

Donald Macdonald has written what will surely be regarded as one of the most authoritative works ever to be published on the history of the Island of Lewis.

The twenty-four chapters cover a wide variety of subjects and events from prehistoric times through the Norse period, the clan feuds and the various proprietorships up until the present day, with every aspect of life carefully examined.

The many years of research involved in compiling this book was undertaken with a great affection and respect for a heritage which has long been neglected by the educational system.

However, there is a stirring of life in Lewis today, and the people have a genuine desire to learn more about their forebears who contributed so much to the development of the Island with little to compensate them for their labours.

This book will provide an important reference for everyone interested in the history of Lewis and establish a sound basis for further research.

Donald Macdonald was born in 1904 in the village of North Tolsta, a crofting-fishing community on the Island of Lewis.

On leaving the village school, he completed his secondary education at the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway and then attended Glasgow University where he graduated M.A. and was also awarded a blue for shinty.

After teacher training at Jordanhill College, he came to Edinburgh where he taught for the next forty-one years, serving in deaf, primary, secondary and Further Education schools, and for a time during the War, in a pre-air crew Training Centre.

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LEWIS

A HISTORY OF THE ISLAND

LEWIS

Donald Macdonald



unsuccessful, a new system was adopted. Students were then nominated by a Secondary Education Committee on the report of the school managers and teachers. (69) The amount awarded to successful students was barely sufficient to support them in Stornoway. In 1919, it was £18 per annum; £6 at the end of each term.

Children who had to walk home as far as eighteen miles on Friday evenings and the same distance back to school on Sunday afternoons, endured much hardship. During the school year, some travelled from 1,200 to 1,400 miles, mostly on foot, with the occasional ride in a cart or gig.

Those who stayed in lodgings in town, were fortunate in having a Welfare Officer from the Edinburgh Ladies' Highland Association to take an interest in them in times of sickness, and in the promotion of social activities in the hall of the Sandwick Road Building on Friday and Saturday nights. Later, hostels were provided for pupils who had to stay in town.

For a long time, there were no continuation classes in Lewis. Young lads who joined the Militia were given instruction in the three R's, but the girls were not given any instruction in subjects necessary to them such as Cookery, Housewifery and Needlework. (70)

By 1910, some classes in Navigation were held in schools like Knock, where ten pupils were learning navigation and signalling. Similar classes were held in Breasclete, where the sole teaching aid was a mariner's compass. (71) Gardening was also taught in some schools.

The two World Wars made the young men and women realise the importance of technical knowledge, and as a result, the Domestic Science College for Girls at Duncraig, near Kyle, and the Lewis Castle Technical College, came into being. The latter seemed destined to be of even more benefit to the people of Lewis than the more academic Nicolson Institute.

Former pupils of the Nicolson are now to be found in all branches of education, industry, commerce, and the services. Quite a few have held or are holding Chairs in universities at home and overseas, and the grandson of a crofter, the late Mr Iain Macleod, became the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Wherever one goes in the world, old Nicolsonians are to be found holding positions of authority.

At long last, it looks as if John Knox's ideal of pupils being educated according to their abilities is being realised.

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EVICCTIONS

The people of Lewis, in common with most Highlanders in the nineteenth century, firmly believed that they had a definite right to the land they occupied, as long as they paid their rents regularly, and performed the services demanded of them by either tacksmen or proprietor. This may have been due to the tradition of the udal system of land tenure (where there was no feudal superior) which probably prevailed in the island when it was under Norse domination. However, the real reason was more likely to be that the arable land had been reclaimed by the relentless toil of their ancestors.

The people were always closely associated with the land, and this is clearly indicated in a report written between 1577 and 1595, possibly for King James VI, in which it was estimated that Macleod of Lewis could put seven hundred fighting men into the field, over and above the tillers of the soil who had "to remane at hame to labour the ground." (1)

After Culloden in 1746, the Highland chiefs were deprived of certain privileges, but this had little effect on the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, as far as Lewis was concerned. Everything on land, sea or air belonged to the proprietor, who could treat his tenants as he wished, for successive Acts of Sederunt had given him legal sanction to do this. By these Acts, tenants could be removed from their lands as if they were animals, provided a warning of removal had been given, or an action brought against the individuals concerned, before a judge, at least forty days before the Whitsunday term. (2) Such legal actions did not trouble the Lewis factors unduly. In 1818, one of them considered it sufficient warning if the ground officer gave the tenants a verbal intimation of removing. (3)

There were three main reasons why summonses of removal could be issued to tenants. The first of these, and the one which accounted for nine-tenths of all summonses, was for arrears of rent. This did not mean immediate eviction, for other legal proceedings had to be undertaken before this could take place. However, during the nineteenth century, every Lewis tenant expected to receive at least one of these summonses during his life-time, a privilege which cost them anything up to thirty shillings.

