

## *The Poetry of the Clearances*

I have decided to limit the title of this paper to 'The Poetry of the Clearances', and its scope to a consideration of poems dealing explicitly with the Clearances. The limitation is not easily justifiable, because very much emigration poetry that cannot explicitly be called Poetry of the Clearances was occasioned by emigration resulting indirectly from the Clearances. I have little doubt that four-fifths of the emigration from 1780 to 1880 was caused directly or indirectly by the Clearances, or by such close relations of the Clearances as rack-renting and appropriation, by landlords, of the best agricultural and pastoral land. Considerations of space, however, force me to the limitation because the general motif of emigration is so all-pervading in 19th century Gaelic poetry that, were I not thus to confine myself, I should have to survey a body of literature out of all proportion to the space at my disposal. All poetry reflects social phenomena, and in the Highlands of the 19th century emigration of one kind or another was the phenomenon of phenomena. I have, therefore, kept to the direct and explicit poetry of the Clearances and their aftermath, the people's struggle and partial resurgence in the eighties of last century. I regret the limitation because it involves the non-inclusion of poems like John MacLachlan's 'Gur moch rinn mi dùsgadh', 'Och nan och, 's na bheil air m' aire', 'Is fhada mi 'm ònaran', and 'Tha mi sgìth 'n fhògairt so'. I realise that very often my selection may appear arbitrary.

The Highland Clearances constitute one of the saddest tragedies that has ever come on a people, and one of the most astounding of all the successes of landlord capitalism in Western Europe, such a triumph over the workers and peasants of a country as has rarely been achieved with such ease, cruelty and cynicism. I have said 'cynicism', not forgetting the vast amount of pseudo-economic and pseudo-philanthropic unktion that formed the ideological preparation, concomitant and justification. I have said 'ease', not forgetting the resistance in Coigach in 1792, in Glen Calvie in 1820, and at Sollas in Uist in 1829, because there was no concerted crofter resistance until after 1880, when the Battle of the Braes, the Lewis Deer Hunt and the Assynt Land Raid marked a new era, albeit a very short-lived one, the

era of the crofters' counter-attack. The Leckmelm eviction in 1880 and the Battle of the Braes in 1882 mark respectively the end of the Clearance period proper and the beginning of the crofter resistance.

The landlords' triumph from 1760 to 1880 was a remarkably easy one, but there were many causes political, economic, social and religious to weaken the Highland people. This weakness is clearly reflected in the weakness, thinness and perplexity of most Gaelic poetry in the 19th century.

The failure of the '45 and the resulting legislation turned the Highland chiefs purely and simply into landlords. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, without the intervening feudal stage, the Highland people had to exchange a tribal economy for a landlord economy, and, as is inevitable in the telescoping of historical processes, the upheaval and suffering was immense. When the British Government took the captaincy of the clan and the power of 'pit and gallows' from the chief, it gave him a right to the many privileges of the laissez-faire capitalist. The Industrial Revolution and growth of big urban populations created a huge demand for wool and animal foodstuffs. Thus the Clearances were expedient and welcome in the eyes of the industrial capitalists of the South as well as to the landlord capitalists of the North. Hence the evicted Highland crofter could expect little support from the humanitarian feeling of the capitalist press of the cities, and he was geographically, politically, economically and linguistically isolated from the industrial workers of the South, who were engaged in their own struggle with capital. The failure of the '45 also gave the death blow to the Scottish Nationalist hopes, and put behind the capitalist the might of the British Empire.

The political and economic position of the landlords was secure, and certain ideological factors strengthened it further. The Highland chief could still take advantage of some at least of the old traditions of loyalty to the chief, for to an unsophisticated population tradition rendered more difficult the appreciation of economic fact. Even as late as the eighties of the last century the lingering traces of this tradition were manifesting themselves in the absurd tendency to blame the factor more than the landlord. But the religious factor was of far more consequence in the weakening of popular resistance, and it increased in importance as the Clearances progressed. Thus the fact that there were so many more examples of resistance to Clearances in the period between 1780 and 1820 than in the period between 1820 and 1870 is partly accounted for by the spreading and deepening of the religious revival after 1820. It may be that the clergy's silent acquiescence and even occasional open support for the landlord has been exaggerated,

but it is probably true that not one in ten of the Highland clergymen supported the crofters in any tangible way. The ministers of the Established Church were economically attached to the landlord, and few of them attacked their patrons, while some of them actively supported the Clearances, preaching to the people that their sufferings were God's judgement on them for their sins, and that resistance to constituted authority was sacrilege. The connection of the landlords with the Established Church undoubtedly helped to drive great numbers of the people into the Free Church, but a church that considered the world a vale of tears, earthly affairs of little account, and original sin one of the two central things in human life,' could advise only submission and resignation and an escape to religion. The poverty that increased with every encroachment by the landlord on good land, and the resulting concentration of population on worthless plots, encouraged even among the more worldly the view that the world was indeed a vale of tears, and moreover, as Professor Tawney has proved, 19th century Calvinism, however democratic in its church government, did not vitally dispute the theories of private property and laissez-faire that were the ideological props of capitalism. Ultimately, even for the Free Church minister, who had little cause to love the landlord, the dispensation was that the land was the landlord's and that he could do what he liked with it, his spiritual blood on his own head. He was of the powers that be, and, at any rate, such earthly matters were of little importance.

For all those reasons, the Highlanders' resistance, physical and moral, was bound to be very weak, and the poetry of the period reflects this impotence. There was one political factor which ought ideally to have helped the crofters, namely, the great services of Highland soldiers to the Empire. Alexander Mackenzie has called attention to factual comment on this: 'At the very hour that Nana Sahib was being crushed and Cawnpore taken by the 78th Regiment, the fathers, mothers and children of the 78th were being evicted within a few miles of Dunrobin Castle.' Contemplation of such ironies is one of the most perplexed and pathetic features of all the perplexed and pathetic Gaelic poetry of the 19th century. Most of the 19th century Gaelic poets gloried in the deeds of the Highland soldiers, and most of them asked why such things were, but, not having much of an insight into the ways of imperialism, they could give no answer. They could only utter the warning that depopulation of the Highlands would sooner or later end the supply of Highland soldiers.

Gaelic poetry in the 19th century is naturally depressing and even hopeless in tone, until the resurgent spirit in the eighties, especially in

Skye and Lewis, brought a new note of courage and hope. This resurgence had three main causes, mostly external in origin, the stirring of a working class Radicalism in the cities, the interest of the Liberal Party in the votes of the rural workers that they were to enfranchise in 1884 and, above all, the example of Ireland. In the words of an island crofter, 'We were hearing such good news from Ireland that we thought we would become rebels ourselves.' In the eighties exultation came again into Gaelic poetry with the songs of Màiri Mhór nan Oran — but it did not survive the first two decades of an active Land League.

