

EVIDENCE

TAKEN BY

HER MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS OF INQUIRY

INTO THE CONDITIONS OF

THE CROFTERS AND COTTARS

IN THE

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND

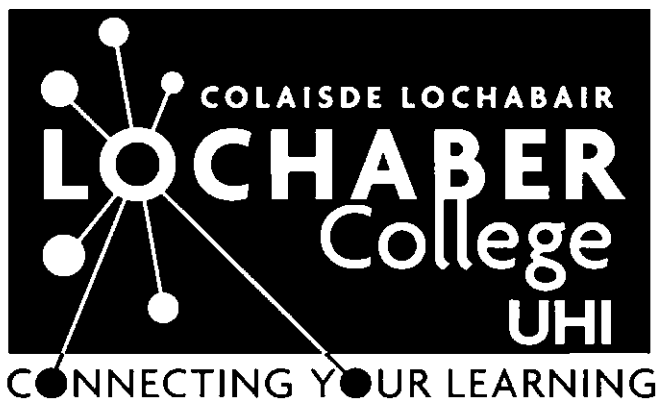
VOL III

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIMENT BY COMMAND OF HER MAJESTY



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2007



34531. *The Chairman (to Beaton).*—Is there an understanding upon the Duke Argyle's estate here that no revaluation is to take place for ten years?—I don't know that such is the case.

ARGYLL.

BUNESSAN.

Donald
Beaton and
Alexander
M'Farlane.

JOHN M'CORMICK, Crofter, Catchean (55), assisted by JOHN M'KINNON, Crofter, Catchean (33)—examined.

34532. *Mr Cameron.*—Have you a written statement?—I have.—The principal of our grievances is the high rent put on us for our holdings, and the excess of stock assigned to our pasturage since the year 1850. Our township consists of twelve crofts. One holds three crofts, one two half crofts, one two crofts, four single crofts, and three half crofts each, paying a rental of from £4 to £27. The average rental before 1850 was £3, 15s. A crofter holding five crofts, and paying a rental of £18, 15s., lost almost all his stock by the biting of rabid dogs, brought to the place by the gamekeeper. He was advised by the chamberlain to make his case known to his Grace, which was done after a copy was provided by himself. The crofter restocked in full; but the proprietor acknowledged his petition by a summons of removal depriving him of three crofts. A settlement was refused, and he was obliged to bring his stock of three crofts to Bunessan for sale. The auctioneer was prohibited by the factor from crying the sale, which left the alternative of selling to his own drover, at a disadvantage; and the rental of the two remaining crofts was, moreover, raised to £10. The crofts taken away were cropped by the proprietor for two years, after which they with two other vacated crofts were turned into common grassing, while the rental of the two crofts in his possession was further raised to £18, and the stock from two to four cows. Subsequently the crofts were relet to crofters at the raised rent, and increased stock. A quarry was opened about twenty years ago; in connection with it a croft was given for grassing for manager's cow, and horses required in the quarry, and the common was put to the crofters. At a later time four crofts and a strip with a portion of the common was marked off for the quarry, and still later two additional were made over to them, occupied by the crofters as sub-tenants with their rent raised, which in itself is a grievance. The quarry is the cause of much damage, and no compensation given or allowed. In 1874 or 1875 a croft was taken off our common, cutting off free access to our stock watering-place. A system for diminishing our means to pay our rent is in progress by giving sites and attaching lands for another rent. Our pasturage is now been for one-half the stock assigned to it. The harsh and cruel law of evictions, formerly used, has now given way to the more modern and refined mode of grinding away our subject, by diminishing our means, which will eventually serve the purpose of bringing us into abject poverty. The discouraging treatment to which the peasant was subject was, and is, deemed sufficient prohibition to lawful wedlock. The writer hereof is an instance. The population of this parish, including Iona *quoad sacra*, was in 1841, 5197; in 1871, 2461; in 1881, 1990. Notwithstanding the enormous decrease of population, the poverty of the remnant crofters is as enormously increasing. Thirty years ago eleven families including one cottar were all the occupants of this township, now there are twenty-two, all paying rent, and six of them only for houses. At one time unprotected patches were sown in a large piece of the common, which was

John
M'Cormick
and John
M'Kinnon.