The second reason for issuing a removal summons, was for a breach of the peace between individuals or townships. There were many instances of this, of which a few may be cited.

In 1797, Allan Morison, a Ness tacksmen, complained to the factor about a woman who not only threatened to set his house on fire, but also abused his wife because her son had been conscripted into the Militia. The tacksmen also alleged that the woman's husband, John Roy, was so unruly a character, that he did not feel safe anywhere near him. Needless to say, John Roy and his wife were evicted.

In Gravir in 1825, the factor wanted a troublesome occupant who quarrelled with all his neighbours exchanged for a notorious thief from Eishken, (4) while about the same time, the ground officer for Barvas supplied the factor with a list of persons he considered should be evicted. One was suspected of sheep

stealing as well as being in arrears with his rent; another had absconded for fear of being punished for sheep stealing, and a third was a 'great thief', who had been detected fleecing a neighbour's sheep on the moors. (5)

The third reason, and the one from which there was no possibility of evasion, was for the sake of land 'improvement', which simply meant the clearing of townships to make way for sheep farms.

Although the Lewis evictions did not receive the same publicity, nor were they on the same scale as those of Sutherland and other Highland districts, the dispossessed suffered similar hardships, and endured the same harsh treatment at the hands of the Estate officials; migration or emigration was their lot. The deserted villages on the Island, especially in Park and Uig, bear testimony to the wholesale evictions which occurred.

The Mackenzie proprietors left the government of the Island chiefly in the hands of the factors, who showed little consideration for the people entrusted to their care. As these proprietors seldom lived on the island for any length of time, they may not always have known the indignities their unfortunate tenants suffered.

As they had no security of tenure, being merely tenants-at-will, under a presumed verbal lease, terminable at Whitsunday, any tenant who fell foul of the factor or ground officers, had little chance of escaping eviction. (6) The threat of "*Cuiridh mi as an fhearann thu*", "I shall evict you", was no idle threat, and it lost nothing of its terror through constant repetition.

As early as 1793, Mr Francis Humberston Mackenzie, later Lord Seaforth, advertised the whole parish of Uig for letting as a sheep farm, much to the amazement of Colonel Colin Mackenzie of Stornoway, the first Surveyor-General of India, who wrote to the factor from Hyderabad in 1794, expressing concern regarding the future of the inhabitants to be removed, but hoping that Seaforth would supply them with land and employment elsewhere. (7)

As Seaforth's financial affairs deteriorated, the number of removing summonses increased. In 1796, there were no fewer than 358 issued, 150 for Barvas, 133 for Uig, 44 for Lochs, and 31 for Stornoway. (8) In addition, 36 of the Goathill tenants were ordered to appear before the Sheriff-Depute of Ross-shire, Mr Donald Macleod of Geanies, or his substitute, "to hear the Decree and Sentence of Removing given furth and pronounced against them." (9)

Between 1780 and 1813, the summonses of removal were in excess of 500, but during the years 1818-32, the number rose to over 2,300. This was mainly due to the collapse of the kelp industry, which led to the introduction of sheep farming on a large scale, and the expansion of the fishing industry, where it was hoped to employ those evicted.

It was not only the Sheriff-Depute and his Substitute who issued removal summonses. The factor, who was also Baron Bailie, could do likewise. In 1826, he handed out a total of 422 summonses for arrears of rent and for sheep-stealing.

