

LETTER XVII.

MY DEAR C.:--

As to those ridiculous stories about the Duchess of Sutherland, which have found their way into many of the prints in America, one has only to be here, moving in society, to see how excessively absurd they are.

All my way through Scotland, and through England, I was associating, from day to day, with people of every religious denomination, and every rank of life. I have been with, dissenters and with churchmen; with the national Presbyterian church and the free Presbyterian; with Quakers and Baptists.

In all these circles I have heard the great and noble of the land freely spoken of and canvassed, and if there had been the least shadow of a foundation for any such accusations, I certainly should have heard it recognized in some manner. If in no other, such warm friends as I have heard speak would have alluded to the subject in the way of defence; but I have actually never heard any allusion of any sort, as if there was any thing to be explained or accounted for.

As I have before intimated, the Howard family, to which the duchess belongs, is one which has always been on the side of popular rights and popular reform. Lord Carlisle, her brother, has been a leader of the

people, particularly during the time of the corn-law reformation, and she has been known to take a wide and generous interest in all these subjects. Every where that I have moved through Scotland and England I have heard her kindness of heart, her affability of manner, and her attention to the feelings of others spoken of as marked characteristics.

Imagine, then, what people must think when they find in respectable American prints the absurd story of her turning her tenants out into the snow, and ordering the cottages to be set on fire over their heads because they would not go out.

But, if you ask how such an absurd story could ever have been made up, whether there is the least foundation to make it on, I answer, that it is the exaggerated report of a movement made by the present Duke of Sutherland's father, in the year 1811, and which was part of a great movement that passed through, the Highlands of Scotland, when the advancing progress of civilization began to make it necessary to change the estates from military to agricultural establishments.

Soon after the union of the crowns of England and Scotland, the border chiefs found it profitable to adopt upon their estates that system, of agriculture to which their hills were adapted, rather than to continue the maintenance of military retainers. Instead of keeping garrisons, with small armies, in a district, they decided to keep only so many as could profitably cultivate the land. The effect of this, of course, was like disbanding an army. It threw many people out of employ, and forced

them to seek for a home elsewhere. Like many other movements which, in their final results, are beneficial to society, this was at first vehemently resisted, and had to be carried into effect in some cases by force. As I have said, it began first in the southern counties of Scotland, soon after the union of the English and Scottish crowns, and gradually crept northward--one county after another yielding to the change. To a certain extent, as it progressed northward, the demand for labor in the great towns absorbed the surplus population; but when it came into the extreme Highlands, this refuge was wanting. Emigration to America now became the resource; and the surplus population were induced to this by means such as the Colonization Society now recommends and approves for promoting emigration to Liberia.

The first farm that was so formed on the Sutherland estate was in 1806. The great change was made in 1811-12, and completed in 1819-20.

The Sutherland estates are in the most northern portion of Scotland. The distance of this district from the more advanced parts of the kingdom, the total want of roads, the unfrequent communication by sea, and the want of towns, made it necessary to adopt a different course in regard to the location of the Sutherland population from that which circumstances had provided in other parts of Scotland, where they had been removed from the bleak and uncultivable mountains. They had lots given them near the sea, or in more fertile spots, where, by labor and industry, they might maintain themselves. They had two years allowed them for preparing for the change, without payment of rent. Timber for

their houses was given, and many other facilities for assisting their change.

The general agent of the Sutherland estate is Mr. Loch. In a speech of this gentleman in the House of Commons, on the second reading of the Scotch poor-law bill, June 12, 1845, he states the following fact with regard to the management of the Sutherland estate during this period, from 1811 to 1833, which certainly can speak for itself: "I can state as from fact that, from 1811 to 1833, not one sixpence of rent has been received from that county, but, on the contrary, there has been sent there, for the benefit and improvement of the people, a sum exceeding sixty thousand pounds."

Mr. Loch goes on in the same speech to say, "There is no set of people more industrious than the people of Sutherland. Thirty years since they were engaged in illegal distillation to a very great extent; at the present moment there is not, I believe, an illegal still in the county. Their morals have improved as those habits have been abandoned; and they have added many hundreds, I believe thousands, of acres to the land in cultivation since they were placed upon the shore.