There was a considerable number of Clearances before the end of the 18th century — the Drummond Clearance in 1762; the Glengarry in 1782; one in Strath Glass in 1788; and others in other parts of Ross-shire and Sutherland, but apparently they evoked little comment in verse, at any rate in verse that has survived. Of course, so much of the poetry of that period has been lost and much was undoubtedly kept out of collections dedicated to aristocratic patrons that one cannot know the reaction of poets between 1750 and 1880. For example, I know of no poetic mention of that grim foretaste of the Clearances, *Soitheach nan Daoine*, the experiment in slave-trafficking from Skye made in 1739 by MacDonald of Sleat and MacLeod of Dunvegan. There is, however, a traditional metrical reference to it in the simple and pathetic rhyme of place-names in Minginish and Bracadale, alleged to be the words of a girl who was kidnapped while pulling dulse on the Gesto shore:

Grùla 's Brunnal 's dà chnoc Scarrail,  
Lag nam Bó, Airigh MhicLeòid,  
Beinn Thota Gormshuil nam fear sgiamhach,  
M'ionam 's mo chiall Beinn Dubhagraich.

*Grula and Brunnal and the two Hills of Scarrail,  
the Hollow of the Cows, the Shieling of MacLeod,  
the Penny-land of Tota Gormuil of the handsome men,  
my love and darling Ben Duagraich.*

John MacCodrum commemorates the squeezing out by Sir Alexander MacDonald of the Uist tacksmen about 1770, and he sails as near the wind as a pensioner of Sir Alexander's could be expected to sail in deprecating the departure of the 'gentlemen' of the clan, and, not understanding the change in the status of chief, he foresees a danger to the chiefs themselves in the loss of their warriors. It is a strange poem. He talks of 'uachdarain ghòrach chuir fuaradh fo'r

srònaibh', keeping discreetly to the plural, and says, 'Thug sud sgrìob air MacDhòmhnaill' — an ingenious and polite way of condoling on the results of a misdeed with the author of the misdeed. The going of the tacksmen was not, of course, a clearance in the ordinary sense, but it was gravely symptomatic, though MacCodrum hardly sees the symptom. What was going to happen to the commons if the gentlemen of the clan were not to be spared? The last part of the poem is surprisingly pointed and probably refers to clearances of commons, as well as to the liquidation of the tacksmen. The plural used of the landlords may be a discreet evasion to mark a particular reference to Sir Alexander MacDonald, but it is likely that MacCodrum was thinking of more than the going of the tacksmen. I do not think he would call the tacksmen 'truaghain'.

Seallaibh m'an cuairt duibh  
 Is faicibh na h-uaislean  
 Gun iochd ann' ri truaghain,  
 Gun suairceas ri dàimhich;  
 'S ann tha iad am barail  
 Nach buin sibh do'n talamh,  
 'S ged dh'fhàg iad sibh falamh  
 Chan fhaic iad mar chall e.  
 Chaill iad an sealladh  
 Air gach reachd agus gealladh  
 Bha eadar na fearaibh  
 Thug am fearann so o'n nàmhaid.

*Look around you  
 and see the nobles  
 with no pity for miserable ones,  
 with no kindness to kinsmen;  
 They are of the opinion  
 that you are not of the land,  
 and though they have left you empty  
 they do not see it as a loss.  
 They have lost their sight  
 of every law and promise  
 that was among the men  
 who took this land from their enemy.*

It is a very clear statement of the old view of the clan's right to the territory. Probably MacCodrum's being a pensioner of the chief most concerned has deprived posterity of some powerful satire.

Such powerful satire as MacCodrum could not, or would not, give on the theme exists in Ailean Dall's 'Oran nan Ciobairean Gallda', a

poem entirely in the vigorous style of the 18th century, though probably composed in the early years of the following century. The first four lines are devastating.

Thàinig oirnn do dh'Albainn crois,  
Tha daoine bochda nochdte ris,  
Gun bhiadh, gun aodach, gun chluain,  
Tha 'n àird a tuath air a sgrios.

*There has come on us in Scotland a cross,  
poor people are naked before it;  
without food, without clothing, without pasture (?),  
the Land of the North is utterly destroyed.*

The poem goes on to describe the desolation of the Highlands and to express with great power an even physical contempt for the Lowland shepherds or shepherd farmers, their manners, their talk, their whole being, but not a disparaging word of the noble landlords whose pockets were being filled by the high rents paid by the shepherd farmers. I wonder if Ailean Dall's failure to indict the real authors of the villainy was due to stupidity, or to the intellectual confusion of the day, or to his intention of seeking patronage and subscriptions. Whatever he thought of the landlords — and we get an inkling of it from his laudatory mention of the 'Colonel of Glengarry' and Mackenzie as not being given to increasing the price of land — his whole soul hated the Lowland shepherds and shepherd farmers as a personification of all that was extinguishing the old Gaeldom of song, wine, bardic patronage and Gaels.

Neither MacCodrum nor MacDougall were rebels in temperament, and Duncan Bàn Macintyre was the least rebellious of men, but they were all three of peasant stock, and all three, and especially Macintyre, had a great zest for the joys of peasant life. In his piquant and spirited 'Oran nam Balgairan', Duncan Macintyre sees most of the implications of the coming of the sheep: untilled soil, no peasantry, no farms, no shielings, no houses, no vestige of any old Gaelic custom, no horse, cattle beast, farm servant, deer, no forester — only sheep and shepherds — and he sings success and long life to the foxes that destroyed the accursed animals that were desolating the Highlands; but Duncan had a great respect for the *uaislean*, and he omits the most important member of the trinity of sheep, shepherd and landlord. Ailean Dall's 'Oran nan Ciobairean' and Macintyre's 'Oran nam Balgairan', with their limited realism and their intellectual shuffling, are in every way different from that exotic poem which is the first

piece in the second volume of the collection published by Alexander and Donald Stewart in 1804. This poem, 'Oran eadar Dòmhnall agus Dùghall, ann am bheil cor truagh nan Gàidheal d' an éigin an tìr fhéin fhàgail, air a leigeadh ris', is a direct imitation of the first Eclogue of Virgil, containing much unreal material borrowed from its original, but nevertheless clearly diagnosing the disease of Gaeldom.

A Dhòmhnail, a ghràidh mo chridh,  
 'S e dh'fhàg mi trom, muladach, sgith,  
 Bhith smuainteach' an céin  
 Air gach bochdainn tha 'm dhéidh,  
 'S mo chàirdean gu léir am dhith.  
 Chan àrdan no stoirm,  
 Cha ghruamaich gharg bhorb,  
 Cha chogadh 's beag orm, no strì,  
 Ach Ile bhith gann  
 De'n òigridh a bh' ann:  
 Chàidh am fuadach o làimh  
 Do dh'America thall  
 'S gun neach ann am bheil dàimh no sith.