- ARGYLL. ' the cause of two crofters dropping off our petition, for an amicable way
 ——— of arranging rent was refused in 1881.'
- BUNESSAN. 34533. How many crofters are there in the township of Catechan pay-
 ——— ing rent?—Nine.
- John 34534. How does it happen that there are only three in the valuation
 M'Cormick roll?—*Mackinnon*. There are some of them sub-tenants.
- and John 34535. (*To M'Cormick*).—You do not live upon the croft?—I am not
 M'Kinnon. living on the croft there is no house on the croft.
34536. Where do you live?—I live on a croft that is sublet.
34537. Are all these seven other crofters, besides those in the valuation
 roll, sub-tenants of the three that are mentioned?—John M'Kinnon here,
 Archibald Campbell, and myself next, and the Free Church minister.
 None of these have sub-tenants.
34538. Who have the sub-tenants?—The quarry people.
34539. How many are sub-tenants of the quarry company?—These are
 sub-tenants of the quarry company, and other three are paying rent to
 the proprietor.
34540. Do you represent the sub-tenants as well as the crofters who
 pay rent?—The sub-tenants never came into our meetings at all except one.
34541. Then I am to understand that you represent yourself and the
 other two crofters?—I represent myself and the other two crofters.
34542. And you do not represent the sub-tenants?—I do not represent
 the sub-tenants.
34543. Will you state what is the grievance that you and your two
 fellow crofters who pay rent to the Duke have at present?—High rent
 and bad pasturage.
34544. I see that you all three have some pasture which you hold in-
 dividually besides the common pasture—is that so?—No, the sub-tenants
 and others have the full pasturage in common.
34545. And do the three crofters who pay rent to the Duke possess
 any pasturage for themselves?—None whatever.
34546. What amount of stock do you keep yourself?—We stock about
 three cows on the croft and a horse.
34547. And what is the extent of the arable land?—The crofts will
 sow about two-and-a-half bolls to three, with half a dozen barrels of
 potatoes.
34548. Do you know how many acres that represents?—We would
 put about a boll to an acre—say two and a half acres to each croft, and
 about an acre of potato ground—three and a half acres of land between
 oats and potatoes for each croft.
34549. Your rent is £6, 15s. ?—Yes.
34550. Do you consider that high?—It is double what it was thirty
 years ago.
34551. Do you consider it high now as things go?—Yes.
34552. Do you get back any of that rent in the shape of rent for sheep
 grazings?—Yes.
34553. How much do you get back for that?—£2, or £2, 5s.
34554. For wintering hogs?—Yes.
34555. So that practically reduces it to £4, 15s. ?—Yes.
34556. When did you first get this benefit of rent back for wintering
 hogs?—We do not consider it a benefit at all; it would be some twenty-
 five years ago, or not so long.
34557. But before that time there was no wintering of hogs?—No,
 none.
34558. Will you explain how that is no benefit?—Because our pastur-
 age is bare enough without that.

34559. That might be no benefit to the man who owns the hogs, but it is no disadvantage to you?—It is too bare for our stock as it is. Thirty years ago we used to have plenty of fodder, and the land is now exhausted.

34560. About those hogs I don't quite understand why it is no benefit to you to get £2 out of £6, 15s. ?—All the rent we got for the hogs goes to the Duke as a rise.

34561. But wouldn't it explain in some way the rise?—But that destroys the grazing.

34562. But it is a clear benefit to you getting £2?—Of course, in the circumstances, it is; but it is spoiling the summer grazing.

34563. But you are not compelled by the factor to do it?—We were compelled to have them.

34564. But would you give it up if you could?—No mistake of that.

34565. You would give up the £2, and not let the pasture to hogs?—Yes, if I would get the croft at a reasonable rent.

34566. But as it is now?—No, we must have something to pay the rent.

34567. When did those rabid dogs come?—In the year 1852.

34568. Who was the gamekeeper or factor then?—Mr Campbell was factor.

34569. Who was the gamekeeper?—One Ross.

34570. I suppose neither of them are present here to-day?—No.

34571. And it was in 1852 that this matter of the auctioneer took place?—No, some years after that.

34572. Was Mr Campbell the factor then too?—He was.

34573. You say a quarry was opened 'about twenty years ago, and in 'connection with it a croft was given for grazing the manager's cow and 'horses required in the quarry, and the common was put to the crofters. 'At a later time four crofts with a strip was marked off to the quarry, 'and still later two additional were made over to them, occupied by the 'two crofters as sub-tenants with their rents raised?' Were those who were formerly crofters and paid rent to his Grace removed?—The crofts were let over their heads to the quarry.