Although every tacksman could evict a sub-tenant, some were more likely to do so than others. The most notorious of these men were Lewis Maciver of Gress, Dr Macaulay of Linshader and Crossbost, and Archibald Stewart of Park. Stewart's favourite excuse for getting rid of his sub-tenants was for sheep-stealing. He was a most aggressive man, who had no hesitation in manhandling his tenants or anybody else for that matter who happened to cross him. On one particular occasion, he ill-treated some fishermen he found ashore on the Shiants, then part of his tack, as he thought they were there to steal sheep. It was also said that he, and some others, severely manhandled the

Breabadair Mor, the Big Weaver, a native of Seaforth Head, who had gone to Valamos after some pointed horses.

Stewart, with his brother Alexander, a much more respectable man, is believed to have arrived in Park with only 60 sheep, 50 of which were ewes. (10)

The arrogant and litigious Dr MacAulay, "a land grabber and oppressor with an insatiable appetite", (11) made life extremely difficult for his tenants, exacting his 'pound of flesh' whenever possible.

Lewis Maciver of Gress, seldom needed an excuse for removing his tenants. A shrewd business man, he showed little consideration for anyone who interfered with his plans. His sub-tenants, in Back and Gress, led an unenviable, uncertain existence. In 1822, his tenants in Gress complained to Seaforth of having been dispossessed of their lands twice in as many years and sent to the "Edge of the Town" for no known reason, especially as they had paid their rents on "The Day". (12)

The irascible Maciver fought a duel with a Customs official in Goathill Park in 1835. (13) the last ever to be held on the Island. However, the fight was stopped, and the result declared a draw.

In 1833, Alexander Stewart, the factor, proposed a most ambitious plan for Lewis when he suggested that large scale improvements could be achieved by two simple arrangements.

Firstly, at the expiry of their leases, all the improvable land in the Parish of Stornoway would be lotted, on both sides of Broad Bay. Five or seven lines of crossroads would be made in Point, from sea to sea, Broad Bay to the Minch, parallel to one another, and the intermediate land lotted and let on suitable terms. This would afford several thousand people an opportunity to improve the land, and give them access to the fishing grounds, seaware and flatfish of Broad Bay, and ling and cod from the Minch. A similar operation could be carried out on the great tract of improvable lands in the parish, particularly round the town of Stornoway. The part of Ness, north of Galson, could be treated in the same way, with reclaimed land devoted to the growth of barley for the production of whisky.

Secondly, to populate these new allotments, the inhabitants of Uig ought to be transferred there. The pasturable districts of Lochs, whether Carloway or Lochs proper, could also be relieved of their present occupants, and the whole two parishes let as grazing farms. (14)

Evictions began in earnest in Uig about 1823, when Kirkibost and Little Bernera were cleared to become part of Linshader Farm. (15) By 1825, the families in the townships behind Mangersta and Mealista, Ceann Chaolais, Hamnaway, and Aird Bheag, were settled at Kinresort, and Aird Uig settled as a crofting community. A sheep farm was formed beside Loch Resort. (16)

From 1825-28, the Uig tenants were deprived of their wintering islands and much of their moorland pasture. The houses of the Timsgarry tenants were "rased out" in 1826 to make a glebe for the Rev. Alexander Macleod, an act which met with a hostile reception from the tenants, and which made the minister unwilling at first to have any of their land in his glebe, as some of them blamed him for their removal, and this might render his gospel ministrations unsuccessful with those concerned.

Mealista, the largest of the townships in West Uig, was cleared of its inhabitants about 1838. Some were sent to already crowded Brenish, and other places on the Island, but the majority went to Canada. Those left behind on the Island, always remembered the cries of the children as they were forced to leave their humble homes.

*He regretted
their loss & they were*

17? *Macleod no.*
About 1851, the inhabitants of Gisla were removed at their own request, but those of Carnish, Reef and Ballyglom had no option but to leave their homes. They were removed to other districts or sent overseas.

In 1872, the people of Bosta and those of Mangersta were likewise removed at their own request, the former to Kirkibost, as their peat supplies were running out, and the latter to Doune Carloway, because of the open position of the village. The Croir tenants were sent to Hacklete, in 1880, along with some others from Tobson, because of overcrowding. (17)

The following list of deserted Uig townships, though not complete, gives some indication of the depopulation which occurred in that parish:

Kinresort, Crola, Torraidh, Aird Mhor, Aird Bheag, Tamnabhaigh, Ceann Chuisil, Beinnisbac, Mealista, Ceann Chaolais, Bhuidhe Mhor, Pabbaidh Mhor, Bhacsaidh, Bernera Beag, Croir, Breidhbhig, Bosta, Cleidir, Baile Ghriasaich, Beiridhro, Berisaidh, Erista, Timgarry, Bail'na Cille, Penny Donald, Capadal (Ardroil), Balnicol, Knockmagem, Drovernish, Earshader, Strome, Ceann Thulabhig, Cleitihog, Berve, Linshader, Sgealagro, Morsgail, Dún and Sandwick.