*Donald, loved one of my heart,  
 what has left me heavy, sorrowful and weary  
 (is) thinking in a distant land  
 of all the poverty left behind me,  
 and my lack of all my kinsfolk.  
 It is not pride nor storm,  
 nor bitter cruel gloom,  
 nor war that I hate, nor strife;  
 but that I stay has few  
 of the youth that were in it:  
 They have been driven far away  
 to America over the sea  
 with no one who is kin and no foe.*

Then follows a most absurdly idyllic picture of the joys of America, patently indebted to the pretty extravagancies of the conventional pastoral of Virgil, but it contains also one of the most uncompromising attacks on landlords in all Gaelic poetry.

Am fearann 's iad féin  
 Gum bàsaich le chéil'  
 O na dh'fhàs iad 'nam béistean doirbh,  
 Rag-mhuinealach, cruaidh,  
 Gun iochd no ath-thruas,  
 Iad puinnseanta, fuar

Ri 'n iochdairean 's ri 'n tuath,  
'Gan casgairt le uallach dhoirbh.

*The land and themselves,  
they will die together,  
since they have become hard monsters,  
stiff-necked, mean,  
with no mercy or pity;  
poisonous, cold  
to their subjects and tenants,  
killing them with hard burdens.*

After that it bitterly describes their bloated parasitism, laments the Disarming Act in nationalist fashion, and ends with a wishful prophecy of vengeance. It is not a great or technically even a competent poem, but it contains the most clear-headed and uncompromising comment on the situation in the Highlands that survives from the Gaelic poetry of the 18th century.

Of a more homely strain is the satire on Riddell of Ardnamurchan, composed, according to the editors of *The MacDonald Collection*, by an unknown author about the middle of the 18th century. This is one of the few direct attacks on a named landlord. Very many were direct enough, but left the object nameless. The satire on Riddell is contemporary, the grasping laird having inflicted a threefold rent rise on the author. It is a vigorous and pointed poem. Riddell is the 'eucorach olc', who has not even the excuse of aristocracy. The author objects especially to being exploited by a laird without pedigree. If the author had lived to the mid 19th century, he would have seen the bluest of Highland blood devastating Sutherland, Ross, Lochaber, Perthshire, Argyll, Mull and Skye.

The satire on Riddell is as homely but not as fierce as the *aoir* on Sellar and Young, the agents of the Sutherland ducal family. This poem, which echoes in metre the simple, spirited rhythm of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'Hé an clò dubh', is a cry of such anger and hatred as had scarcely been heard in Gaelic poetry since the death of Iain Lom. Significantly, its tone is of the 18th century, though it must have been composed after 1809.

Nam faighinn-s' air an raon thu  
Is daoine 'ga do cheangal,  
Bheirinn le mo dhòrnaibh  
Tri òirlich a mach de d' sgamhan.

*If I had you on the open field  
with men tying you up*



*with my fists I would take out  
three inches of your lungs.*

I know of only one poem like it in 19th century Gaelic poetry, that is Dr John MacLachlan's poem on an Ardnamurchan tacksman and factor, anonymous in *The MacDonald Collection*, but published under MacLachlan's name in *Mac Talla*. If it is MacLachlan's, it is very unlike his other work, for MacLachlan is in spirit and technique very much of the 19th century, but this poem has a grimness, directness and economy that is more of the 18th century. Of course, MacLachlan's known poetry is clearly an expression of only a few sides of his great personality. As a man, MacLachlan was evidently something much more than is implied in the phrase, 'the sweet singer of Rahoy', and he was sometimes capable of a surprising economy and force. This poem, however, has a forceful brevity with more than MacLachlan's occasional intensity.

'S nuair théid spaid de'n ùir ort  
Gum bi 'n dùthaich glan;  
Cha téid nì air t'uaichdar-sa  
Ach buachar mhart;  
Cha bhi gal nam pàisdean  
No gàirich bhan;  
Cha bhi bantrach 's truaghan ann  
A bhualadh bhas.

*And when a spade of earth goes on you  
the country will be clean;  
nothing will go on top of you  
but the dung of cattle;  
there will be no weeping of children  
nor wailing of women;  
there will be no widow or poor one  
striking their palms.*

As these poems I have mentioned speak with the voice of the 18th century, so does the famous poem by John Maclean, 'Am Bàrd an Canada'. John Maclean was in every sense but the chronological, a poet of the 18th century, though he was alive until 1848. In 'Am Bàrd an Canada' he dwells with an astonishing concentration of realistic detail on the hardships of settlers in Canada. Very strictly, the poem is not a poem of the Clearances, inasmuch as Maclean himself was not

evicted, but its truth would have been even keener in the case of victims of the Clearances than in Maclean's own case. Its sombre but powerful note makes it a bitterly pointed retort to the idyllic picture of America in the 'Oran eadar Dòmhnall agus Dùghall' of the Stewarts' Collection.

The period 1820 to 1860 was above all the period of the Clearances. During those years huge masses of the Highland population were uprooted, poverty was terribly increased, and the economic and social revolution was completed. There was also in those years the great emotional and intellectual change occasioned by the evangelical movement, and there was, naturally enough, a big break in the continuity of Gaelic poetry, and a characteristic 19th century Gaelic poetry emerged. How much that poetry was inferior in inspiration and tradition to 18th century Gaelic poetry, it is not my business at present to consider, but, apart from the technical degeneration that resulted from the exaggeration of artificial metrical stresses, which as Rev. William Matheson declares, was greatly influenced by the importation of Lowland airs, there is a great decline in full bloodedness of matter. As compared with 18th century Gaelic poetry, 19th century poetry is flabby and anaemic; it lacks power, gusto, spontaneity, joie de vivre. Of course, form and content are so much inter-related in poetry that a failing in one cannot be distinguished from a failing in the other. I am inclined to think that only in a certain broadening and deepening of human sympathy has 19th century poetry advanced on 18th century poetry. 19th century Gaelic poets have, on the whole, a more tender and comprehensive sense of humanity than is common in the well-known 18th century poets other than Dugald Buchanan and William Ross. In some ways, 18th century Gaelic poetry is the poetry of a splendid, thoughtless, full blooded youthfulness. 19th century poetry has nothing like its sheer power, but it has a more persistent feeling for humanity. I think that this development of a humanitarian quality is due mainly to the Clearances and the great evangelical movement, but as the poet was most often rather an outsider to the religious movement, the first cause is undoubtedly the more important. The humanist and religious strains coalesce in the scanty but fine poetry of Dr John MacLachlan, who, born in 1804 and dead in 1874, lived through the Clearances in a country where they were exceedingly severe, Morven, Sunart and Mull. MacLachlan is not a great poet, though many reasons could be adduced for declaring him the best Gaelic poet of his century. I deal with him first for chronological reasons. He is pre-eminently a poet of the Clearance period, as he died in 1874, the very year when the men

of Bernera in Lewis supplied the first glimmering of Highland resurgence, and eight years before the Battle of the Braes made it unmistakable. From all accounts — and I heard a few during my year in Mull — MacLachlan was a splendid human being, greater as a man than as a poet, and possibly the only completely revealing part of his poetry is that part motivated by the Clearances. Here there is a union of anger and piercing sorrow which, though common in 19th century Gaelic poetry, is not elsewhere expressed with the same intensity and control that some of MacLachlan's poems have. Such a poem is that beginning 'Och nan och 's mi so am ònar', and ending

Nuair a chì mi na lagain àlainn,  
A h-uile àirigh do fàs le cóinnich,  
Fo bhadain chaorach le'n uain 'gan àrach,  
Chan fhaod mi ràdhtainn nach b'fhàidhe Tómas.

