for Australia. Many of those who came to South Australia were from the estates of Lord MacDonald. Men like John Nicholson who was described as an 'Intruder from Raasay, able-bodied but likely to become a pauper, will require outfit and aid.' There was William Nicolson, who had been dispossessed at Whitsunday 1853, a very poor man who owed £12 in rent arrears. There was Alexander MacDonald of Voltas who had four children, who lived at his father's house, held no land of his own and who would need passage money and clothing for Australia — a classic example of the landless pauper with a dependent family. And there was Donald Macleod with his wife and children, who had been removed once already and was 'desperately poor and will require outfit and passage money.'[28] Clearance, poverty and overpopulation had left their marks on these individuals who were about to embark for Australia.

The link between the clearances and the South Australian migrants requires some precision. There were spectacular evictions in Harris in 1839 and North Uist in 1849 but there is no evidence of an immediate connection with the Australian migrants. At Knoydart, on the estate of Macdonnell of Glengarry, there is firm documentation that landlord pressure caused tenants to migrate to Australia and that physical force was used against recalcitrant tenants — but there is no reason to believe they came to South Australia.[29] On the other hand we do know that people from Boreraig and Suishnish (in Skye) came to this colony in 1855 and there is a strong likelihood that they were refugees from a well known clearance in the winter of 1853-4. The lands were those of Lord MacDonald whose finances were in extreme disarray; a debt of £200,000 hung over the estates. Trustees were appointed and charged with the responsibility of retrieving the position. They decided on a policy designed to clear the population and convert the estate to a large sheep farm. The episode was recalled later by an eye-witness, Sir Archibald Geikie, one of the most eminent geologists of his day. He believed the people at Suishnish were peacable and contented and made no refefence to the ravages of famine. His vivid description of the actual clearance is worth repeating: '. . . as I returned from my ramble, a strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the breeze from the west. On gaining the top of one of the hills on the south side of the valley, I could

see a long and motley procession winding along the road that led north from Suishnish. It halted at the point of the road opposite Kilbride, and there the lamentation became long and loud. As I drew nearer, I could see that the minister with his wife and daughters had come out to meet the people and bid them all farewell. It was a miscellaneous gathering of at least three generations of crofters. There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts; the younger members of the community on foot were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children, with looks of alarm, walked alongside. There was a pause in the notes of woe as the last words were exchanged with the family of Kilbride. Everyone was in tears'. Geikie then recalled the 'long plaintive wail, like a funeral coronach' of the emigrants echoing through the valley, leaving the deserted ground of Suishnish solitary and green in memory of the happy community.[30] Geikie believed that the people were headed for Canada but it is likely that some came to Adelaide on the *Switzerland*.[31]

Another group of Highland migrants to South Australia can be directly linked with one of the most publicised and controversial clearances of the mid-century – the Sollas Evictions of 1849 and 1852. These people were brought from North Uist to Campbeltown, probably aboard the *Celt*, and then trans-shipped to the *Hercules*, bound for Adelaide and Melbourne. Once more the landlord in question was Lord MacDonald.[32] This is not the place to rehearse the details of the Sollas events which have been etched deeply into the Highland tradition. Briefly, the episode concerned the attempted resettlement of a large body of people on new plantations in 1849; the Sollas people actively resisted the clearance and there were scenes of cruelty and hysteria, allegedly exacerbated by the action of the landlord's factors. Three years later the scenes were re-enacted. While some of the people were prevailed upon to emigrate to Australia, others denied their undertakings to leave the estate. In all the confusion it is clear that the people were extremely wretched, very reluctant to leave, and levered out by a bankrupt landlord. And there is little doubt that there were ugly scenes in which the people were bundled onto the ship. The so-called Battle of Sollas, according to the recollection of one of the crofters, was 'a victory for the nobles, and the defeat and utter discomfiture of the peasantry. As is always the case, this battle was fruitful of immense sufferings, hardships, and loss to the defeated. Many of them were compelled to emigrate to the colonies.' And another crofter reiterated that 'an emigrant ship was brought to Lochmaddy, on

board of which twelve or fourteen families from the district in which I reside were prevailed upon or forced to embark for Australia.'[33]

It happens that there exists impeccable corroborative evidence not only that the Sollas people came to South Australia, but also that they had been cleared twice in three years and that they were extremely reluctant migrants. The case is sustained by the testimony, given in 1883, by the principal law officer involved in the events, Charles Shaw. His account of the Sollas episode emphasised the philanthropy and humanity of the landlords, the expensive and constructive efforts that had been made on behalf of the people, and also the view that emigration had been the last resort of a desperate community. His account contains an interesting postscript on the subsequent attitude of the people whom he had pushed into an emigration to South Australia. Shaw recollected:

> Some of those who resisted Mr. Cooper's attempt to get them to go to Canada and singled themselves out by the violence of their opposition, and again when leaving Lochmaddy to join the "Hercules", spoke to me in no very polite terms, as if I had some personal object in getting them away, began a correspondence with me a few years after reaching Australia and sent through me money to their friends. So much had their tempers changed, and their feelings towards me, that they put a sum of money together, and remitted it to me, with a request that I would purchase my wife a ring with it as a token of their gratitude to me for all the trouble I had from first to last taken in their matters; and in writing me they begged of me on no account to return the money as they would not accept of it. I felt gratified, after all the ill-feeling they all had shown, that they at last appreciated my disinterested efforts to improve their condition, though these efforts had not at first met their approval but very much the contrary.[34]

It is plain from Shaw's evidence that the people had been cleared, that they had been extremely angry and bitter about their emigration to South Australia. It is also clear that some of them made good progress in the colony in the following three decades: enough to heal old wounds and even to change perceptions of past wrongs and misunderstandings.

VII

The first main group of Highlanders and Islanders bound for South Australia left Campbeltown, Argyllshire, on Boxing Day 1852 aboard the very large frigate, HMS *Hercules*.[35] It was described as 'a noble ship, nicely fitted up, sufficiently manned, and excellently managed. She has her captain and officers, her clergyman and teachers, her surgeon and complete staff on board.'[36] There were 619 emigrants, some of whom

were due to disembark in Victoria. The *Hercules* was ill-fated, and its long-suffering passengers were exposed to a further series of agonies which were widely publicised in Scotland and which acted as a deterrent to many prospective emigrants. The passengers had been taken on board in mid-December; already 'the emigrants suffered considerable deprivation awaiting the steamer's arrival, after having quitted their homes.' Almost as soon as it set sail the *Hercules* was caught in a great storm on the first night which raged for four days; although the ship weathered the storm well enough, it was reported that 'the scene on board, from the sickness, was painful.'[37] There had been two deaths. It put into Rothesay on the Firth of Clyde and was detained there until 14 January. Very soon after the vessel had set sail again smallpox and typhus broke out among the passengers and crew and on 20 January the *Hercules* put into Queenstown, Cork where the people were detained until 14 April 1853. A teacher on board reported that there had been 237 cases of fever and smallpox and 38 deaths since December.[38] Later recollection by crofters on North Uist stated that most of the passengers succumbed and that 'some were buried in Ireland, others were committed to a watery grave.' There were allegations that the ship had been contaminated with smallpox on a previous voyage, but more relevant was the fact that many people in the Western Isles had been indifferent about the need for smallpox vaccination. Among those who died were the heads of two of the North Uist families; their orphan children were returned to the island. Another crofter remembered that 'The survivors were sent over in different batches as they recovered; families were broken up, some of them never to meet again; and their sufferings on landing in Australia were not much better, and they had to sell their blankets and part of their clothing before they got to the settlement.'[39] One newspaper report quoted a journal of the events kept by one of the passengers on the *Hercules*. It records numerous deaths and also several attempts at suicide. One man from Uist tried suicide three times, first by thrusting a knife into his throat, then by strangling himself; a young girl from Harripool, Strath, threw herself overboard in the middle of the night and was never seen again. Shocking stories of conditions aboard the *Hercules* were printed in the Scottish newspapers. There were particularly gruesome reports of the deaths at sea. One was a letter from Alexander Nicolson, posted from the Cape of Good Hope, about the death of Ann Macleod, which related how 'no less than eight sharks followed close on the ship, and watching every movement until her body

was thrown overboard, when they immediately disappeared after the box containing her corpse, was committed to the deep.'[40] The original number of emigrants aboard the *Hercules* was reduced by about half by death and the removal of the infirm at Queenstown.[41] The remainder of the voyage was relatively uneventful and, after 104 days, the ship arrived at Adelaide on 20 July 1853.

There were 192 Highlanders who disembarked from the *Hercules*: 62 married adults, 67 single adults and 61 children. They arrived at a time when the labour market, despite substantial intakes of migrants, was still buoyant. Most of the married people could speak no English at all. On arrival they were accommodated at 'Mr. Newman's iron stores, at Port Adelaide.'[42] The Immigration Agent reported favourably on their demeanour: 'As a body, I found them manifest no indisposition to engage for fair wages; and they all, without exception, expressed their desire that their debt to the Society should be liquidated as speedily as possible, and they have entered engagements accordingly.' He noted the family character of the Highland immigration programme which was in accord with the needs of the colony, for it was 'a guarantee for their continued residence in the colony, when fairly settled. It is supposed that this system will, to the Highlander, act as an antidote to the temptation of the gold fields, and that the old and the young will be useful as forming "anchors" by which the families will be held together in the Colony.' He remarked that the Highlanders were chiefly accustomed to pastoral pursuits and would be useful as stockmen and shepherds; they were peaceable, orderly and moral, 'inured to hardships', hardworking and 'accustomed to turn their hand to every description of rough outdoor work.'[43]

