

States; and there, in most cases, the little capital increased, and a rude plenty continues to be enjoyed by their descendants. Many thousands more, however, fell down upon the coasts of the country, and, on moss-covered moors or bare promontories, ill-suited to repay the labors of the agriculturist, commenced a sort of amphibious life as crofters and fishermen. And, located on an ungenial soil, and prosecuting with but indifferent skill a precarious trade, their little capital dribbled out of their hands, and they became the poorest of men. Meanwhile, in some parts of the Highlands and Islands, a busy commerce sprang up, which employed—much to the profit of the landlords—many thousands of the inhabitants. The kelp manufacture rendered inhospitable islets and tracts of bleak rocky shore, rich in sea-weed, of as much value to the proprietors as the best land in Scotland; and under the impetus given by full employment, and, if not ample, at least remunerative pay, population increased. Suddenly, however, Free Trade, in its first approaches, destroyed the trade in kelp; and then the discovery of a cheap mode of manufacturing soda out of common salt secured its ruin beyond the power of legislation to retrieve. Both the people and landlords experienced in the kelp districts the evils which a ruined commerce alway leaves behind it. Old Highland families disappeared from amid the aristocracy and landowners of Scotland; and the population of extensive islands and sea-boards of the country, from being no more than adequate, suddenly became oppressively redundant. It required, however, another drop to make the full cup run over. The potatoes had become, as I have shown, the staple food of the Highlander; and when, in 1846, the potato blight came on, the people, most of them previously stripped of their little capitals, and divested of their employment, were deprived of their food, and ruined at a blow. The same stroke which did little more than slightly impinge on the comforts of the people of the Lowlands, utterly prostrated the Highlanders; and ever since, the sufferings of famine have become chronic along the bleak shores and rugged islands of at least the north-western portion of our country. Nor is it perhaps the worst