*When I see the beautiful hollows,  
every shieling a waste with moss,  
under clumps of sheep rearing their lambs,  
I cannot say that Thomas was not a prophet.*

Better still is that one so reminiscent of the splendidly simple technique of 17th century song:

Dreadh a mach ri Beinn Shianta,  
Gur cianail tha mo smuaintean;  
A' faicinn na beinne 'na fàsaich  
'S i gun àiteach air a h-uachdar.  
Sealltainn slios thar a' bhealaich  
'S ann agamsa tha an sealladh fuaraidh.  
'S lìonmhor bothan bochd gun àird air,  
Air gach taobh 'na làraich uaine;  
Agus fàrdach tha gun mhullach  
Is 'na tulach aig an fhuaran.  
Far an robh an teine 's na pàisdean  
'S ann as àirde dh'fhàs an luachair.

*As I go up the face of Ben Hiant  
my thoughts are very sad;  
seeing the mountain a wilderness  
with no tillage on its face.*

*As I look down over the pass  
the view I have is very chill.*

*there is many a poor hut levelled,  
a green site on every side;  
and many a roofless dwelling  
a mound beside a spring of water.  
Where the fire and children were  
the rushes grow the highest.*

I do not know of any other poem of the 19th century that has more of the intensity and economy of the old ballad. The sense of complete desolation and the equation of personal and general loss is a common motif in Clearance poetry, but I think its most taut expression is in MacLachlan. There is in Clearance poetry a tendency to a vague generalised regret without a definiteness even of indictment, a common failure to face the real cause, but MacLachlan is explicit:

*Ach fhir shanntaich rinn an droch bheairt,  
Liuthad teaghlach bochd a ghluais thu.  
But greedy one who did the evil deed,  
many a poor family you moved.*

An uncritical idealisation of the pre-Clearance period, so common in 19th century Gaelic poetry, is not frequent in MacLachlan, though it does occur in the poem beginning, 'Trom tiamhaidh mo chridhe ag imeachd troimh 'n ghleann'. As in most Clearance poetry, a nationalist spirit is evident in much of MacLachlan, and there is the common execration of the Lowland shepherd and shepherd farmer. That weakness in confusing the cause and effect of the Clearances is one of the intellectual failings of 19th century poetry, but in MacLachlan it is probably explained by the fact that most of the Clearers in his district, with the exception of the Duke of Argyll and MacLaine of Lochbuie, were Lowlanders, but MacLachlan's own aristocratic strain no doubt tends to preclude the expression of class hatred in his poetry. It is only too common a feature of Gaelic poetry to blame Englishmen and Lowlanders for the crimes of Highland chiefs. This tendency gets an absurd expression in Màiri Mhòr's wish to drive the Sasunnaich from Skye, where nearly all the principal Clearers had names at least as Gaelic as her own.

The nationalist feeling that has only a partial and inconclusive expression in the poetry of MacLachlan had a complete expression in William Livingston, who indeed wasted much of his splendid power on themes like the campaigns of Wallace and Bruce, wars between Gaels and Norsemen, and between different clans. He has, however, a

few poems such as 'Fios thun a' Bhàird' and 'Eirinn ag gul' that are contemporaneous and perhaps the finest Gaelic poems of the century. Livingston does not equal MacLachlan in poignancy, but in the stately expression of a proud anger and sorrow those two poems are unrivalled. It is not that 'Fios thun a' Bhàird' contains emotionally or intellectually anything really original, but its peculiar emotional blend and classic form makes it unique in the 19th century. Professor W J Watson has rightly said of 19th century poetry that it is the 'wail of a harassed and dejected people', but Livingston is strong and proud in sadness:

Ged a roinneas gathan gréine  
Thus nan speur ri blàths nan lòn,  
'S ged a chithear spréidh air àirigh  
Is buailtean làn de àlach bhó,  
Tha Ile an diugh gun daoine:  
Chuir a' chaora a bailtean fàs;  
Mar a fhuair 's a chunnaic mise,  
Thoir am fios so thun a' bhàird.

*Though sunbeams impart  
the balm of the skies to the warmth of the meadows,  
and though stock are seen on a shieling  
and folds full of the young of cattle,  
Islay is to-day without people:  
the sheep has laid waste its townships;  
As I found and as I saw:  
bring this message to the poet.*

And again:

Tha 'n nathair bhreac 'na lùban  
Air an ùrlar far an d' fhàs  
Na fir mhóra chunnaic mise:  
Thoir am fios so thun a' bhàird.

*The speckled adder is coiled  
on the floor where grew  
the big men whom I saw:  
Bring this message to the poet.*

Livingston's Gaelic nationalism makes him see the tragedies of Ireland and Scotland as one. To him the accursed Anglo-Saxon imperialism was the one and only cause of the sufferings of both countries, and therefore his verse is devoid of the narrowness that

makes other Gaelic poets of his time shut their eyes to the exploitation of their fellow Gaels in Ireland. To Livingston, Islay of Clan Donald and Ireland of O'Donnell, O'Neill and Maguire, were near in geography and nearer in blood, history and culture, and Ireland's tragedy was greater even than Scotland's. Strangely enough, I find this sympathy for Ireland only in one other poet of the time, Lady D'Oyly, one of the MacLeods of Raasay, one of the very few old Highland aristocratic families unstained by Clearances:

Tha a' Ghàidhealtachd is Eirinn  
Fo dhóruinn 's fo éigin,  
'S an Gall bho thír gu tìr.

*Gaeldom and Ireland are  
under grief and dire need,  
with the non-Gael (dominating) from land to land.*

While a historical nationalism is perhaps the chief motif of Livingston's poetry, an unusual blend of Christian feeling and a sense of class exploitation is the chief motif of the poetry of John Smith, who is placed first among Lewis poets by Mr John N MacLeod. To me the poetry of Smith seems deficient in lyricism, but I think he has by far the most comprehensive reflective power of any Gaelic poet of the 19th century. Smith has a profound feeling for the suffering, folly and wickedness of man, and such an understanding of the causes of the Highland Clearances and their place in the development of capitalism that I should say he is an exception to all I have said of the intellectual weakness of 19th century Gaelic poetry. For instance, Smith correlates the Highland Clearances and the forcing of opium on China in a way that puts his political intelligence above any well-known English poet of his day except Morris. The radicalism of Smith's poetry is all the more remarkable because he died in 1881, and is thus chronologically in the period of the authentic Celtic Gloom. I use 'Celtic Gloom' in the sense in which it is used by Professor W J Watson in his introduction to *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, not at all to indicate the largely bogus movement that arose from foreign imagination.