The Parish of Lochs, excluding the Carloway portion, was always sparsely populated, particularly the area known as Park. It was here that the first sheep farm was formed, early in the nineteenth century by a group of Skymen, including Lachlan Mackinnon of Corry. Their manager was a Donald Stewart, who became tenant in 1816. On taking up an appointment in Harris, he was succeeded in the tenancy by his two brothers, Alexander and Archibald, who held it until 1842. These were years of sore affliction for the Park tenants, and even yet, the name of Stewart is anathema among the descendants of those whom they evicted. A Walter Scott held the farm from 1842-57, when it was let to a Michael Scobie, who removed the Steimreway crofters to re-settle in Lemreway, which had been cleared many years before. Mr Scobie made over his lease to a Mr Sellar, until its expiry in 1883. It was then unsuccessfully advertised for letting, and finally let as a deer forest to Mr Joseph Platt. (18) Both Mr and Mrs Platt were very popular in Lochs, so much so, that Mrs Platt came to be called "Lady" Platt, and her Christian name, Jessie, was bestowed on many children.

The original Park Farm was fairly small, consisting chiefly of the area round Valamos, where the first farmhouse still exists. In 1823, in addition to Valamos and the Shiant Islands, the Stewarts had only managed to gain possession of Scaladale Mor and Beag, and Ceann Chrionaig. (19)

Some of the Park townships were probably cleared before the arrival of the Stewarts. They were all small villages containing from about two houses, as at Bun Chorcabhig, to twenty-three in Lemreway which was later re-settled in 1857. Before 1830, well over a hundred families, something like five hundred souls, were uprooted to make room for sheep. Lemreway was cleared in 1831, Orinsay in 1838, and Eishken and Ceann Loch Shealg in 1843. (20) Steimreway, as already stated, was cleared in 1857.

The cleared townships were: Valamos Beag and Mor, Caolas an Eilean, Bagh Ciarach, Ceannamhor, Scaladale Beag and Mor, Strómas, Brinigil, Bagh Reimsabhaigh, Smosivig, Gleann Claidh (the deepest, the most desolate, and to the superstitious natives, the most fearful glen in Lewis), (21) Brollum, Ceann Chrionaig, Mol Truisg, Mol Chadha Gearraidh, Ailtinish, Búdhanaís, Ceann Loch Shealg, Eilean Iubhaird, Isginn (Eishken), Steimreway, Orinsay, Cuiriseal, Gearraidh Riasaidh, Bun Chorcabhig, Gilmhicphaic, Ceann Sifíord. (22)

Other places cleared in Lochs were: Crobeg, Cleitir, Shildenish (later re-

Thompson's Smith notes.

Craggybank.
settled), Ardintroime, Aline, Valtos, Keose (part), Swordale (for the minister's glebe), Cró Gearraidh, Ceann na Cairidh, Dalmore and Dalbeg.

When Isginn and Ceann Loch Shealg were cleared, the fires on the hearths were drowned by the Estate officials, and the inhabitants fined for not evacuating the villages on the appointed day. (23)

The evicted were given little consideration. They were dealt with as if they were sheep. There were no roads in South Lochs, so in most cases, the people had to carry their young children and their goods and chattels on their backs over moorland, while driving their stock before them. Some were more fortunate than others in not having to travel so far to their new homes.

Overcrowded Balallan received many unfortunates; others went to Crossbost and to Tong, where they were not exactly welcome, while some made the long trek to Glen Tolsta and Tolsta. In this case, the women and children drove the stock while the men sailed with the roof timbers and other heavy articles to their allotted places. On arrival, they slept under their upturned boats until they had built new turf-walled homes.