34574. The people are there, but instead of paying rent to his Grace they pay rent to the quarry?—Yes.

34575. And they object to that?—Yes.

34576. They would rather hold their land direct from the Duke?—Of course.

34577. Have the people who hold the quarry raised their rent?—They have. They raised the rent 10s. in 1873.

34578. Do you know if any equivalent was given for that?—I am not aware of it.

34579. Do you know if any reason was given why the rent was raised?—I don't know any reason except that they wished to raise it.

34580. What was the average rent of those sub-tenants before it was raised?—They were £7, 10s., and they were raised to £8.

34581. Is that all the rise that has taken place in these crofts?—Yes.

34582. It is stated that in 1874 or 1875, 'a croft was taken off our 'common, cutting off the access to our stock watering-place;' who was the croft given to?—To the Free Church minister.

34583. Do you know if he asked for it?—I am sure he did; but he is not there now.

34584. Has the present Free Church minister still got the croft?—Yes.

ARGYLL.

BUNESSAN.

John

M'Cormick

and John

M'Kinnon.

ARGYLL.

BUNESSAN.

John

M^cCormick

and John

M^cKinnon.

34585. Did you ever ask him if he would give it up?—No, and I don't suppose he would.

34586. Did you and the other crofters remonstrate with the chamberlain for giving the croft to the Free Church minister?—Not much, because there was no use talking about it.

34587. How could you tell until you tried?—We just thought it; we were threatened everywhere.

34588. Had you a general feeling of alarm that you dare not ask for that or anything else?—That was just the case. My father was a very old man at the time, and did not want to make any row about it.

34589. Did you think that feeling of alarm was entertained by the others as well as your father?—It was entertained by my father; every one of them expressed themselves against that croft being taken off and given to the minister amongst ourselves.

34590. But you did not express it to the management of the estate?—I don't think so.

34591. (To M^cKinnon).—Do you concur in saying that the reason it was not asked was that there was a general sense of fear?—Yes, that was the reason. It was fear that we would be visited with after consequences.

34592. Were most of the people members of the congregation of the Free Church minister?—Yes, some of the sub-tenants were members of the Free Church, but none of the other three.

34593. All the people whose stock watering-place was injured, were not members of the Free Church?—No.

34594. (To M^cCormack).—What is the prohibition to lawful wedlock to which you refer?—Because there is no encouragement to multiply on the land when we are huddled about so much, or rear a family in a respectable way.

34595. There was no direct prohibition to marry?—No, but twenty or thirty years ago there was.

34596. Was it prohibition of banns?—No, the marriage was delayed on account of prohibition by the chamberlain. One of the parties is living yet.

34597. One of the people whose marriage was prohibited?—Yes.

34598. Did he afterwards marry?—They were married afterwards by Mr M^cGregor, Iona.

34599. How long afterwards?—A few weeks.

34600. Have they lived happily ever since?—They lived happily while they lived; but the husband is dead, and the wife is now a pauper.

34601. Was the husband industrious?—Middling.

34602. But with this exception, there was no direct prohibition to marry; but people from their poverty are not able to marry?—Just from their circumstances.

34603. Are you really in a state of poverty—are your means insufficient to enable you to live tolerably comfortable?—They are.

34604. Do you get no work?—There is some work in the quarry.

34605. Do they not take advantage of it?—A few work in it—able-bodied men.

34606. What wages do they earn?—I suppose from 15s. to 20s. a week when they work a whole week.

34607. The sub-tenants have all got a cow's grass?—Yes, and one of them has two crofts in his tenancy, and one old woman has her old croft yet.

34608. Do you consider it a case of great hardship in the condition of things where the head of a family can earn 15s. to £1 a week, and where

they have cow's grass and some of them two and potato ground?—I would not consider that a great hardship.

34609. And had a small croft?—No.

34610. Then why are these people in such abject poverty if they have a cow's grass and potato ground, and can earn that?—They are not very regularly paid, and some of them are in great distress sometimes owing to that; and some of them have no cow.