"Previous to that change to which I have referred, they exported very few cattle, and hardly any thing else. They were, also, every now and then, exposed to all the difficulties of extreme famine. In the years 1812-13, and 1816-17, so great was the misery that it was necessary to send down oatmeal for their supply to the amount of nine thousand

pounds, and that was given to the people. But, since industrious habits were introduced, and they were settled within reach of fishing, no such calamity has overtaken them. Their condition was then so low that they were obliged to bleed their cattle, during the winter, and mix the blood with the remnant of meal they had, in order to save them from starvation.

"Since then the country has improved so much that the fish, in particular, which they exported, in 1815, from one village alone, Helmsdale, (which, previous to 1811, did not exist,) amounted to five thousand three hundred and eighteen barrels of herring, and in 1844 thirty-seven thousand five hundred and ninety-four barrels, giving employment to about three thousand nine hundred people. This extends over the whole of the county, in which fifty-six thousand barrels were cured.

"Do not let me be supposed to say that there are not cases requiring attention: it must be so in a large population; but there can be no means taken by a landlord, or by those under him, that are not bestowed upon that tenantry.

"It has been said that the contribution by the heritor (the duke) to one kirk session for the poor was but six pounds. Now, in the eight parishes which are called Sutherland proper, the amount of the contribution of the Duke of Sutherland to the kirk session is forty-two pounds a year. That is a very small sum but that sum merely is so given because the

landlord thinks that he can distribute his charity in a more beneficial manner to the people; and the amount of charity which he gives--and which, I may say, is settled on them, for it is given regularly--is above four hundred and fifty pounds a year.

"Therefore the statements that have been made, so far from being correct, are in every way an exaggeration of what is the fact. No portion of the kingdom has advanced in prosperity so much; and if the honorable member (Mr. S. Crawford) will go down there, I will give him every facility for seeing the state of the people, and he shall judge with his own eyes whether my representation be not correct. I could go through a great many other particulars, but I will not trouble the house now with them. The statements I have made are accurate, and I am quite ready to prove them in any way that is necessary."

This same Mr. Loch has published a pamphlet, in which he has traced out the effects of the system pursued on the Sutherland estate, in many very important particulars. It appears from this that previously to 1811 the people were generally sub-tenants to middle men, who exacted high rents, and also various perquisites, such as the delivery of poultry and eggs, giving so many days' labor in harvest time, cutting and carrying peat and stones for building.

Since 1811 the people have become immediate tenants, at a greatly diminished rate of rent, and released from all these exactions. For instance, in two parishes, in 1812, the rents were one thousand five

hundred and ninety-three pounds, and in 1823 they were only nine hundred and seventy-two pounds. In another parish the reduction of rents has amounted, on an average, to thirty-six per cent. Previous to 1811 the houses were turf huts of the poorest description, in many instances the cattle being kept under the same roof with the family. Since 1811 a large proportion, of their houses have been rebuilt in a superior manner--the landlord having paid them for their old timber where it could not be moved, and having also contributed the new timber, with lime.

Before 1811 all the rents of the estates were used for the personal profit of the landlord; but since that time, both by the present duke and his father, all the rents have been expended on improvements in the county, besides sixty thousand pounds more which have been remitted from England for the purpose. This money has been spent on churches, school houses, harbors, public inns, roads, and bridges.

In 1811 there was not a carriage road in the county, and only two bridges. Since that time four hundred and thirty miles of road have been constructed on the estate, at the expense of the proprietor and tenants. There is not a turnpike gate in the county, and yet the roads are kept perfect.

Before 1811 the mail was conveyed entirely by a foot runner, and there was but one post office in the county; and there was no direct post across the county, but letters to the north and west were forwarded

once a month. A mail coach has since been established, to which the late Duke of Sutherland contributed more than two thousand six hundred pounds; and since 1834 mail gigs have been established to convey letters to the north and west coast, towards which the Duke of Sutherland contributes three hundred pounds a year. There are thirteen post offices and sub-offices in the county. Before 1811 there was no inn in the county fit for the reception of strangers. Since that time there have been fourteen inns either built or enlarged by the duke.

