

THE TYREE EMIGRANTS.

30th October 1849.

DEAR SIR,—I read with deep horror, but without surprise, the account given of the sufferings of the emigrants from Mull and Tyree, in your paper of 23d inst. The tale is already sickening enough, but I wish to add a stroke or two more which seem requisite to complete the picture.

The village of Fergus, to which your Canadian correspondent got them forwarded, contained, in the summer of 1846, if I do not forget, not more than 20 houses. The cleared land around it was not extensive, and over the greater portion of this the stumps were still standing. I do not suppose the village can have increased much since that period, as it is situated far inland, and I cannot believe that so many hundreds of destitute creatures can have got lodging or food in it. Could a small village in this country furnish homes or food for some hundreds of destitute persons suddenly thrown upon it? and if not, can this be done in a comparatively new Canadian settlement? and whither can they go? shall they return to Hamilton? the hungry hundreds from Uist who arrived there after them, forbid this. Shall they go forward? Owen Sound is still 70 miles away, conveyances, food, and shelter, cannot be got amid the solitudes of the Garrabraza road, a road not quite cleared, and otherwise wholly unfinished three years ago; and if not, how are these poor people, weakened by disease and want, crushed by the losses which they have just sustained, and the scenes of anguish through which they have passed—who have seen the agonised frames of loved ones tortured in waggons on rough Canadian roads, and their scarcely breathless bodies flung into holes at the road-side—to travel over a road which it took me nearly three days to ride? The strength of women and children at least is unequal to the task, they have no means, and public and private charity are alike exhausted. Were it possible for them to advance to Owen Sound their condition would still be pitiable; the first tree was cut in that settlement, only eight years ago, and it is not reasonable to suppose, its inhabitants can as yet afford much aid to others. It would seem then they must remain in Fergus; it is quite obvious this cannot support them, even should the poor men of Uist not advance thither, and I fear go where they may, the conditions of these last cannot be better, the sufferings of the whole seem only beginning, and I shudder to think of what any remnant of them, which may survive, must endure before the coming autumn. And has it really come to this? Is the country to disregard (I say not, the feelings for it seems forgotten they have any) but the lives of the poor unoffending, often slandered Highlanders—is it deemed proper that they should be vomited forth as an abomination on far distant shores—are their famished carcasses to fill the maw of the wolf, or fatten Canadian soil, in order that the incomes of noble Lords and brave Colonels may be increased? Is it a crime to speak Gaelic, to dwell in the Highlands, to be poor and uneducated? If so I wish the Legislature would openly declare this, and direct its own officials to conduct the work of exportation, for then these poor people might share the kindness now bestowed on thieves and robbers, and be saved from the mistaken and unwelcome kindness of Highland Lairds and Destitution Committees.

I am far from being opposed to voluntary emigration, and have no feeling of ill will to his Grace the Duke of Argyll, or the others concerned in this ill-starred transaction. I know they imagine they are doing the people a real service, by sending them to a land of plenty. Nor have I a wish to pain any other of our depopulating lairds. But my heart bleeds at seeing human life thus thrown away, and I would fain rouse our proprietary to consider, that the country cannot much longer bear the reproach, of caring for the rich and great alone, or see her poor thus driven forth to perish. It would be really less cruel, to shoot or hang a certain proportion of those designed for exportation, and divide their clothes and intended provisions &c. among the remainder, before shipping them off, than to act as is now done, for then there would be some considerable chance, that this remnant might be sent over in some measure of comfort, and kept alive till the coming autumn. But were this attempted, those who feel horror struck at the murder of brave Hungarians, would be up in arms to prevent it, and shall these humane persons not feel for those who, without crime, are driven away to perish of disease or want, or by the cold of a Canadian winter? I fear not yet, though I feel it is full time that the middle and lower classes were awake to the enormities which are now being perpetrated, and consider, that they have the means of putting an end once and for ever to such scenes as your correspondent pictures. They have the power—let them use it—let them but speak out—let them demand in a voice of thunder, that the Legislature look into this matter, and regard the rights of the non-pauper poor, and they must be hearkened to; no government dare refuse them, the clearing system must perish for ever, and even the Soil is people may be saved from the like destruction at the hands of Lord Macdonald and his Commissioner.