The parishes of Barvas and Stornoway had fewer evictions as there was more arable ground there. Upper Barvas was cleared about 1827, to make it into a minister's glebe. Owing to the nature of the soil, it was a double glebe, containing thirty acres of land formerly in the possession of the crofters. (24)

South Galson lost its sub-tenants because it was the ground officer's tack, but North Galson was not cleared until 1863, at the tenants' own request. As in the case of Balmeanach and Melbost, the ground was added to South Galson. Altogether, 108 families were removed from these townships over a period of twenty years. Many people went to Canada.

Prior to 1844, the cleared villages in the parish of Stornoway were: Gress, Upper Coll, Gearraidh Ghuirm, Tong, Aignish, Holm, Melbost, and Stoneyfield, and after 1844, North Tolsta, Goathill, and the Gearraidh Chruaidh, Castle Grounds.

It must have been heartbreaking to see these people leave their homes. Some incidents are still remembered, like that of the Bernera widow who, on being evicted, was rowed across to the mainland and then, accompanied by her three children, and carrying all her worldly goods on her back, walked to Cliascro, where she built a bothy for herself and her family.

A four year old Tolsta boy, John Macdonald, carried the tongs when his parents had to leave their home in 1852. The family had to flit once again the following year to the Moine, unreclaimed peat land on the outskirts of South Tolsta. The factor was extremely generous, for he did not charge rent for this bog-land for the first two years. In 1922, seventy years later, the boy returned to the village from which he had been evicted as a child.

Angus Maclean, one of those evicted from Reef, was sent to Lochganvich, but he was not there long before he had to emigrate. The estate officials came and quenched his fire, and sent him away to the waiting emigrant ship. His only cow was left standing at the back door. (25)

Alexander Macleod from Laxay was reported as having had to abandon three different holdings and three different homes in three consecutive years. Two of these houses were at Seaforth Head and Ardintroime. Another Laxay resident, an Angus Morison, was said to have been chased by "deer and sheep", from Uig to Dalmore before arriving at his present destination. (26)

A John Smith, born in Eishken, was compelled to go to Brinigil, from where he was removed to Cleitir before finally being settled in Balallan. (27)

A Mr Craig, writing to Mr Stewart Mackenzie, in 1828, gives some idea of what these poor, uprooted people had to suffer.

Until I saw the actual situations of the new lotters in the Aird of Tong, I had no idea of the great hardship and privation that the poor people endure who are forced into new allotments, without matters being previously arranged for their moving. The situation of the new lotters on the Aird of Tong, at this moment, beggars description. It is worse than anything I saw in Donegal, where I always considered human wretchedness to have reached its very acme. The roofs of the present hovels on the Estate might, in general, stand for a few years if they were let alone, but the act of taking them down, breaks and injures them so much that they are of comparatively little value in roofing their new homes—fresh timber is therefore necessary, and the exorbitant price demanded is so great as to more than exhaust their means.

I am therefore deeply of the opinion that whenever a general move of the people is ordered by you from one part of a farm to another, you ought to present them with the timber necessary to roof their buildings, and besides, good access should be made to the site of the proposed habitations before they be required to leave their old: for lack of such an arrangement at Aird of Tong, the poor people at the new lots there, are suffering the greatest hardship, many of them dead. I am told, from disease brought on, I have no doubt, from the unwholesome situation in which they have been forced to plant themselves.

To erect their cabins, the sward has been taken off the whole line of the intended road which has now become a morass, dangerous for both man and beast, to set their foot upon: how the children contrive out and in of their cabins baffles my comprehension, for the men have literally to step up to the knee in mud, the moment they quit their threshold. (28)

There were many places worse than Aird of Tong, with no one to describe the conditions. Even New Shawbost, where most of those evicted from Reef were placed, was not much better.

By 1850, the farms formed from the deserted townships were: South Galson, North Dell mill and land, Dalbeag, Gress, Coll, Melbost, Holm, Stoneyfield, Arnish, Aignish, Goathill, Crobeag, Valtos (Lochs) and Eilean Torray, Mealista, Ardroll, Timsgarry and Eilean Vacsey, and the largest of all, Linshader. (29) Most of those were occupied by farmers from the mainland.