34611. I thought you said they had a cow?—They have a cow's grass, and if they have a cow they can graze it.

34612. Do not the company pay their wages regularly?—No.

34613. When they do pay their wages do they pay in money, or is there a store?—I suppose they pay them now in money.

34614. There is nothing of truck?—Not much now that I am aware of.

34615. Was there formerly?—There was.

34616. How long ago?—It was very considerable before the year 1868.

34617. Who put a stop to it?—The quarry company failed.

34618. Then this is a new company?—I suppose it is.

34619. And they started a new system?—Yes.

34620. Do the people prefer being paid in money to taking their wages in goods?—So I should think.

34621. What does that mean about the two crofters dropping off?—The factor's cattle at that time used to break in over our march, and one crofter got two cows killed by the factor's stock, and the other fellow had to leave off for breaking down his croft fence and destroying his crops.

34622. He gave up the land?—Yes, he is without the land.

34623. He had the land taken from him?—Yes.

34624. For doing what?—He had done nothing that I know of.

34625. You said something about a cow?—That was the man M'Cormack, who lost two cows by the factor's stock.

34626. And another man lost his land because his cows fought with the factor's?—Yes.

34627. I understand the factor's cows came over the march and killed two of the crofter's cows?—Yes.

34628. And in consequence of that another crofter, whose cows had nothing to do with it, was dispossessed of his land?—Yes, because his fence was knocked down and the crops destroyed—a man named M'Gillivray, living at the ferry.

34629. Was any explanation given of that?—No, not that I know of.

34630. *Mr Fraser-Mackintosh.*—I suppose you do not belong to the Free Church?—No, not now; I once did.

34631. You had no objections to the Free Church minister getting the croft; but I suppose you thought it should have been given from a big farm?—No; we would have been agreeable to give him a piece of the common in another fashion altogether.

34632. You said it was no benefit for you to get the £2 for the wintering. Whose hogs are wintered on the croft?—Mr Elliot's, for the last nine or ten years.

34633. Who is Mr Elliot?—A farmer on the other side of Mull.

34634. Is it understood you are bound to winter his hogs?—No, because others had it before he had it; but he is as good a man as we could get. I was bound to take some hogs.

34635. You said it was not worth the £2 this winter, because it destroyed your grazing for the next summer?—Yes.

34636. In fact, it is a burden upon you which you would rather be rid of?—Yes; if we could get rid of the rent, we would soon get rid of them.

34637. Did you ever hear anybody assign a reason why the quarry

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people were allowed to get some of the old crofters as their sub-tenants?—I don't know, indeed. I don't know unless that they wished to do away with the crofters that were there.

34638. Have the quarry people the power if they chose to dispossess their sub-tenants?—I think so, if they chose.

34639. And does it come to this, that the authorities would like, in the event of any people being put out, that they should be put out by somebody else and not themselves?—I think that would be it.

34640. Are you aware that in every well-regulated property now-a-days sub-tenancies are prohibited, and that everybody is made to pay direct to the proprietor?—No, I was not aware of that; but it is far the best way. [Question repeated to M'Kinnon.]—I think that is the best way.

34641. (*To M'Cormick.*)—At the time the truck system, which before 1868 you said was very severe in the quarries, do you know whether the proprietor or those in authority on the estate were aware it was going on?—They would be aware.

34642. Are you aware that such a system, called the truck system, has been prohibited by Act of Parliament as an oppression to people under it?—I know there is such a law.

34643. So far as you have an opportunity of judging of the state of people like yourself in your neighbourhood, do you consider that they are as poor now as ever they were, if not poorer?—They are much poorer now than they have been that I can remember.

34644. You say the united parish in 1841 amounted to 4113, and now it is reduced to 1990, being a reduction of more than one-half?—That is correct.

34645. So that although the united parishes have fallen off by more than one-half, the state of many of the people remaining is worse than before?—Yes.

34646. Can you also say that the rental of parishes has risen enormously during forty years?—Yes.

34647. Rents have been rising and population diminishing?—Yes.

34648. Do you consider the state of matters in the Ross of Mull generally satisfactory to the crofting community?—I do not.

34649. What do you suggest should be done to improve that in a permanent form?—That every crofter should have ten cows and fifty or sixty sheep to rear his family respectably.

34650. And a horse?—Two horses and as much land as would do that.

34651. For such accommodation would they be willing to pay a fair rent?—Yes.

34652. Is there more than enough of land in the Ross of Mull which would sustain at that increased acreage all the people that need it?—Yes.