The Immigration Agent employed an interpreter to assist the people to find work and arrangements were made with various pastoralists to take them on. In each case an agreement was signed that the employer would deduct money from wages to repay debts to the Emigration Society. By 1855 substantial repayments had been recorded.[44] The Agent was told that the people were 'very grateful . . . for the extraordinary interest you have taken in their welfare.'[45] But tragedy continued to stalk these people. Of the few individuals that can be traced, three young mothers died within a few weeks of their disembarkation at Port Adelaide: Christina McCaskill aged 30, from Harris, died 23 July 1853; her two children went into the Destitute Asylum while their father took a job at Glen Ewin at £52 a year. He owed the Emigration Society £9.3.3. A few weeks later Marian

Macdonald aged 25, died in hospital in Adelaide of 'febris', leaving two small children in the asylum, and a husband who left to work as a shepherd at Clare. Malcolm McPhail, a 26 year old labourer from the Long Island, affected by 'debility', also died in the Adelaide hospital. At least ten of the *Hercules* people were admitted to the Adelaide Hospital.[46] It was a common problem in the experience of poor immigrants — that 'before they could well establish themselves [they] have been thrown into great poverty through sickness.'[47] Among the Highlanders there were several such cases, and it is clear that the colony was unable to hold such families together despite its philosophy of family anchorage as the basis of settlement. Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that these people were from small highly localised communities in the Hebrides, and were chosen specifically for their social cohesion, the nature of employment opportunities in South Australia demanded an extraordinary dispersal of the immigrants. They came to be employed as shepherds, hutkeepers, labourers, grooms, domestic servants and dairy maids — but they spread across the colony – some went to the Clare district, others to Tatiara, to Port Gawler, Yorke Peninsula, Port Lincoln, Aldinga Plains, Gumeracha, Morialta and Mount Barker.[48] It was hardly at all the fulfilment of the expectations general in Harris and North Uist at the time of embarkation.

VIII

In November 1853 the government of South Australia wrote to the Highland and Island Emigration Society to express satisfaction with the first consignment of Highlanders. A sum of £3000 was voted in aid of the Society; enough, by the rules, to secure a further one thousand Highlanders for the colony. By mid-1854 Trevelyan and McNeill were able to report that 550 new migrants had been selected, 'of a class superior to those who were formerly sent.' But they were constrained to admit that applications for emigration had declined because of renewed prosperity in the Highlands; indeed there was 'a deficiency of Highland emigrants.'[49]

It was not until late in 1855 that South Australia received another substantial number of Highlanders. Once more the story was unhappy — primarily because the colony had miscalculated the need for labour[50] and underestimated the costs of maintaining destitute immigrants. The pressure on the facilities of the Destitute Board became almost intolerable.[51] The Highlanders were indeed a small part of the deluge of

immigrants that overwhelmed the colony in 1855 — total arrivals had been more than 17,000 in that year, and no less than 4000 single Irish girls had descended on the labour market in two years. Some 31 families of Highlanders arrived in the second week of September 1855 aboard the *Switzerland*. They were from various estates in Skye — Glendale, Skeabost and Dunvegan mainly — and were described as farm servants, shepherds and crofters. It was thought that the people were 'well suited for employment in the squatting districts . . . and might perhaps be employed at the next shearing.'[52] An advertisement was placed in the Government Gazette:

> *Notice to Country Settlers*
> . . . thirty Highland families, well suited for agricultural and pastoral employment, have been sent out by the Highland Emigration Society, under the auspices of the Land and Emigration Commissioners, in the *Switzerland* and . . . the men will be in attendance here [at the Labor Office, Adelaide], to be hired . . . . Persons needing this class of laborers are, therefore, invited to make early application.[53]

The Immigration Agent, by now under great pressure from the excess of migrants on his hands, was less than enthusiastic about the arrival of the *Switzerland*, despite his Scottish sympathy with the Highlanders. He recalled that 'these people are generally valuable colonists, their social and domestic habits and attachments lead them to remain together, so that inducements which would [tempt?] many others to the gold fields are powerless on the Highlander.' He recollected that the people from the *Hercules* 'were at that time a most eligible class of people.' But conditions in the colony had changed and demand for labour amongst the pastoralists was now very limited.[54]

There were no buildings available to accommodate the Highlanders when they disembarked at Port Adelaide, and they were put in tents. It was at this time that the people drew up a petition to the Governor. This document constitutes the only piece of evidence to issue directly from any of these people — it is the authentic expression of Highland immigrants. For that reason alone it has special value, but it also contains a clear view of their expectations. It was a petition signed by nineteen of the menfolk appealing for a grant of land: it was a case of the dispossessed peasantry seeking to re-establish themselves in the status they had lost in the Highlands. South Australia was not, in any sense, a colony for peasant farmers. The Highlanders, began the petition, 'humbly beg your Lordship, that government would grant each family of us, more or less land, in a maner that we would be able to live by it, as we would pay the whole amount to Government by

instalment. In the next place, we the undersined as all Head of familys, should we scatter hear and there in search of work, we dont no what to do with our familys, as we have no money to [uphold?] them during our absence. We do Humbly expect to have better prospect through your Lordship's influence.'[55] The petition was expressive of a profound abhorrence of dispersion and separation. The government was unable to meet the petitioners' requests. Employment was so scarce that jobs had to be taken where they arose; as for land, the appeal ran in diametric contradiction to the most fundamental Wakefieldian principle of the colony's philosophy.