In tone, the bulk of 19th century Gaelic poetry belongs to the period of hopelessness, whether it belongs to it chronologically or not. Many of the poets who were writing before 1880 lived a considerable time after that date, as, for example, Dugald MacPhail, John Campbell, Donald Mackechnie, Neil MacLeod, Henry Whyte, Malcolm MacFarlane, and Màiri Mhór. Accordingly, their poetry is sometimes in

tone of the period before 1880 and sometimes of the period immediately after. Before dealing with them however, I shall say a little of the innumerable songs by obscure authors that reflect the Highland spirit at the depths of the Clearance period, the fifty years from 1820 to 1870.

Of the three poets with whom I have been dealing, MacLachlan is the most typical of the Clearance period, Livingston's strong national feeling and Smith's intellect making their poetry not so typical of the Clearance dejection as is much of the poetry of Neil MacLeod, Mackechnie and others, who were born late enough to experience the Land League resurgence while in their prime, but perhaps the most typical of all Clearance poetry is to be found in the mass of lyrics by unknown or obscure authors that bulks so big in a collection like Sinclair's *Oranaiche*, published in 1879. Very many of the songs deal exclusively with the Clearances, but many more consist of records of personal experience, the emotional problems of individuals involved in emigration resulting directly or indirectly from the Clearances. Of those songs which are only implicitly of the Clearances, one of the greatest and most famous is a very poignant and simple song by Donald MacCuithein, of Totascore in Skye, 'C'ait an caidil an nigh-neag an nochd?' I am thinking of the proper version of it as published by *Mac Talla*, not of the uncritical 'improvement' of it, an 'improvement' which tinges it with romantic convention. It is a record of private sorrow arising ultimately from a Clearance. Another such song is the poem sometimes attributed to Donald Mackechnie, 'Och nan och 's na bheil air m'aire', perfect in a moving simplicity. Of course, in this song the motif is emigration in general, whether resulting from Clearances I do not know. Another very great song, 'Ged tha mi gun chroth gun aighean', has an emigration motif, which is probably not of the Clearances. This song is addressed to a soldier, and is an example of the difficulty of differentiating between poetry of the Clearances and of emigration in general, for it is certain that a great number of the Highlanders who became soldiers in the first three-quarters of the 19th century, must have been driven to the Army by the economic stringency that was so greatly increased by the Clearances.

I need instance only these, but it is obvious that the Clearances and emigration resulting directly or indirectly are by far the most persistent single motif in 19th century poetry, love poems, patriotic poems, poems of nostalgia, and even nature poems reflecting the tragedy of the Highland people. I have included nature poems among the kinds deeply affected by the Clearances, and this at once suggests the great

difference between nature poetry in the 18th century and nature poetry in the 19th century. Nature poetry of the former century, which reaches its supreme expression in Duncan Macintyre and Alexander MacDonald, is a splendid thing, one of the three or four greatest manifestations of the Gaelic genius, but in a way it is rather unconcerned with humanity. Probably this relative unconcern with humanity was essential to its objectivity, but there is a startling difference between it and the very humanised nature poetry of the 19th century. One of the central themes of Clearance poetry is the contrast between unchanging, flourishing nature and human desolation. It is in MacLachlan, Livingston, Neil MacLeod, and almost all the 19th century poets. I take an example at random, 'Gleann Chill a' Mhàrtainn', by an obscure poet, Gillies. Of its twelve verses, only the first two are really nature poetry, the rest are occupied with the glen's human desolation:

Ach bho'n thàinig caochladh air an taobh so,  
 Dh'fhalbh na daoine, chan 'eil iad ann,  
 'S bho thàinig caoraich cho pailt air raointean  
 'S e dh'fhàg mi faondrach anns an àm.

*But since a change has come over this district  
 the people have gone, they are here no more,  
 and since sheep have become so numerous on fields,  
 I am rootless at this time.*

This is only one of hundreds of such poems. There is quite a common variation on the theme: in many poems the ravages wrought on man are aggravated by ravages even on the face of nature. Such a poem is the well-known song by Angus MacMhuirich, an expression of nostalgia and a contemplation of the physical and human desolation of Mull. It is to me a curiously affecting poem, ingenuous, even naive, commonplace in theme and rhythm, yet spontaneous and moving:

Rinn peirceall chaorach fearann a dhaoradh,  
 'S dh'innis dhuinn daoine an fhàisneachd,  
 Gun cuireadh iad gaisgich nan gleannaibh air faondradh,  
 'S dùthaich nan laoch 'na fàsaich.

Tha fearann ar gaoil fo fhraineach 's fo fhraoch  
 'S gach machair is raon gun àiteach,  
 'S chan fhada bhios duine ann am Muile nan craobh,  
 Ach Goill agus caoraich bhàna.

*The jaws of sheep have made land dear  
 and men have told us the prophecy,*



*that they would uproot the heroes of the glens  
and make the land of the brave men a wilderness.*

*The land of our love is under bracken and heather  
and every plain and field untilled,  
and soon there will be no-one in Mull of the trees  
but Lowlanders and white sheep.*

The artlessness of Angus MacMhuirich's song is very different from the highly conscious art of Donald MacIver's famous poem, 'An Ataireachd Ard'. MacMhuirich sees the visible and particular change in the face of Mull, but MacIver rises to a contemplation of universal change. It crystallises, by the skilful blending of the idea of human desolation and a mournful sound in nature, a mood of universal sadness, a sense of the transience of the world, which is outraged by the futile wickedness of the man who has wrought a cruel change in the life of man and on the face of external nature, which would, at any rate, change without human violence. The blending of open vowels, *ua*, *ò* and *à* is part of its wonderful effect.