Before 1811 there was scarcely a cart on the estate; all the carriage was done on the backs of ponies. The cultivation of the interior was generally executed with a rude kind of spade, and there was not a gig in the county. In 1845 there were one thousand one hundred and thirty carts owned on the estate, and seven hundred and eight ploughs, also forty-one gigs.

Before 1812 there was no baker, and only two shops. In 1845 there were eight bakers and forty-six grocer's shops, in nearly all of which shoe blacking was sold to some extent, an unmistakable evidence of advancing civilization.

In 1808 the cultivation of the coast side of Sutherland was so defective that it was necessary often, in a fall of snow, to cut down the young Scotch firs to feed the cattle on; and in 1808 hay had to be imported. Now the coast side of Sutherland exhibits an extensive district of land cultivated according to the best principles of modern agriculture;

several thousand acres have been added to the arable land by these improvements.

Before 1811 there were no woodlands of any extent on the estate, and timber had to be obtained from a distance. Since that time many thousand acres of woodland have been planted, the thinnings of which, being sold to the people at a moderate rate, have greatly increased their comfort and improved their domestic arrangements.

Before 1811 there were only two blacksmiths in the county. In 1845 there were forty-two blacksmiths and sixty-three carpenters. Before 1829 the exports of the county consisted of black cattle of an inferior description, pickled salmon, and some ponies; but these were precarious sources of profit, as many died in winter for want of food; for example, in the spring of 1807 two hundred cows, five hundred cattle, and more than two hundred ponies died in the parish of Kildonan alone. Since that time the measures pursued by the Duke of Sutherland, in introducing improved breeds of cattle, pigs, and modes of agriculture, have produced results in exports which tell their own story. About forty thousand sheep and one hundred and eighty thousand fleeces of wool are exported annually; also fifty thousand barrels of herring.

The whole fishing village of Helmsdale has been built since that time. It now contains from thirteen to fifteen curing yards covered with slate, and several streets with houses similarly built. The herring fishery, which has been mentioned as so productive, has been established

since the change, and affords employment to three thousand nine hundred people.

Since 1811, also, a savings bank has been established in every parish, of which the Duke of Sutherland is patron and treasurer, and the savings have been very considerable.

The education of the children of the people has been a subject of deep interest to the Duke of Sutherland. Besides the parochial schools, (which answer, I suppose, to our district schools,) of which the greater number have been rebuilt or repaired at an expense exceeding what is legally required for such purposes, the Duke of Sutherland contributes to the support of several schools for young females, at which sewing and other branches of education are taught; and in 1844 he agreed to establish twelve general assembly schools in such parts of the county as were without the sphere of the parochial schools, and to build school and schoolmasters' houses, which will, upon an average, cost two hundred pounds each; and to contribute annually two hundred pounds in aid of salaries to the teachers, besides a garden and cows' grass; and in 1845 he made an arrangement with the education committee of the Free church, whereby no child, of whatever persuasion, will be beyond the reach of moral and religious education.

There are five medical gentlemen on the estate, three of whom receive allowances from the Duke of Sutherland for attendance on the poor in the districts in which they reside.

An agricultural association, or farmers' club, has been formed under the patronage of the Duke of Sutherland, of which the other proprietors in the county, and the larger tenantry, are members, which is in a very active and flourishing state. They have recently invited Professor Johnston to visit Sutherland, and give lectures on agricultural chemistry.

The total population of the Sutherland estate is twenty-one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four. To have the charge and care of so large an estate, of course, must require very systematic arrangements; but a talent for system seems to be rather the forte of the English.

The estate is first divided into three districts, and each district is under the superintendence of a factor, who communicates with the duke through a general agent. Besides this, when the duke is on the estate, which is during a portion of every year, he receives on Monday whoever of his tenants wishes to see him. Their complaints or wishes are presented in writing; he takes them into consideration, and gives written replies.