The South Australian government was placed in serious difficulty — at the end of 1855 it had more than 2000 people on relief; half of them Irish, a fifth Scotch, and widely distributed on shipboard, in town and country depots, and the numbers were rising. It was 'a fearful amount of dependence viewed in connection with our limited population' and the newspapers and public officials were increasingly critical. The Adelaide *Observer* commented that 'The blessing of an increasing population will always be discounted by the evil of an unsuitable population, until the action of a new Constitution places us in full possession of all our local revenues, and empowers us to select and regulate our immigrants.'[56] Moreover it was becoming more than ever apparent that families of migrants were very difficult to employ: single male adults, healthy and with a practical knowledge of husbandry were the required category of immigrants, as opposed to families 'many of whom are evidently physically incapacitated for active labour.'[57]

It was in this atmosphere that most of the *Switzerland* Highlanders were shipped off to Guichen Bay at the beginning of October 1855 (a few remained behind at the Destitute Asylum in Adelaide).[58] The labour position in the south-east was less unfavourable than elsewhere; there were reports that settlers had to go as far as Portland for their employees and there was a prospect of work for families on the Mosquito Plains close by present day Naracoorte. This proved overoptimistic and by the time the 29 families (147 souls) arrived at Robe most of the shearing had finished and the roads were too wet for the people to transport themselves to possible employers. By the third week of October, 15 of the families had found employment. But the residue of the immigrants now descended into hopelessness and began to exhibit signs of desperation and broken spirits. It was not surprising in the light of their experiences over the previous twelve months. They were accommodated in iron sheds and tents at Robe under the

guardianship of Charles Brewer, Government Resident in the district. As the season worsened the physical and mental condition of the immigrants deteriorated. Some began to die. Brewer reported to the Colonial Secretary: 'There has been much sickness among them since their arrival and three of them had died, one man of consumption and two lads of bilious fever; two men are now under medical treatment, and one in a very debilitated state, and even should they recover from their present illness will not be fit for any employment for some time.' One of the widows hoped to get to Geelong where friends might help.

The whole episode at Robe was clouded by allegations of professional negligence by Dr Cotter, the government medical officer in the district, who was dismissed after the death of Ann Campbell in January 1856. Brewer asserted that Cotter was drunk and incapable at the time of the illness; Cotter countercharged that Brewer was virtually insane with jealousy. Cotter claimed also that he had been out in the bush attending a sick woman and some aborigines, and had received inadequate cooperation from the matron and was impeded by Mrs Brewer. Brewer, said Cotter in his own defence, had placed the Highlanders in the charge of a Mr Penney who, though he had a diploma, had mainly been 'practising as a whaler or as shepherd.' Brewer reported that 'in truth the immigrants have lost all confidence in Dr Cotter.'[59]

In November seven families remained in Brewer's charge. He reported that 'they have been much longer here than was expected and have had no other shelter than tarpaulins.' He added that one of the men had 'recently displayed symptoms of unsoundness of mind and is daily growing worse', and he recommended his return to Adelaide. Another man had become so infirm that he was unfit for employment though he had a wife and three children to support. Another man, in similar circumstances, died. The Colonial Secretary was unable to accept these miserable people in Adelaide for 'they would be lost in the mass of destitution unhappily thrown on the Government at present.'[60]

Gradually, almost by erosion, the Highlanders at Robe were absorbed into the working population. In March 1856 a few were still on rations and Brewer was given rigorous instructions to terminate such assistance as soon as possible. 'His Excellency', he was told, 'conceives that even though these Immigrants should be obliged to work for their food and clothing, the colony has no right to maintain them in idleness' longer than was usual for the Destitute Poor. Brewer was told repeatedly that the Highlanders must be made to work for their own

support, and in April all the Highlanders, save for one such man and two women with babies, were struck off the rations. The matron at Guichen Bay remarked that the Highlanders had been ten times more troublesome than the Irish girls, 'sickness having been long serious among them.' There were at least five deaths at Guichen Bay.[61] For these people, like those of the *Hercules*, emigration was the survival of the fittest in a hard world.