Nostalgia is the most common sentiment in 19th century Gaelic poetry, and there is a huge body of verse that says nothing explicitly about the Clearances, but that an emigrant's sadness pervades. Indeed some poets specialise in a generalised nostalgia that neither explains nor attacks; hence arises a whole poetry of nostalgia, which is still common. Much of it is sincere and convincing, but it is a greatly overworked motif. Indeed much recent Gaelic verse would make one think that it is the only Gaelic motif, but in the 19th century it was still the dynamic of fine songs like 'An t-Eilean Muileach', which has a kind of typical glow. 'An t-Eilean Muileach' has no direct reference to the Clearances, but that other well-known poem by MacPhail, 'A Dhòmhnail Bhig', has the passing reference that is so common:

*Is iomadh cearn d'an d'rinn iad sgaoileadh,  
Deas is tuath air feadh an t-saoghail:  
'S iad na Goill 's na caoirich mhaola  
Chuir mo dhaoine air allaban.*

*There is many a part to which they have scattered,  
south and north throughout the world:  
the Lowlanders and the hornless sheep  
have made poor wanderers of my people.*

Very often, as here, this passing reference has a poignancy that heightens an otherwise mediocre poem, but it is a reflection of the weakness of 19th century poetry that this passing reference is often

the whole expressed reaction to the Clearances. It is only rarely, as with MacLachlan, Livingston, Smith, and later, Neil MacLeod and Mary MacPherson, that one finds a pre-occupation with the fate of the Gael that lasts the length of a whole poem. There are, of course, numerous exceptions to this limitation to the passing reference. Such an exception is 'Oran do bhochdaibh na rioghachd', by Calum Campbell MacPhail, a remarkably vigorous attack on the evicting landlords, invoking Gaelic nationalist and strong class feeling, full of a virile contempt for the exploiters, and bitterly declamatory:

Nuair thòisicheas an streupaid  
Thig feum air a' bhochd,  
Bidh daoine' uaisle 'gan glaothaich  
Bhàrr aodann nan cnoc;  
Freagraidh mac-talla iad:  
'Chan eagal duibh 'sa' chàs,  
Is pailteas chaoraich-mhaola  
Ri aodann a' bhlàir.'

*When the strife of war begins  
the poor will come to be needed,  
gentry will be shouting for them  
over the faces of the hills;  
Echo will answer them:  
'There is no fear for you in this matter,  
when there is an abundance of hornless sheep  
facing the field (of battle).'*

Another such is 'Oran na Bàirlinn', where there is the same anger at the injustice done to the Gael, and the more rare sense of shame for their subjection.

It is a remarkable characteristic of the poetry of the Clearances that it is mostly retrospective. Poetry has nothing like the contemporary prose accounts either written originally in English or translated from Gaelic. There is nothing like the detailed descriptions in verse that Alexander MacDonald and John Roy Stewart and others give of Hanoverian ravages after Culloden, but then 19th century Gaelic verse has not the stomach for strong-realism that they had in the 18th century, and its greater subjectivity tends to make it describe a mood rather than a scene. Again Calum Campbell MacPhail is an exception, as in 'Oran na Bàirlinn', where he gives a contemporary comment on a Skye Clearance, and calls all Gaels to resist.

As a rule, the Gaelic poet of the Clearances is a Gael speaking to Gaels, but sometimes he addresses the rulers of the Empire with the

question: Why this treatment of the Gael, who is of such great military value? Sometimes there is a pathetic confusion, as in John Campbell's 'Is toigh learn a' Ghàidhealtachd', in which he says:

Nis tha dùthaich ar gaoil fo chaoraich 's fo fhéidh,  
Sinn 'gar fuadach thar sàile mar bhàrrlach gun fheum.

*Now the land of our love is under sheep and deer,  
ourselves being driven away like useless scum.*

But he goes on to declare that, no matter what happens, the Gael will always be available for military duty as he was of yore, smashing Napoleon Czar Nicholas and giving freedom to India. Imperialist dope had badly muddled John Campbell, but it is a sad reflection on the political acumen of the Highlander that his song should be so much better known than that of a Lewisman, Malcolm MacKay, who very correctly assessed the role of the Highland soldier in the Boer War:

Tha àireamh nach gann  
Anns a' chogadh á Leódhas,  
A' cosanadh dhaimhean  
Is saoihbreas do chàch;  
Bidh mise 'gan caoidh  
'S mar is tric iad ri m'inntinn,  
Am beatha 'ga call  
Airson ghleanntaichean fàs.

*There is no small number  
from Lewis in the war,  
earning diamonds and wealth for others;  
I will be lamenting them  
and they are most of the time on my mind,  
their lives being lost  
in return for desolate glens.*

Of course, in the eighties Lewis put up a stronger fight than Argyll did, perhaps a stronger fight than even Skye did. I find a reflection of this in the uncompromising note in the verse of three Lewismen, John Smith, Malcolm MacKay and Donald MacDonald, the last of whom was one of those whom Màiri Mhór acclaims as 'ceatharnaich Bheàrnaraidh' with a pride and approbation she usually reserves for 'fir mhóra a' Bhràighe', but it must be added that John Campbell was already an old man in the eighties, and really belongs to the period of hopeless subjection, while MacKay is typical of the poets of the

eighties, who express the crofter resurgence.

The change of temper that was brought into Gaelic poetry by the crofter struggles in the eighties is clearly manifested in the difference between nearly all the political poems of Sinclair's *Oranaiche*, published in 1879, and the new hope that is seen in the later poetry in *Modern Gaelic Bards*, published in 1908, and *Bàrdachd Leòdhais*, published in 1916. Some of the poets of the second and third collections were dead or out of action by 1880, but the majority were in their prime about that year, and thus both collections contain poems that have not one ray of hope, and other poems that are even optimistic. Sometimes there is this difference between different poems by the same author; thus the later poems of Neil MacLeod are optimistic compared with his earlier.

The crofter resistance, which made Skye the cynosure of Britain in 1882 and developed into the Lewis Deer Hunt in 1887, is naturally most strongly reflected in the poetry of Skye and Lewis, but the two islands were linked in the person of a famous Argyll man, Donald MacCallum. The Rev. Donald MacCallum, who was imprisoned for the unministerial offence of 'inciting the lieges to class hatred', was not much of a poet, but his direct, forceful, unadorned verse expresses great courage and optimism. In 'Cumail suas an cliù gu bràth' he uses the metre of Neil MacLeod's despondent poem, 'An Gleann san robh mi òg', to sing of the manliness of the crofters of Bernera, Valtos, Crossbost, Siadar, Park and Aiginish in preventing the desolation of Lewis, and, as he was greater as a man than as a poet, it is no wonder that Màiri Mhór said of him:

Chunnaic sinn bristeadh na fàire  
Is neòil na tràillealachd air chall  
An là a sheas MacCaluim làmh ruinn  
Aig Beul-Atha-Nan-Tri-Allt.

