THE SUTHERLAND EVICTIONS OF 1814: FORMER AND RECENT STATEMENTS RESPECTING THEM EXAMINED

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by Thomas Sellar

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THOMAS SELLAR

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Trieste

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THE

SUTHERLAND EVICTIONS

OF

1814

FORMER AND RECENT STATEMENTS

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BY

THOMAS SELLAR

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PREFACE.

The publication, in the course of the past year, of statements injurious to the memory of Mr. Patrick Sellar has cast upon the writer, as his representative, the task of entering on a public discussion of matters, long gone by, in which Mr. Sellar took part.

It is needless to say that this discussion would gladly have been avoided, if only on account of the reluctance felt by Mr. Sellar's family to publish to the world a narrative of personal details. They also felt that the public might justly resent the intrusion of personal matters into the consideration of a great question,—namely, the question by what means improvement in the condition of the Highlands may best be effected.

The apology which the writer has to offer is that the discussion is not of his seeking, but has been thrust upon him. It was not to be avoided, unless he was willing to permit the memory of his father to rest under unmerited obloquy.

It was the intention of the writer to go at length into the history of the Sutherland clearances—their antecedents, concomitant circumstances, and results—feeling, as he did, that a narrative of mere personal details relating to Mr. Patrick Sellar would be an inadequate performance of his duty. He had provided himself, to some extent, with material for the purpose, but the appearance of Mr. Mackenzie's book ('The History of the Highland Clearances'), and the allusions in the press to Mr. Patrick Sellar, have necessitated an early publication; and he has had to content himself with a short statement, in the introductory chapter, which he hopes will give a sufficient general outline of the circumstances.

The writer, and the writer only, is responsible for the statements and arguments put forward. For obvious reasons—in order that no one should feel himself compromised by those statements and arguments—he has avoided all communication, direct or indirect, with the representatives of persons concerned in any manner with the management of the Sutherland Estate.

THOMAS SELLAR.

HALL GROVE, BAGSHOT: *May* 1883.

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INTRODUCTORY.

THE condition of the population of the Scottish Highlands at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century was deplorable. Mr. John Knox,[1] who, in sixteen journeys in the course of twenty-three years, had penetrated, from philanthropic motives, into the remotest parts of the country, and who claimed to have accumulated more information about the condition of the Highland people than had ever been acquired by any one before, declared, in 1785, that it was 'such as no language could describe.'[2]

Knox's *Tour*, p. lxxi.

Knox's *View*, &c., vol. i. p. 122.

[1] *A View of the British Empire, and more especially Scotland:* by John Knox, 1785. *A Tour throughout the Highlands of Scotland:* by John Knox, 1787. Among the various panaceas which have been suggested from time to time for the amelioration of the condition of the Highland people, and of other kindred races, the one which commended itself to Mr. Knox, and to many other persons at the time, was the establishment of fishing stations, by means of which, not only fishermen, but artisans of various kinds, were to be developed. Mr. Knox was an active promoter of the 'British Society for the Extension of Fisheries, &c.,' incorporated in 1786; and for the purpose of examining the sites best suited for fishing stations, he travelled in one expedition along the whole coast, from Oban, by Cape Wrath and John o' Groat's House, to the Moray Firth, and thence onward to the Firth of Forth.

[2] Dr. Garnett (*Observations on a Tour in the Highlands*, 1800, vol. i. p. 178) confirms Mr. Knox's view of the condition of the Highland people in the following terms:—'Mr. Knox's description of the distresses of the Highlanders has often affected me with horror, even when I hoped it was exaggerated; but my own observation and information convince me that his pictures are not too highly coloured.'