IX

The third and final boatload of Highlanders arrived in the very middle of the employment crisis in South Australia at the end of 1855. On the *Royal Albert* were 27 families, 192 souls, from the Highlands who had travelled by way of Plymouth, almost a thousand miles south of Harris from whence most of them came. It was inevitable that these people would experience difficulty in finding employment in the labour-saturated colony. All enthusiasm for immigration had evaporated one shipment of people was described at this time, by the Surgeon-Superintendent, as 'the sweepings of Hell'.[62] The Adelaide *Observer* remarked of some of the Highlanders that 'as they cannot converse freely except in Gaelic, and are evidently calculated to become very useful domestic servants, they claim special sympathy and regard. They are very favourably spoken of, and it is hoped this notice may have the effect of convincing them that in coming to this colony they have not taken any hasty or injudicious steps'.[63]

The Immigration Agent, Handasyde Duncan, gave a concise analysis of the problem that had overtaken both the colony and the immigrants. He adverted to the loss of labour that South Australia had suffered during the gold rush days in 1852 and 1853: 'South Australia then gladly welcomed an importation of Highland families, as in that crisis, they were, from their peculiar character, not likely to be enticed to other Colonies in search of gold'. This character was specifically associated with their strong family attachments. Duncan defined this further, presumably from close observation of the Highlanders:

> Removed by their insular position from almost any intercourse with the main land, they have been, from their earliest childhood, accustomed to intercourse with none but their own families; the stranger who appeared amongst them was the infant newly-born, and he who left them was, in general, carried to his grave. It is in vain to ask such people to emigrate except in entire families — the young and the old, the son and the daughter, must join in the exodus from the land of their nativity. Even when famine forced them to entertain the proposal of emigrating, it was

> long before they could be induced to make a choice, the alternative was before them — emigration on the one hand, on the other, starvation, disease and death; it was on the express stipulation that they should go together in unbroken families that they agreed to emigrate.

Duncan pointed out that the first party had arrived in times when labour was in good demand and food cheap. Circumstances had since been reversed and the very virtue of adhesive kinship had now turned into a serious impediment: 'The Highlander will not separate from his family; and, on the other hand, the settler will not engage entire families when it can be avoided; thus, the very peculiarity of character which made these people so valuable three years since, is the very cause of the difficulty which we experience in finding employment for them now.'[64] Such was the terrible irony of the Highlanders' position. Duncan felt constrained to recommend the suspension of Highland emigration to South Australia.

Duncan knew that some of the Highlanders had refused employment at reasonable wages 'to avoid being separated from their friends', and would not be moved on the question. This led to ill-will, and the episode suggests that the immigrants had entertained uninformed expectations of life in the colony. Offers of £30 a year wages had been rejected; a Highland woman at Morphett Vale had left her employment because she believed her employer demanded that she work on the Sabbath. Another Highland family in the same area had fallen victim to fever and their employer turned them over to the Destitute Asylum. Newspapers complained that they asked for unrealistically high wages. The publication of unemployment statistics early in 1856 caused predictable criticism of the creation of 'colonial pauperism',[65] and the continued arrival of 'immigrants unfitted for the needs of the colony, unable consequently to obtain employment, and [who] remain idly as a burden on the resources of the colony'.[66] Within a month the government gave instructions that the Highlanders had outstayed the regulation period at the migrant depot and would have to find their own quarters. They were given the option of going to the Free Labour Station to break up stones at piece rates.[67]

In company with many other unemployed immigrants, the Highlanders were dispatched to Northfield, Dry Creek, for stone breaking. They were accommodated in tents in the bed of the creek. Their tribulations did not diminish. In February 1856, the Comptroller of the Free Labour Station reported the death of one of the Highland children at Dry Creek; he commented 'I am put to great difficulty with

these people, because I am unable to communicate with them except by signs as I do not understand one word of Gaelic and they do not understand one word of English. However I will do the best I can to mitigate their sufferings — and make them turn out useful Colonists, which I am of opinion they will do, if we can only muster patience enough to manage them properly.'[68]

In fact the only source of information that exists about the Highlanders at Dry Creek is that of C. S. Hare, the Comptroller of the Free Labour Station. Inevitably it is an 'official' perception of their difficulties but, even through this filter, it is plain enough that the spirits of many of the Highlanders had been snapped by this stage. They became listless and more than ever prone to disease. It was a common experience of newly arrived immigrants to fall ill and to be reduced, temporarily, to pauperism before they found their feet. But the condition of the Highlanders was chronic — it became a sombre story of defeat, and of exasperation on the part of the officials. In the second week of February typhoid broke out in the tents in the creek bed; six of the children infected were segregated into a small Iron Store and fed milk and eggs. Hare reported that he thought 'the disease may again make its appearance, from the uncleanly habits of these Gaelic people.' The acculturation problem was beginning to raise its head. He added that, despite 'a good deal of grumbling and, as far as I can understand them, complaining against the Government — these men assisted by the women and their children, are learning to work and I think ere long they will become useful Colonists — and be happy to quit this for *any* wages that will secure food for their labour without the necessity of occupying children and women in the unfeminine employment of preparing road metal.' Hare's comments confirmed the recurrent allegation that the Highland personality was unable to adapt to regular employment.[69] At this stage Hare was confident that they could be taught to work hard despite the ravages of typhoid.