*We saw the breaking of the horizon  
and the clouds of slavery dispelled  
on the day MacCallum stood with us  
at the Confluence of the Three Burns.*

MacCallum's poem, 'Cumail suas an cliù gu bràth', when compared with its technical model, 'An gleann san robh mi òg', shows the change of temper that the Land League brought into Gaelic poetry, for 'An Gleann san robh mi òg' is anterior to 1882, the crucial year. It is therefore a poem of the Clearance period, while MacCallum's poem is a poem of the resurgence. Thus the difference in tone is politically

significant as well as indicative of the difference in temperament between the militant MacCallum and the gentle and retiring Neil MacLeod. Neil MacLeod is, however, a poet of both periods, but it is noteworthy that the best known and most characteristic of his poems are those of the earlier period. A hundred people know 'An gleann san robh mi òg' for every single person who knows 'Oran nan Croiteirean'. Indeed that has obscured the duality of MacLeod's verse: one tends to think of him as of the Clearance period and not of the Land League period. The truth is, however, that Neil MacLeod composed the majority of his poems after the crofter struggle had begun, and that there is expressed in nearly all those poems a new hope. MacLeod did not enter into the crofter struggle whole-heartedly; he had no deficiency in intellect, and his fine sensitive nature reacted keenly to the tragedy of his people, but he was incapable of expressing a militant ardour. It is not that he kept anything back; his whole poetry is permeated with sorrow for the dispersal of the Gaels, and it evinces as great a pre-occupation as that of any other 19th century poet, with the results of the Clearances and the possibilities of the Land League, but even his most hopeful poems seem pessimistic at the core. His hope does not ring as true as his sorrow. Indeed he appears to have had no great zest for life and to have had too keen a sense of the essential sadness of a transient existence to enter very strongly into any struggle. It would appear that the misfortune of his people had so struck him that, even when he was outwardly optimistic, there was a background of melancholy and dejection. He was incapable of bitterness and incapable of the adequate expression of strong indignation, and he saw human life as sad whether the sorrow was of a particular or universal nature. To me his typical utterance is:

Chaochail madainn ait ar n-òige  
 Mar an ceò air bhàrr nam beann;  
 Tha ar càirdean 's ar luchd eòlais  
 Air am fògradh bhos is thall;  
 Tha cuid eile dhiubh nach gluais,  
 Tha an cadal fuar fo'n fhòd,  
 Bha gun uail, gun fhuath, gun anntlachd  
 Anns a' ghleann san robh iad òg.

*The joyous morning of our youth has changed  
 like the mist on the top of the mountains;  
 our kinsmen and our acquaintances  
 are driven away in this country and over the sea;  
 there are others of them who will not move,  
 who are in a cold sleep under the turf,*

*people who were without pride, hatred or malice  
in the glen in which they were young.*

Or

Ach tha am fàrdaichean sguabte  
'S an seòmraichean uaine;  
Iad fhéin is an gaisge  
'Nan cadal fo'n fhòd;  
'S tha osag nam fuar bheann  
Le h-osnaidhean gruamach  
'Gan caoidh mu na cruachan  
'S a' luaidh air an glòir.

*But their dwellings are swept  
and their rooms green;  
they themselves and their heroism  
asleep under the turf;  
and the breeze of the cold mountains  
with its gloomy sighs  
laments them about the heights  
and speaks of their glory.*

It is typical of such a man that he sees happiness only in retrospect, as in the idyllic opening of 'Anns a' ghleann san robh mi òg'. For these reasons I find MacLeod's later and more militant verse, even a song like 'Oran nan croiteirean', which is in the metre of 'Agus hó Mhórag', unconvincing. The poem has brave, hopeful, even optimistic verses, but I cannot help feeling that it is more an echo of the unconquerable MacDonald than a profound expression of Neil MacLeod. Poetic sincerity is not the same thing as moral sincerity, and I think that 'Oran nan croiteirean', though the expression of a sincere man, is not poetically sincere. Neil MacLeod gave to the cause of the crofters as much as he was constitutionally capable of giving, but he could hardly be militant. As poetry, he is difficult to assess: it is exquisite in modulation and even in general technique, but too thin in texture of form and content to justify the claim that he is among the greatest Gaelic poets. Nevertheless, I think that its technical perfection, however limited a perfection it is, and its record of a finely sensitive nature, and its exquisite, if rather thin, lyrical note will ensure it a permanence co-extensive with the permanence of the Gaelic language.

What Neil MacLeod was by temperament incapable of giving to the cause of the crofter was supplied in full measure by a very different person, Mary MacDonald, variously known as Mrs MacPherson,

Màiri Nighean Iain Bhàin or Màiri Mhór nan Oran. In quantity she gave as much as almost all the other 19th century poets put together.

I have kept Màiri Mhór to the end though she was twenty years older than Neil MacLeod and though, in many ways, her verse has more kinship with older Gaelic poetry than the verse of MacLeod and most of the others I have mentioned, because she impressed herself on the Highland people as par excellence the poet of the Land League.

It is not easy to give a consistent account of Màiri Mhór's poetry, as she herself was the least logical of people. The only logic in her poetry is a logic of feeling and inconsistencies abound. She composed a flattering elegy on one of the worst landlords in Skye in her own time; she married a fine poem with trivial compliments on the marriage of the greater landlord who was the arch-enemy of the heroes, the men of Braes; she forbore to say anything against another enemy of her people because he had a good grandfather; and she attacked the English for their doings in Skye, although it was very plain that not one Clearance had been made in Skye by anyone who had not a name as Gaelic as her own. In spite of all that, she gave a great deal to the cause of the crofters, following every phase of the struggle closely and keenly, and when it came to a choice between the crofters and some of the people whom she had complimented, she was always uncompromisingly on the crofters' side. Màiri had a respect for *uaisle*, a respect that was absurd in the Skye of the 'Eighties, and it was difficult for her to attack anyone who bore a name that had been great in Skye tradition.

Màiri Mhór is so much a poet of the Land League that one is very apt to forget that most of her life was lived in the period before the Land League. Her sanguine, militant temperament is partly the cause of this misconception, but the chief cause is, of course, that she composed no poetry until the wrong she herself suffered in 1872 put an edge on her nature and liberated her expression.

Màiri has told again and again what gave birth to her poetry:

'S e na dh'fhuiling mi de thàmailt  
A thug mo bhàrdachd beò.

*It is all the shame I suffered  
that made my poetry live.*

Some think that her poetry might as well have stayed where it was, but I do not agree with those who consider her of little account. It is true that she is often garrulous even to absurdity; that she is often frequently and even amusingly prosaic; that she had apparently no

kind of discrimination, but to me she has, not sometimes but often, a convincing lyrical cry, a strange evocative quality, and a simple, as it were unconscious, power that no other 19th century poet has. Of course, it is difficult for any Skyeman, who has a strong feeling for Skye and a certain conception of it, to speak coldly of Màiri Mhór, for her native land was in her blood, as it was in the blood of Duncan Macintyre and Domhnall MacFhionnlaigh nan Dàn. By her native land I mean not Scotland nor the Highlands but Skye and even then only that part of Skye bounded by Lochs Bracadale, Snizort, Sli-gachan, and the Sound of Raasay. It is not of her great roll-calls of Skye names that I am thinking; sometimes these have been compared to glorified tourist guides, though at other times they have their own evocative power. What I am thinking of is that glorious pride in her own people and her own soil, and that warmth for them that takes everything for granted, that neither invites nor expects questions. Màiri Mhór does not trail her coat to say, 'Skye is the best of all lands'. It would seem to her an obvious and unnecessary statement. For that reason, she is, above all others, poet of the people, and it was inevitable that the Clearances and crofter struggle would be an obsession to her, but the Skye of Skyes was in her youth, just before the Clearances, and it was in that Skye that her pride and joy was unqualified. Many Gaelic poets have idealised the pre-Clearance period, but no one else has idealised it with the same robust *joie de vivre* and the same lack of conventional romanticism of Màiri Mhór. I myself, who am left cold by the idyllic glen of Neil MacLeod, cannot resist Màiri's idealisation, which throws to the winds all romantic convention:

Nuair thigeadh an Fhéill Mhàrtainn  
 'S an spréidh 's am bàrr air dòigh,  
 Na fir a' dèanamh càinnteach;  
 'S na plàtaichean 'nan tòrr;  
 Rì taobh na brìg bhuntàta  
 Bhiodh baraille làn de dh'fhèoil:  
 Sud mar chàidh ar n-àrach  
 Ann an Eilean àrd a' cheò.

*When Martinmas came  
 and the livestock and crops put right,  
 the men making heather ropes  
 and the rush-made bags in a heap;  
 beside the built heap of potatoes  
 there would be a barrel full of meat:  
 that was how we were reared  
 in the high Island of the Mist.*



I have purposely taken an extreme example to illustrate the point that Màiri's poetry is the most convincing expression of the joys of a peasant life that had gone that is to be found in the poetry of her time. This expression is undoubtedly heightened by nostalgic retrospect, but it has a splendid glow in a poem like 'Nuair bha mi òg', a song that has taken the hearts of Highlanders, and is showing a stubborn permanence that cannot be disregarded by the most fastidious.

I think Màiri Mhór had the qualities and defects that make a popular poet, a poet of the people, and I believe that her limitations have been exaggerated and her merits depreciated. I grant that it is not possible to take any one poem of hers, except 'Nuair bha mi òg', and say that it is truly a fine poem, but to me at least the cumulative effect of her poetry is very convincing. She was so near the people whose lives she sang; her poetry has such an immediate contact and such an utter lack of affection of any kind, of any self-consciousness, such a contagious *joie de vivre*, and at times such a poignancy of feeling, that I think it has not received anything like its due except in popular esteem.<sup>1</sup> I respect the popular feeling for Gaelic song that was. Before Mods, radio and gramophone records had created a taste for non-entities, Duncan Bàn was the most popular Gaelic poet.

The Crofters' Commission and the resulting Act did much. It stopped Clearances and the worst rack-renting, but it did not give back to the people the good land. Therefore it did not end the struggle, and Màiri Mhór was militant to the end. The popularity of 'Ged tha mo cheann air liathadh' and 'Soraidh leis an àit' has obscured the best part of her poetry, those militant poems in very competent 17th and 18th century verse forms, mingling reminiscence sometimes proud and joyous, and sometimes, as in 'Soraidh leis an nollaig ùr', wonderfully poignant, and following every phase of the struggle. Sometimes there is terrible anger as in 'Freagradh Màiri gu Gàidheil Ghrianaig'; sometimes there are surprising turns like the piquant comment on the clergy in 'Clach Ard Uige'.

Tha luchd teagaisg cho beag cùraim,  
Faicinn càradh mo luchd dùthcha;  
'S iad cho balbh air anns a' chùbaid,  
'S ged bu bhrùidean bhiodh 'gan éisdeachd.

*Preachers care so little  
seeing the condition of my countrymen,  
so dumb about it in the pulpit  
as if their audience were brute beasts.*

Sometimes there are most revealing touches, as that comment on the religious obsession:

Tha 'n sluagh air fàs cho iongantach  
'S gur cruithneachd leotha bròn.

*The people have grown so strange  
that sorrow is wheat to them.*

And that comment on her own natural paganism:

Ach bho'n is luibh an diomhanas  
A riarachas an fheòil,  
Tha i leantuinn rium cho daingeann  
'S tha am barr-iall ris a' bhròig.

*But since vanity is a plant  
that satisfies the flesh,  
it clings to me as firmly  
as the shoe-lace to the shoe.*

At other times, however, she could express most exemplary orthodoxy. Pride and triumph, as in 'Ceatharnaich Bheàrnaraidh' and 'Oran Beinn Li', alternate with a wistful sorrow for what is irretrievably gone, as in 'Ag ath-ùrachadh m'èblais':

Leagh mo chridhe stigh an Udairn,  
Sgoirebreac fo bheachd mo shùilean,  
Bha na laoich a dhèanadh tùbh rium  
Fad o'n dùthaich 's iad fo'n talamh.

*My heart melted coming in by the Udairn,  
Sgoirebreac in the vision of my eyes,  
the good men who would remember their kinship to me  
far from their land and under the earth.*

Sometimes there is an amazing zest for life; often there is a mingling of many emotions. Sometimes there are such fearless attacks on people she does all but name that one feels it ungracious and ungrateful ever to accuse her of any failure in consistent courage. At other times she senses her own mistakes. For instance, in 'Duilleag gu Gàidheil Chanada', she recognises her own folly in attacking the English, and makes a most direct attack on the rack-renting, absentee landlords of Skye, who enjoyed in London the fruits of their exploitation of her people. Here there is no doubt whom she is attacking.

There is also optimism about the future which the subsequent history of the Highlands hardly justifies, and an acute and unusual shame for the subjection of the Clearance period. The last poem in her collected works, 'Fàistneachd agus Beannachd do na Gàidheil', has the splendid warmth and the brave optimism in full, and that remarkable sinking of her own personality in the sorrows, joys and hopes of her people:

'S nuair bhios mise 's na bòrdaibh  
Bidh mo chòmhradh mar fhàistneachd,

'S pillidh gineal na tuatha  
Rinneadh fhuadach thar sàile.

'S bidh na baigearan uasal  
Air an ruaig mar bha iadsan;

Féidh is caoraich 'gan cuibhleadh  
'S bidh na glinn air an àiteach;

Am cur is ám buana  
'S ám duais do na meàirlich;

'S théid na tobhtachan fuara  
Thogail suas le ar càirdean.

*And when I am in the boards  
my words will be as a prophecy,  
and there will return the stock of the tenantry  
who were driven over the sea.*

*And the 'beggars' of gentry  
will be routed as they (the crofters) were;  
deer and sheep will be wheeled away  
and the glens will be tilled;*

*a time of sowing and of reaping  
and a time of reward for the robbers;*

*and the cold ruined stances of houses  
will be built up by our kinsmen.*

That the prophecy has failed of fulfilment is not the fault of the big, brave heart of Màiri Mhór nan Oran.

#### NOTES

- 1 This was written before I had read Mr Murdo Murray's fine paper in Vol. XXXVII of the *Transactions*.