I earnestly hope that this matter shall not be allowed to rest, the safety of the upper classes, the peace and well-being of our country, and the dependence of Canada on the British Crown, all demand that it be speedily attended to and rightly settled.—I remain yours &c.

A CONSTANT READER.

THE LOCHALSH EMIGRANTS.

SIR,—For several successive weeks we have had exposed to us, for the first time, through your valuable columns, a monster evil, which silently, but destructively has been gnawing the very vitals of domestic happiness wherever it appeared, for the last half century. I allude to the Highland depopulation system. Its source has been tangibly traced to a heartless avarice; but, alas! all its consequent evils, though daily coming more and more to light, are not yet fully comprehended. I will not refer to the loss which reckless proprietors are themselves sustaining, in clearing their estates of men who, for honesty and industry, are surpassed by no nation in the world. I might glance at the fearful privation and distress to which men of such character are subjected. Viewing the subject in this light, and taking no farther retrospect than the exportations of this present year, what a sad amount of human suffering do we find! How fearful have been the sufferings of the Tyree, Uist, and Lochalsh emigrants! And is it indulging in the spirit of dismal foreboding, to anticipate that these sufferings have not yet terminated, and that starvation will yet increase the number of the victims of this barbarous system?

I have been induced to offer these remarks from having had the perusal of a private letter, received by a Lochalsh woman, who settled in this neighbourhood since the departure of almost all her friends on the ill-fated expedition from that coast. The letter was from a respectable man in Lochalsh, who had received authentic intelligence of the catastrophe which awaited his unfortunate countrymen, from one of the survivors, an emigrant schoolmaster. It corroborates the statement made in your paper of the 30th ult., and states that almost all, or, at least, the great majority of the deaths happened in the quarantine hospital, after their arrival on the Canadian shore. He also states that a circumstance which greatly increased the mortality was, that the crew of an Irish ship which had cholera on board were sent to the same hospital with that of one of the Lochalsh ships (for there were two)—the consequence of which was that 100 were cut off in the short space of five days. The long list of families mentioned in the letter as having been totally or partially destroyed by the ravages of disease is most melancholy; while some of the survivors are described as wandering along the streets of Quebec, soliciting charity of the benevolent for the support of themselves and their helpless little ones. May the promise be verified in the case of their benefactors—"Cast thy bread upon the waters and thou shalt find it after many days." All of these wretched unfortunates are said to be in a most defenceless state to resist the approaching severity of a Canadian winter.

To turn from the sufferers abroad, let us now think of their bereaved relatives at home. And oh! sir, could even their hard-hearted oppressors witness the sight, methinks even they would be touched by the piteous walls of widowed and friendless mothers mourning over the loss of dutiful sons and loving daughters—of sisters weeping over the death of affectionate brothers, with feelings of deeper and more poignant grief than those unfeeling landlords seem to think the Highland heart susceptible of. Surely their refined feelings must be touched at the contemplation of such a scene, rendered all the more awful that indirectly at least its cause may be traced to their very doors.

Ah! will not the cries of these our unfortunate fellow-countrymen ascend into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth? Assuredly they will. Oh that their cries might also ring in the ears of these men, who seem but too thoughtless about the dread responsibility which attaches to their situation. It is a matter of satisfaction that the conscientious, though in some respects capricious gentleman, Mr Lillingston, from whose estate these unhappy emigrants have gone, is said not to have taken so active a part in the expatriation of his tenantry as his co-partners in the odious system, and that he used all the means in his power for increasing their comforts. Yet it may be considered doubtful whether it was not on account of the crotchety regulations he drew up for the management of their crofts, hard necessity compelled them to try their fortune on a foreign shore.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

SYMPATHY.

A VOICE FROM CANADA.

STORY AND FATE OF THE TYREE EMIGRANTS.

We some weeks ago called the attention of our readers to the sufferings and privations endured by the poor exiles from the western isles and coast, who had been cleared out during the earlier part of the present season. Our only sources of information then were the Canadian journals, but harrowing as were their details, it would seem that they hardly conveyed the feeblest conception of the actual horrors of their situation. But we this day submit to our readers a communication from a correspondent in Canada, which fills up the back ground of the dark and terrible picture. Himself a Highlander, and a native of Ross-shire (of Tain), his feelings of compassion were deeply stirred in behalf of the unhappy exiles, and whatever was done in Hamilton for the alleviation of their unspeakable miseries, was accomplished mainly, if not entirely, through his personal exertions. He had, therefore, the best opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with the actual facts of the case, and his high character is a sufficient guarantee for the truthfulness of his statements, upon which, therefore, full and implicit reliance may be placed.