The Comptroller's tone changed when the Gaelic people refused an offer of employment at metal breaking for a private employer. Their obstinacy and their sickliness made them difficult to deal with. John Macleod died leaving his widow who continued to break stones for another six months until her own health broke down.[70] Hare was alarmed; he believed that the fever would recur because the weather was deteriorating, and more especially because of 'the uncleanliness of their habits and their obstinate opposition to all sanatory measures.' He recommended that the families should be separated and taken to a

healthier place. Hare returned to his theme at the end of April when typhoid re-appeared: he again blamed 'their manner of life, their personal uncleanliness' and opposition to elementary hygiene. He described how he 'had to take two men and two women almost by force out of their tents and convey them to the Iron Hospital. I furnished them with new Blankets, Beds etc. from the Dept., their own clothes and bedding being so perfectly saturated with malaria from *filth* and fever as of itself sufficing to superinduce fatal results to ordinary disease.'[71] He confessed himself to be at his wit's end with 'these incomprehensible and intractable people; they are at once the most helpless and hopeless lot of people that ever I have had to deal with in my life. I have to set a watch over them to make them perform for each other the most common offices of humanity, to see that they take their medicine and cook their food.'

Two days later Hare notified the Colonial Secretary of the death of another of the Macleods whose demise he particularly regretted because 'he was the only one among the number of these people who seemed to me to have a spark of modern civilization, the remainder are as near an approach to barbarians as any I have ever met with coming from Gt. Britain.' Such words, of course, tell us as much about the Comptroller as about the Highlanders. These people were still accommodated in tents in the Creek, and three of them were in a chronic state. The Medical Officer emphasised that the people were 'so utterly helpless that they cannot give a patient a drink or be trusted with the most trivial duty.'[72] The fatalism of these Highlanders may have been closely associated with the circumstances through which they had passed, 'the apathy and indifference to the future which is perhaps the most melancholy of the consequences of the long continued distress which they have suffered.'[73]

The residue of the *Royal Albert* Highlanders were still at Dry Creek in August 1856. Comptroller Hare was still advocating their dispersal and the withdrawal of rations from those able-bodied enough to break stones. Some were not able, and Hare offered a few more chilling comments on their suitability for the colony. 'It is obvious', he wrote, 'that to earn a living at breaking stones persons so employed must be strong and robust — those who are weakly, and where families comprise several children of tender age might perhaps, mercifully and wisely be allowed half rations. It appears to me that a very much larger portion of these people are affected with pulmonic diseases and are otherwise broken constitutioned than is usual among the ordinary

English or Irish immigrants.' They were sickly and debilitated folk who 'in addition to bad health have to learn a new language (English) before they can make their most common wants and distresses known.'[74] Moreover, during examination before a Parliamentary Committee, the Rev. J. Gardner confirmed the idea that the Highland immigrants were 'saddled on this Colony as paupers.'[75] By November 1856 only two families were left at Northfield, and by that time Comptroller Hare believed that they had learned some English and would gain employment among local farmers.[76] By then, at last, the labour market had revived and there was even a call put out for renewed, but selective, immigration.[77]

X

Bitter disappointment, the breaking of the spirit, even death — these were some of the consequences of emigration for some of the Highland Scots in South Australia. The agony that had begun in Mull, Skye, Harris and North Uist, for some ended in prolonged tragedy in Robe, Dry Creek and Morphett Vale. But, of course, most of these Highlanders survived and some, indeed, achieved great age and relative prosperity in the colony. For balance it is important to juxtapose some of these cases of comparative success.

It is extraordinarily difficult to trace these survivors, but enough evidence is available to suggest that, in the long run, many of the Highlanders discovered a better future in South Australia than was ever possible in Scotland. A few individuals were recorded on their deaths, though they otherwise remained obscure. There was Donald Munro who arrived on the *Switzerland* and who obtained employment as a farm servant despite his age of sixty; his wife gave birth to twins in the year of their arrival.[78] Angus Maclean who died at White Hut in 1928 was probably an octogenarian survivor of the *Royal Albert*.[79] Alexander McLeod, of the *Hercules*, died in the Spalding district, age 95, famous for having walked from Clare to Adelaide and back in three days.[80] Mr R. Campbell died in Lucindale in 1913 at the age of 94; he had been one of the *Switzerland* migrants and had begun a small business at Lucindale in the 1870s and took great delight in voting in every election since constitutional government; at the time of his death he had 5 children, 27 grandchildren and one great grandchild.[81] And again it is known that one of the children from North Uist who had been orphaned in the smallpox epidemic on the *Hercules* was later sent to Adelaide and, in 1883, was described as 'rapidly accumulating wealth

there, and remitted money to his mother while she lived.'[82] Mrs Christina McInnes from Lord MacDonald's estate on the Isle of Skye, who travelled by the *Switzerland*, survived until the age of 84.[83] No particularly striking stories of success have been discovered though there may be cases in the late 19th century.[84] Mostly it seems that the Highlanders merged into the agricultural community of South Australia.[85]

The cases of longevity among some of the Highlanders help to balance the sombre story that has provided the main focus of this paper. There is always a temptation to render the history of South Australia as a mere celebration of the achievements of the successful and the strong. Perhaps we should look carefully at some of the casualties of progress, among whom were many of the Highland Scots. It would be easy to lay blame upon officialdom for the plight of these people. Certainly many of the officials were incompetent and unfeeling, but others were humane, hardworking and diligent. The causes of the agony of the Highlanders were, in reality, a great deal more diffused. They relate to the grinding poverty of the Highland economy, to the great changes in world commodity markets, to population growth and displacement on a continental scale, to the stretching of landlord resources and patiences until they were broken. They relate also to the fact that the resources and facilities of the recipient colony were inadequate to accommodate the deluge of immigrants. They concern also the appalling lack of luck, and the misfortune of the timing of the arrival of the Highlanders in South Australia.

