Scottish-Irish connections have been enjoying renewed interest in recent years, boosted by the higher status of Scottish, as distinct from British, history since devolution; the new-found recognition of the Ulster-Scots movement in the matrix of compromises that made the Belfast Agreement (1998) and the St Andrew’s Agreement (2006); and the emergence of the ‘four nations’ approach to the history of Britain and Ireland. It is an extensive field, though as Newby notes in this book, one characterized more by friction than friendship from the early modern era. Thanks to the popularity of men like Michael Davitt, the Nelson Mandela of his day, links between radical agitation in Ireland and Scotland in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries have not been entirely forgotten. At the same time, our knowledge of the subject has been potted, and largely confined to incidents and personalities. Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands is the first comprehensive exploration. Based on a PhD, with all of the benefits but few of the drawbacks that implies, it offers an excellent contextual survey, which ranges over the politics of land and social reform in Ireland, Britain, and Irish-America. Canada has a walk-on part in the accidental presence of James Innes, MP, editor of the Guelph Mercury, at a meeting during the 1885 elections.

The Irish Land War of 1879-81 marked the beginning of a substantial interaction between Irish and Scottish radicals.
Hitherto, as Newby concedes, connections were ‘extremely tenuous’ (p. 27), and contact between the peasantry of both countries remained so. The buckle in the belt was Glasgow, a magnet for Highlanders and Irish immigrants alike and, as Ó Catháin has shown in a parallel study, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland, 1858-1916* (2007), a key centre in the Fenian world. While events in Ireland were important, the direct Irish input into Scottish unrest was largely confined to Davitt and Glasgow-based urban radicals. Other extraneous elements were Henry George, celebrated advocate of a single tax on land and author of the hugely influential *Progress and Poverty* (1879), and sections of the Irish and Scottish diaspora in the United States. The initial steps in forging the coalition were taken by Highlanders in Glasgow making common cause with the Irish Home Government Federation. A Highland Land Law Reform Association was established in 1882 to secure provisions similar to the Irish Land Act of 1881. Ireland remained something of a double-edged sword. The fear of a comparable land war developing in Scotland amounted to a potent threat to the authorities, and radical Georgites ‘revelled in their Irish connections’ (p. 92). On the other hand, moderates found them an embarrassment. Most Scots regarded the Irish as superstitious, impoverished, disaffected, and anything but an appropriate model, and conservatives deliberately exaggerated the level of Irish involvement.

The centrepiece of Newby’s research is the ‘Crofters’ War’ in the 1880s, in which rent strikes and boycotts were organized against attempts to evict crofters in rent arrears or clear land for hunting and shooting. The agitation was strongest on Skye, but supported throughout the Highlands and Islands. The unrest climaxed in ‘The Battle of the Braes’ in 1882, when an eviction force of bailiffs and police was ambushed and repelled at The Braes on Skye. The campaign slackened in 1883, but revived in 1884, and, aided by the major extension of the franchise in the Third Reform Act, five ‘Crofters’ MPs’, dubbed ‘the Scotch Parnellite party’, were returned in the general election of 1885. Meanwhile,
the government had responded to the ‘The Battle of the Braes’ by appointing a Royal Commission, under Lord Napier, which in turn led to the Crofters’ Holdings (Scotland) Act in 1886. Based in part on the Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, the Crofters’ Act provided security of tenure, introduced widespread rent reductions, and established a commission with power to fix rents. The ‘Scotch Parnellites’ were too few to influence the Act or prevent the Liberals stealing their clothes. Disputes persisted over access to land, but with less popular support, and in the 1890s the Highland land reform movement ‘crumbled in the face of internal splits and remedial Tory legislation, and the other radical threads which were entwined for a period in the 1880s unravelled’ (p.171).

In an admirably concise conclusion, Newby stresses that the Crofters’ War was a Scottish affair. Davitt’s *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Or the Story of the Irish Land League Revolution* (1904) treated it as a successful extension of the Irish Land War, led by Irishmen. The myth allowed him to claim the outcome as a victory and the struggle as an example of Celtic solidarity. In reality, Davitt, George, and their ilk were disappointed, both by the compromises that ended the Irish Land War, and in the hope that Scotland would offer a fresh opportunity to pursue a radical agenda. Disappointing too for Davitt and kindred spirits in Scotland, was their failure to generate pan-Celtic unity. Though Scots would make a vital contribution to Irish Marxist movements from the 1890s to the 1940s – a good subject for a PhD candidate wishing to complete a trilogy with Newby and Ó Catháin – the Crofters’ War stands as a rare chapter of fraternity in the history of the sea-divided Gaels. Tellingly, Newby is able to despatch the last twenty years of his monograph in as many pages.

There’s a footnote to the story in the address of James Browne, fraternal delegate of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, to its Irish namesake in 1913.
[Browne] They had landlordism in Scotland as rampant as ever it had been in Ireland, and land was not available for the people to live in because of deer forests and playgrounds which the landlords insisted on having.

A voice in the public gallery – Why don’t ye shoot them (great laughter).

Mr Bowne – I forgot that I was in Ireland (renewed laughter).

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