34653. And something to spare?—Yes, and even leave the large farms.

34654. Is there any official connected with the estate of Argyll who has a farm upon the Ross of Mull?—I don't know. The ground officer has a croft, I suppose.

34655. Only a croft?—Only a croft.

34656. No one has a farm of any size?—Not that I remember of just now.

34657. Is there any higher official resident in the Ross of Mull than the ground officer?—No.

34658. I think you used the expression about taking hogs, that you are bound to take some hogs?—We were made bound to take them before, and necessity compels us to take them now.

34659. Are you aware that there is such a rule upon the Argyll estate

that no person under £100 will get a lease?—I am not aware, but there may be.

34660. Have any of the crofters got leases here?—Not that I know of.

34661. Are there any printed regulations that you are bound by?—Yes, I suppose there are printed regulations, but I never saw them.

34662. And you never signed them?—My father may have signed them.

34663. Is this prohibition about widows put in force now?—I heard about a widow M'Phail. I recollect it being strongly enforced.

34664. What was the reason assigned for such a law, if any?—I don't know what reason could be assigned for it. I knew one widow whose husband died in February, and she was removed in March, and she had a full stock.

34665. Had she a son?—A son about seventeen or eighteen.

34666. What became of that family; were they removed from the estate altogether?—No, she was one of the best crofter-farmers in Ross, and she was sent to another croft; and she was removed from it to another croft, and from the croft where her husband died to a house without a croft; and at last she died out of the place altogether.

34667. What was the name of that woman?—Mary M'Kinnon or M'Coll.

34668. What was the name of the town she was in first?—Suie; she was sent from there to Ardalanish; from there to Catchean; and from there to Ardalanish, back again to the house without land.

34669. *The Chairman.*—You stated you were about fifty-five years of age; does your memory extend back to the year 1850?—Yes.

34670. We heard it stated that about the year 1850 in another township an addition of £1 on the rental had been made—do you know anything about that?—I do not particularly know about that.

34671. Do you remember that the people were very poor in those years?—Yes, they were very poor, and many of the crofters in that township left the place.

34672. Did you ever hear when you were a young man, that the Duke of Argyll had made large remissions of rent, and spent large sums in support of the people during the bad years?—So far as I remember, I heard that he remitted the rents of some, but I did not hear that it was general.

34673. What parish are you in?—Iona *quoad sacra*.

34674. Is this the united parish of Kilfinichen and Kilvickeon?—Yes.

34675. In the year 1851 there was a report made to Government by Sir John M'Neill upon the state of the people in the islands. In that report I find it stated, that in the four years, from 1846 to 1850, the Duke of Argyll expended in wages and gratuities to the inhabitants £1790, besides the whole revenue derived from the property in those four years. Did you ever hear those great sacrifices made by the Duke of Argyll spoken of among the people?—I heard that he remitted the rent of some who had large and young families, but he did not do it as a rule throughout the country.

34676. Do you think it is right for a proprietor to discriminate between those who need it and those who do not?—I think it is right that the proprietor should distinguish between the needy and the less needy, and that he should give in accordance.

34677. Has there been any expenditure by the landlord of late years upon considerable works of improvement in the parish?—I am not aware that there was much; there was this year a little done at Creich.

ARGYLL

BUNESSAN.

John
M'Connick
and John
M'Kinnon.

ARGYLL.

BUNESSAN.

John
M'Cormick
and John
M'Kinnon.

34678. At whose expense have the improvements on this place and port been made?—I think it was the Duke of Argyll.

34679. *Sir Kenneth Mackenzie*.—I suppose you are obliged to let the wintering of the croft, because the high rent makes it necessary you should make the most money out of the croft?—That is the very reason.

34680. If your rent was less wouldn't you try still to make the most money out of it?—I would endeavour to make more out of my own stock; it deteriorates our grazing.

34681. But whether your rent is high or low your endeavour is to make the most money possible out of the croft?—Yes, but we make more money by raising our own stock.

34682. If you would make more money in that way, why do you make less money by having this wintering stock in?—We were bound to take them in once, but we continue now from necessity.

34683. You were bound by the regulations of the property?—I am not aware; but we were bound by the factor.

34684. You mean that the factor had a farm of his own, but made you take his stock?—I don't know whether they were his stock or not—he had a nephew, and he left the wintering to him for two years, and never paid it.