Other farms were created later. Dalmore was added to Dalbeag in 1853, Manor Farm in 1851, North Tolsta and Tong in 1853, and Mangersta in 1873. Park, Aline, Morsgail and Scaliscro became deer forests, Park in 1866, and the others about 1850. (30)

Mr Mackay, the factor, might say that it was not for the sake of profit that Sir James Matheson cleared any one township, but because the crofters could not make a living from it and so were unable to pay the rent. (31) This may be true, but the fact remains that successive Lewis proprietors did evict their tenantry, forcing many to leave the island, while others were sent to places "where hardly a snipe could live." (32)

EMIGRATION

During the eighteenth century, Stornoway was a port of call for many ships trading with North America, so the Islanders were not entirely ignorant of conditions on the other side of the Atlantic. The few soldiers who returned from service in America during the Seven Years' War, as well as the time-expired servants of the Hudson Bay Company, all contributed to their knowledge of conditions overseas.

Early emigration from the Island was entirely voluntary, and was chiefly confined to the tacksman class and their dependants, as well as a few tradesmen.

In 1773, no fewer than 840 people emigrated from Lewis, causing so much consternation, that the proprietor, Lord Fortrose, who spent most of his time in London, rushed to the Island to try and stop any further departures. His tenants told him that they would only stay if they were given the land at their former rents, the excess rental for the previous three years refunded, and the immediate dismissal of the factor. (1)

Lord Fortrose evidently paid little attention to their demands, for the following year, 1774, two ships, the *Friendship*, and the *Peace and Plenty*, sailed from Stornoway for Philadelphia and New York respectively, carrying over a hundred emigrants between them, among whom was the future Canadian explorer, Alexander Mackenzie, then aged twelve. Along with his aunts, he was on his way to join his father and his uncle John "Ready Money" Maciver, in New York. Some Morisons, descendants of the Brieve, also emigrated at this time. (2)

In 1776, the outbreak of the American War of Independence checked the tide of emigration. When it was eventually resumed, Canada was the main destination.

In 1803, three ships sailed from Stornoway for Pictou, Nova Scotia.

This steady loss of manpower was not all to the liking of the lairds. As long as the kelp trade was profitable, the more people employed in it meant larger revenues. In 1803, they managed to have an Act of Parliament passed which severely curtailed this movement of population. By 1811, regulations were eased slightly, and in the same year, seventy-six people, mostly from Skye, left Stornoway for Pictou and Prince Edward Island.

For some years, the Hudson Bay Company had an agent in Stornoway to recruit men for the fur trade in Canada, locally called the *Talamh Fuar, Cold Land*. These men were engaged for a minimum period of three years, and were given free passages there and back. Many lads took advantage of these terms, and in 1811, one hundred and nine sailed the Atlantic, not all of whom returned home again. The life in Northern Canada appealed to many of them, as they got on well with the Indians and the Eskimos. Some married Indian girls, and in any case, there was not much difference between a beehive shieling in Lewis and a wigwam or an igloo in Canada. Some of those who returned brought their families with them. Perhaps the most outstanding athlete the island ever produced had a Red Indian mother.

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11. GD 46/17/Vol. 66.
12. GD 46/17/Vol. 60.
13. GD 46/1/538.
14. GD 46/1/530.
15. GD 46/17/Vol. 64.
16. GD 46/17/Vol. 68.
17. Crofters Commission, 1884, 1080.
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25. Ibid. 931.
26. Ibid. 1140-1142.
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7. Ibid. 97.
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11. Murchadh Cam, MacTalla, 16 June, 1899.
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4. Crofters Commission, 1884, 908.
5. Ibid. 904.
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7. Crofters Commission, 1884, 893.
8. N.S.A., op. cit., 166.
9. SC 33/5/6.
10. Crofters Commission, 1884, 1143, 1144.
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14. Ibid. 1144.
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13. Ibid. 315, 316.
14. Ibid. 317.
15. Ibid. 319, 320.
16. Capt. Burnaby, O.S., op. cit., O.N.B., 136.
17. O.S.A., Vol. XIX, 271.
18. SC 33/5/4.
19. GD 46/17/Vol. 70.
20. W. C. Mackenzie, The Book of the Lews, 249.
21. Sir D. Monro, op. cit., 514.
22. M. Martin, op. cit., 105.
23. Capt. Burnaby, O.S., O.N.B., 134.
24. O.S.A., Vol. XIX, 276.