It would be trite to say much in a generalising vein about this minor saga. It was tragedy, it was perhaps avoidable; it was, most of all, the result of poverty, ignorance, and to a lesser extent, inhumanity and cupidity. The experience of these Highland immigrants was not typical. We know what we do about them because they became, temporarily, a social problem. Nevertheless historians may underestimate the difficulties of settlement for ordinary people in the colony; and it may be possible to draw parallels between the experience of the Highland Scots in the 1850s and that of more recent immigrants to Australia from Southern Europe and Asia.

References

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10. *Ibid.*, Macleod to Loch, 17 February 1847, 19 February 1847.
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24. Robert Somers, *Letters from the Highlands, or the Famine of 1847* (London, 1848), pp. 107, 110; more generally see, *Extracts from Letters to the Rev. Dr. McLeod, Glasgow, regarding the Famine and Destitution in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1847).
25. *Scotsman*, 6 June 1850, 5 October 1850.

26. *Perthshire Courier*, 29 November 1849.
27. Coffin to Trevelyan, 22 July 1852, printed in pamphlet, *Emigration from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to Australia* (published by Trelawney Saunders, London, 1852), p. 90.
28. SRO GD 221/15 Lord MacDonald Papers, 'Population List of Certain Districts in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland . . . c. 1854.'
29. *Scotsman*, 17 September 1853.
30. Sir Archibald Geikie, *Scottish Reminiscences* (Glasgow, 1906), pp. 223-7.
31. SAA GRG24/6/1855/3391 O.S.
32. Defences of the MacDonald estates may be read in the Rev. Thomas Grierson, *Autumnal Rambles among the Scottish Mountains* (Edinburgh, 1850), pp. 104-6 and that of one of the officials involved, Patrick Cooper, *The So-called Evictions from the MacDonald Estates, in the Island of North Uist, Outer Hebrides 1849* (Aberdeen, 1881).
33. British Parliamentary Papers, 1884, vol. XXXIII. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (hereafter, Napier Commission). Evidence pp. 787, 801.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 2736.
35. The suggestion that the *Hercules* came to South Australia by mistake in D. Pike, *Paradise of Dissent* (1957), p. 319, is not borne out by the evidence of the *South Australian Government Gazette* (hereafter SAGG), 28 April 1853, 14 July 1853, 20 October 1853.
36. *Perthshire Courier*, 24 February 1853.
37. *Ibid.*, 13 January 1853.
38. *Scotsman*, 16 April 1853, letter of A. Nicholson. The deaths included the matron and the surgeon, Macmillan, op. cit., p. 182.
39. Napier Commission, Evidence, pp. 797, 801, 2736.
40. *Northern Ensign*, (Wick) 14 April 1853; *Perthshire Courier*, 24 February 1853.
41. *Northern Ensign*, 11 August 1853. A few of the *Hercules* people who were left in Cork arrived in Adelaide aboard the *Calabar* in August, 1853, from Southampton; over sixty arrived on the *Neptune* in October, and others on the *Olivia* in November, 1853, both from Plymouth. SAA Passenger Lists, 1853/4; 1853/8; 1853/14. The *Hercules* itself was destined for Hong Kong to serve as a floating hospital, *Perthshire Courier*, 13 January 1853.
42. SAA GRG 24/6/1853/1857, Duncan reporting arrival of *Hercules*, 26 July 1853.
43. SAGG, 21 October 1853, pp. 689-90.
44. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/3391 OS. List of Emigrants in debt to and respecting repayments to Highland Emigration Society, Finnis to Brewer, 26 October 1855.
45. SAA GRG 24/6/1853/2275, MacDonald to Duncan, 10 August 1853, Duncan to Colonial Secretary, 7 September 1853.
46. SAA GRG78, series 49, Adelaide Hospital Admissions Registers Vol. 2; I owe this reference to Gillian Eskine.
47. SAGG, 13 January 1853. Immigration Agent's Report.
48. SAA Passenger lists, Acc 313/53/8, *Hercules*.
49. SAPP 1854 No. 50, 'Highland and Island Emigration', letter of C. E. Trevelyan and John McNeill to Sir H. E. Young, 7 June 1854.