Besides the three factors there is a ground officer, or sub-factor, in every parish, and an agriculturist in the Dunrobin district, who gives particular attention to instructing the people in the best methods of farming. The factors, the ground officers, and the agriculturists all work to one common end. They teach the advantages of draining; of

ploughing deep, and forming their ridges in straight lines; of constructing tanks for saving liquid manure. The young farmers also pick up a great deal of knowledge when working as ploughmen or laborers on the more immediate grounds of the estate.

The head agent, Mr. Loch, has been kind enough to put into my hands a general report of the condition of the estate, which he drew up for the inspection of the duke, May 12, 1853, and in which he goes minutely over the condition of every part of the estate.

One anecdote of the former Duke of Sutherland will show the spirit which has influenced the family in their management of the estate. In 1817, when there was much suffering on account of bad seasons, the Duke of Sutherland sent down his chief agent to look into the condition of the people, who desired the ministers of the parishes to send in their lists of the poor. To his surprise it was found that there were located on the estate a number of people who had settled there without leave. They amounted to four hundred and eight families, or two thousand persons; and though they had no legal title to remain where they were, no hesitation was shown in supplying them with food in the same manner with those who were tenants, on the sole condition that on the first opportunity they should take cottages on the sea shore, and become industrious people. It was the constant object of the duke to keep the rents of his poorer tenants at a nominal amount.

What led me more particularly to inquire into these facts was, that I

received by mail, while in London, an account containing some of these stories, which had been industriously circulated in America. There were dreadful accounts of cruelties practised in the process of inducing the tenants to change their places of residence. The following is a specimen of these stories:--

"I was present at the pulling down and burning of the house of William Chisholm, Badinloskin, in which was lying his wife's mother, an old, bed-ridden woman of near one hundred years of age, none of the family being present. I informed the persons about to set fire to the house of this circumstance, and prevailed on them to wait till Mr. Sellar came. On his arrival I told him of the poor old woman being in a condition unfit for removal. He replied, 'Damn her, the old witch, she has lived too long; let her burn.' Fire was immediately set to the house, and the blankets in which she was carried were in flames before she could be got out. She was placed in a little shed, and it was with great difficulty they were prevented from firing that also. The old woman's daughter arrived while the house was on fire, and assisted the neighbors in removing her mother out of the flames and smoke, presenting a picture of horror which I shall never forget, but cannot attempt to describe. She died within five days."

With regard to this story Mr. Loch, the agent, says, "I must notice the only thing like a fact stated in the newspaper extract which you sent to me, wherein Mr. Sellar is accused of acts of cruelty towards some of the

people. This Mr. Sellar tested, by bringing an action against the then sheriff substitute of the county. He obtained a verdict for heavy damages. The sheriff, by whom, the slander was propagated, left the county. Both are since dead."

Having, through Lord Shaftesbury's kindness, received the benefit of Mr. Loch's corrections to this statement, I am permitted to make a little further extract from his reply. He says,--

"In addition to what I was able to say in my former paper, I can now state that the Duke of Sutherland has received, from, one of the most determined opposers of the measure, who travelled to the north of Scotland as editor of a newspaper, a letter regretting all he had written on the subject, being convinced that he was entirely misinformed. As you take so much interest in the subject, I will conclude by saying that nothing could exceed the prosperity of the county during the past year; their stock, sheep, and other things sold at high prices; their crops of grain and turnips were never so good, and the potatoes were free from all disease; rents have been paid better than was ever known. * * * As an instance of the improved habits of the farmers, no house is now built for them that they do not require a hot bath and water closets."

From this long epitome you can gather the following results; first, if the system were a bad one, the Duchess of Sutherland had nothing to do with it, since it was first introduced in 1806, the same year her grace

was born; and the accusation against Mr. Sellar dates in 1811, when her grace was five or six years old. The Sutherland arrangements were completed in 1819, and her grace was not married to the duke till 1823, so that, had the arrangement been the worst in the world, it is nothing to the purpose so far as she is concerned.

As to whether the arrangement is a bad one, the facts which have been stated speak for themselves. To my view it is an almost sublime instance of the benevolent employment of superior wealth and power in shortening the struggles of advancing civilization, and elevating in a few years a whole community to a point of education and material prosperity, which, unassisted, they might never have obtained,