34685. And the factor insisted you should let the wintering to his nephew?—He let it without our consent.

34686. And paid you the money?—No, he never paid us the money.

34687. What year was that?—I think about 1866 or 1867.

34688. He did not let it; he took possession of your crofts, in fact?—He let it to them, and put in a stock of hogs.

34689. And did that man pay any rent for it to anybody?—No, because when Mr Campbell died the crofters put in an account to the trustees, and the trustees declined to pay it, and then it was sent to Mr Wyllie.

34690. And Mr Wyllie knew about it?—He knew about it; the account was sent to him, and never a farthing was paid.

34691. And at present you continue this practice because you make more money in that way than otherwise?—Yes.

34692. You said it would be desirable to enlarge the crofts so as to have ten cows and fifty sheep, and that you could do that and still retain the large farms?—Yes.

34693. How could you do that?—The old townships that have been cleared into large farms, if they were given to the people now, there would be quite sufficient for all the people of Ross.

34694. Reduce the large farms?—Yes.

34695. To what they were—when?—In the year 1850.

34696. That would leave enough land to supply the crofter and cottar population with crofts sufficient for ten cows and fifty sheep?—I think so.

34697. *Professor Mackinnon*.—Are you the writer of the paper yourself?—Yes.

34698. I understand that the factor's cows broke the fence of the crofter and ate his crops?—Yes, and not only that, but the neighbour's did it too.

34699. And then these cows went and killed the neighbour's cow?—They went and killed two cows.

34700. And were there any damages got for this?—The only damages given was that the land was taken from him.

34701. Did he ever ask any?—I don't know; the children of one of them are here to-day.

34702. I suppose, if there was any likelihood of their getting damages they would ask them?—I believe they would ask it.

ARGYLL

BUNESSAN.

John
M'Cormick
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M'Kinnon.

34703. About this expenditure of money, were you in the country yourself between the years 1846 and 1851?—Yes.

34704. Although you took no part yourself in the work going on at the time you know well enough what work was going on?—The work which was going on was draining and trenching, and building fences and making boundaries.

34705. Where were these things done?—They were mostly done about the farm of Ardfenaig.

34706. In whose possession was that farm at that time?—In the factor's.

34707. Did you ever hear of the statement before that, during those years, there was expended upon works on the estate and upon gratuities to the people, the whole rental of the estate and £1790 more?—I never heard it before to-day.

34708. How were the people paid for the work that was done at that time?—Some who were working there—Alexander Macfarlane, who has been before you, and another—worked twenty years, and I heard them saying last night they were only getting from 1d. to 1½d. the hour; and they wrought for about twenty years.

34709. Were they always paid in money?—No, they were paid in kind.

34710. By whom?—The clerk to the factor.

34711. From your knowledge of the amount of work that was done and the number of people that were employed, and the wages they received at that time, are you able to understand the statement that there was expended upon the people of this place the whole rent of the estate and £1790 more?—I could not say as to that; the work was done very cheaply. There was a good deal of work done and improvements made, especially in Ardfenaig and some other large farms, but I cannot give any idea of it.

34712. In what kind of goods were they paid?—Meal; the factor kept a meal store.

34713. What was the amount of meal usually paid for a day's work?—I don't know; I suppose they would get what they worked for.

34714. You don't know the rate they were paid?—No.

34715. Are there some people here yet who were at this work and got this kind of wage?—Yes.

34716. *Mr Fraser-Mackintosh.*—Is it possible that much of this large sum which is said to have been spent may have gone out of the Duke's pocket and never have been spent in reality upon the estate?—I cannot say.

34717-9. Is it possible?—It is quite possible.

DUNCAN M'LEAN, Crofter, Ardtun (60), assisted by LACHLAN MACDONALD, Crofter, Ardtun (60)—examined.

34720. *Sheriff Nicolson.*—Have you a paper?—No.

34721. What have you to state for the people of Ardtun?—The only thing we have to say is that we complain that the rents are higher than the land is worth.

34722. How many crofters are there in Ardtun?—More than twenty.

34723. Do the rents vary, or are they uniform?—They vary.

34724. What is the highest rent?—About £22; that is, £11 for one croft.

Duncan
M'Lean and
Lachlan
Macdonald.