50. In mid 1853 the Immigration Agent stated that 'At present no emigrant in health need remain out of employment three days after arrival, nor does it appear probable that a surplus of labour will exist for many years'. SAGG, 14 July 1853.
51. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/2528, Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 6 August 1855.
52. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/3077.
53. SAGG, 20 September 1855.
54. SAGG, 25 October 1855. A very poor harvest – so bad that flour and grain were imported from Melbourne and Chile – also reduced labour requirements. All types of labour were in excessive supply and workmen were becoming agitated at the depressing effect of immigration on wages. *Register*, 19 October 1855; *Observer*, 15 March 1856; SAA GRG 24/6/1855 664.
55. SAA GRG 24/6/1855 3077, Letter from McInnes and others, dated 18 September 1855.
56. *Observer*, 5 January 1855, 12 January 1855. See also *Register*, 24 October 1855.
57. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/3450, Report of Immigration Officer, dated 18 October 1855.
58. SAA GRG 28/4 p. 96.
59. SAA GRG 24 4 29 pp. 53, 62; GRG 24 6 1855 4157; GRG 24 6 1855 402; GRG 24/6/1855/3941; GRG 24/6/1855/3791.
60. SAA GRG 24/6/1855, 3460, Seymour to Brewer, 18 October 1855, Brewer to Colonial Secretary, 12 October 1855; GRG 24/6/1855 3629 Brewer to Colonial Secretary, 24 November 1855.
61. SAA GRG 24/6/1856 906 Brewer to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1856; Colonial Secretary to Brewer, 14 April 1856. GRG 24/6/1856 906 CSO to Chas. Brewer 14 April 1856; GRG 28/1/2 Minute Book of Destitute Board January 1854 to September 1856, p. 270; *Observer* 5 April 1856; SAPP, 1855-6, No. 137, pp. 20-1.
62. *Register*, 15 October 1855.
63. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/3948 Immigration Agent, General report of the ship *Royal Albert*.
64. SAGG, 31 January 1856, pp. 61-2.
65. *Observer*, 5 January 1856.
66. *Observer*, 9 February 1856.
67. *Observer*, 2 February 1856, 9 February 1856.
68. SAA GRG 54/6, letter of Hare to Colonial Secretary, 8 February 1856.
69. This allegation was given further credence in the evidence of the Rev. J. Gardner to the Committee Investigating Female Immigration and Destitution in 1856 – he referred to the Highlanders when he said that 'some of them are just proverbial for their laziness' and ought not to be given relief too easily. SAPP 1855-6, No. 137, p. 20.
70. Hare recommended relief for this woman on the grounds that 'Her late husband, herself and family, were remarkable among the Gaelic families both for their industry and peaceable demeanour; there was such a respectability of conduct about them as to induce me to believe that his widow would not apply for your charity if she had any means of earning a subsistence without your help.' SAA GRG 54/6 Hare to Destitute Board 16 August 1856.

71. The unhygienic habits of the Highlanders was given considerable prominence in contemporary Scottish accounts, e.g. *New Statistical Account*, op. cit., Inverness-shire, p. 345.
72. SAA GRG 54/6 Letters of C. S. Hare.
73. Trelawny Saunders, op. cit., p. 1.
74. SAA GRG 54/6 Hare to Colonial Secretary, 16 August 1856.
75. SAPP 1855-6, No. 137.
76. SAA GRG 54/6 Hare to Colonial Secretary, 7 November 1856.
77. *Observer*, 3 May 1856.
78. SAA GRG 24/6/1855/3391.
79. *Northern Argus*, 30 March 1928.
80. *Ibid.*, 15 August 1915.
81. *Adelaide Chronicle*, 28 June 1913.
82. Napier Commission, p. 2736.
83. *Observer*, 22 May 1915.
84. E.g. The case of Robert McDonald, a son of a shepherd from Orkney who arrived in the 1850s, and eventually owned Nalang Station. *Adelaide Chronicle*, 12 June 1915.
85. There was one reminiscence which spoke of the Highlanders in tones of admiration. This occurs in Robert Bruce's *Reminiscences of an Old Squatter* (Adelaide, 1902), p. 53, where Bruce, recollecting the late 1850s in the region north of Port Augusta, laid emphasis upon the character of the Highlanders:

> For a year or so previous to my arrival the blacks (after receiving some sharp and salutory lessons) had been behaving remarkably well, and so as both single shepherds and hutkeepers were too prone to take up their beds and walk off without the slightest provocation, married couples had been gradually substituted for them, and at the time of my visit to Wanoka I do not think there was a bachelor shepherd on it, while the married ones, in whom the manager had the most confidence, were Highland born, and bred as one might say to the care of sheep, and had grown up stalwart and strong on porritch, girdle cakes and broxie . . . The Macleods and the McCaskills were men who minded their masters and their own business and interfered with nobody else's, who kept their dogs at heel if not actually working them, and who, without ostentation, said their prayers regularly, therefore they were thoroughly to be trusted, while as for their wives, I can only say that they were truly modest, had families which would have gained them pensions, had they lived in ancient Sparta.