It is impossible, we conceive, to read his simple and unexaggerated detail of facts without experiencing a thrill of horror—a revolt of the whole nature against “man’s inhumanity to man,” which “makes countless thousands mourn.” He confines his present exposition to the case of the emigrants from Tyree and Mull, as exported by his Grace the Duke of Argyle, because with their case he was chiefly and most intimately versant. It was the case of the very same party that we previously referred to—but then they had reached no farther than Toronto—and utterly deplorable as their condition had then become, still it was vastly ameliorated by the fact of their being forwarded at Government expense from Quebec to Hamilton, the head of the navigation. They suffered much during their transit losing many lives from the prevailing epidemic; but it was only at Hamilton, the head of the internal navigation, that their sufferings reached a crisis. There the Government succour totally abandoned them. The emigrant sheds, already crowded with the miserable Irish, could afford them no shelter. Huddled together on the wharfs, or on the commons betwixt the bays and the city, old and young—women and children—the feeble and the robust—they lay without shelter—exposed to the scorching beams of a Canadian summer sun, and the cold, damp dews of a Canadian night. The sad consequences, says our correspondent, may be easily conjectured. On the first night, thirteen; on the second, eight—were seized with cholera; in all forty-eight were sent to hospital, labouring under the epidemic; and up to the time at which he wrote us, *not so much as one had left it alive.* It was in this desperate crisis that our correspondent stepped forward to their relief. Accompanied by a solitary friend, he went from house to house soliciting subscriptions, and raised enough to preserve them for a few days from absolute starvation. He did more, he prevailed with the city authorities, though heavily burdened with debt, to forward them (at an expense of £150), another stage on their journey to the village of Fergus, forty-five miles from the city of Hamilton. Waggoners were provided, which forwarded them in separate detachments. On the return of the teams, one of the waggoners told him that three belonging to his load—two men and a girl—had died on the way, and the bodies were thrown into holes by the way-side, amid the heart-rending cries of their distracted relatives. All the other waggoners had similar tales to tell.

The wretched remnant linger on at Fergus until the spring. They have not so much as an axe to penetrate into the primæval forests, no food, nor a single necessary for a life in the bush. “Poor people,” says our correspondent, “there is something terrible in their situation; a cold and cheerless winter is before them, and ill prepared are they for the heart chilling frosts of a Canadian winter; how they are to survive it, is known only to Him who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.” How indeed! What fraction of the hundreds, who but a few months ago were driven forth, full of health and life, are likely to muster at the dawn of spring? Not one, we believe for every two who will have sunk into the silent rest of the grave.

It is not the first time that the earlier—the initial horrors of a *Highland Clearing* have been well and fearfully depicted, but we hardly know, if in any case, its ultimate and fearful issues beyond the Atlantic, have ever before in any case been so clearly brought to light. They have hitherto been allowed to be enveloped in the mists and obscurities of distance. The victims have fallen unrecked of, and unheeded. We do not know with what feelings the Duke of Argyle will peruse the sad record of his handiwork. But this we know, that not for all the glories of his ancient coronet, nor for his Grace’s broad lands, would we assume his responsibility in connection with it. In our apprehension, the fearful guilt of blood lies at his door, and before God and his country we summon him to answer for it.

Not that he is worse than other Highland clearers. Our correspondent expressly states that the exiles from other estates were just as badly off, and suffered as much. And we learn that a week after the date of our correspondent’s letter, 500, and a fortnight later, 600 of the people exported from the Cluny estates in South Uist, had reached Hamilton, in circumstances, if possible, still more deplorable than those of the Tyree men, and with prospects still darker, for in a small community the charities and resources of even the most philanthropic must fail before demands so frequent and onerous.

Again we put it to the country, how long this accursed trading and trifling in the lives of a virtuous and oppressed peasantry is to be endured?