

A WORD

FROM

AN IRISH LANDOWNER

TO

HIS BRETHREN OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

BY

JOHN HAMILTON, A. M. CANTAB.,

(ST. ERNAN'S,)

DEP. LIEUT. OF COUNTY OF DONEGAL.

"Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."
PSALM xxxvii. 3.

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TO
THE LANDOWNERS
IN
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

THERE is a tendency in these times to school us and criticize us, shown by classes very unfit for the office, at least as to the details into which they enter. Quite right it is that our conduct, as members of the community, claiming a high place in society, and exercising rights, and bound to duties peculiar to our property, should be scrutinized and animadverted on, and that any abuse of rights or neglect of duties should be brought to the bar of that most efficient court of castigation and amendment—*public opinion*.

But how absurd is it, when persons of humane dispositions and literary acquirements, observing the suffering of a great mass of the population, not only take upon themselves to charge upon the landed proprietors the whole fault of the evil, and the whole duty of supporting and relieving it, but, in utter ignorance of the nature of landed property, venture to dictate the *means* to be used, and settle the *details* for the improvement of tenantry and fertilization of estates.

I am not going to defend our class as free from blame—nay, I acknowledge that we all have erred more or less, and the evils and sufferings caused by neglectful or worse conduct on the part of *some* landlords, have no excuse. I am sure that those landowners who have done their duty best, will be the most ready to acknowledge that they might have done more. My purpose is

not to excuse, but in some degree to account for what is past, and to point out means of improvement for the future.

But if I do not attempt to shake off the blame justly due to bad landlords, I do affirm that even the worst of that class are not fairly dealt with, in being selected as if they, and they *alone*, had sunk the population upon their properties into pauperism—as if they, and they alone, should be compelled to support those who are in destitution, and to provide means for bringing about an improved state of the rural population (for I refer in all this chiefly to rural districts).

How little do we hear, comparatively, of the sums of money extorted by the merchant or tradesman, from whom the population of a rural district procure many of the necessaries of life. Is the landowners' rent the principal part of their expenditure, or the profits charged by him the most exorbitant they have to pay?

In the poorer parts of Ireland, where the rent paid by each holder of a little plot of land is only one or two pounds, it is plain that he must spend *much more* than that to provide even the ragged and insufficient clothing which covers his family, and the few necessaries of food and other things, which, with his crop, enabled them to exist. Who *raises* his demands upon the poor man when times are hard? Who gains by charging a high price to the hungry man for food, or to the pennyless man for some article of necessity?—a *spade* or a *coat* purchased upon credit. Who pursues the poor man at law, and screws out the payment of the dear food and the double-priced coat, as soon as he sees the poor man has the least prospect of paying for it? Is it the landowner? No; it is the provision merchant, the shopkeeper, &c., &c.

The Landlord, as a rule, exacts *less* in a bad year. The other parties with whom the poor man deals exact *more* at such times. It may be that their security requires it, for the risk they run. Suppose it be so, still theirs is the act, theirs the profit.

And when we look higher up in the scale of prosperity, and examine the case of other and more prosperous tenantry, we shall find more and more, in proportion of their payments, goes to others than to the landowners for rent.

Again, who is it that lays out his money in an article which he divides out among his poorer neighbours, at a profit to himself of ten, twenty, forty, fifty per cent. ? Is it the landowner ? Nay, three or four per cent. is the utmost he ever expects for his capital invested ; but the mill-owner, the shop-owner, the dealer in any goods or wares, will they be satisfied with this ?

The only argument I would draw from this is, that the landowner is not the *only* person who has been enriched by the poor man's earnings, and certainly is not the *only* man who has oppressed and sunk, even an oppressed and sunken tenantry, and, therefore, should neither bear *all* the blame of the evil, nor *all* the cost of the remedy.

There is, however, some reason why, in a time of unusual distress and poverty, the Landowner should be compelled, as a matter of state policy, to bear a share of the cost of remedying the evil, greater than he *deserves* to be burdened with. It is, because he *can* bear it without the same loss to himself, and *can*, by proper exertion and due prudence, make the improvement of the poor man's condition and of his own property, work together and assist each other ; and it is reasonable that where unwillingness, or any other cause, prevents this mutually beneficial operation, the law should enforce it.

But this applies only to the employment of the able-bodied poor, in the reclaiming and improving of the soil, and in rural districts. The poor in towns, and the infirm poor, cannot justly be placed to the charge of landowners alone. These should bear their charge with the rest of the community, which might best be divided, by making the cost of the poor-house and its officers and furniture, be at the general expense, and that of the food and clothing of each pauper at the expense of the *land*, or division of land, to which the pauper belongs, paid partly by the owner, and partly by the occupier, in fairly divided proportions. Thus would be pressed on those who could efficiently act, the advantage of *preventing pauperism*, for it would be cheaper to take means in due time to prevent it, than to support the pauper in the poor-house.

As a Landowner, I would concede, then, that the employment of the poor, or sustenance of paupers, should be laid upon the

land, partly to be levied on the owner, and partly on the occupier, according to the interest he might have in the land. The whole weight thus comes *really* on the owner (if the land be not let at an under rate), because the poor-rate will be considered by the tenant in taking the land. But it will render the tenant interested in the welfare of his poor neighbour, if the cost of keeping him in pauperism will affect him.

But in order that both owner and occupier shall be sufficiently interested in the case of each poor person, and shall be *able* to act so as to save him from pauperism; the whole weight of the cost of feeding, and clothing the pauper must come upon one limited division, belonging to one proprietor, else the endeavour to prevent pauperism could not avail.

Thus far, it is probable, most persons who have given the matter their attention, will agree, even if they have little knowledge of the means and details by which, in managing an estate, a Landowner may improve his tenantry, and keep them from pauperism, or even raise them out of it.

In a crisis like the present in Ireland, a system of legislation to enable landowners to make use of their *credit*, in order to keep up their tenantry, and improve their land, is plainly necessary. The government of the United Kingdom, after several attempts and experiments, which were not more unsuccessful than must have been expected in so untried a case, have, I hope, hit on the right principle—not to *give* anything, but to enable the landowners to *use* what they *have*, by legalizing the pledging of their lands, or rather the *improveability* of their lands, and by aiding them to procure quickly, and at a moderate interest, money upon that security. Binding the owners so to use the money as to render that *improveability* available to the food of the people first, and to the repayment of the advance secondly. This has been in a degree done by the effect given to some previous Acts of Parliament for encouraging improvement of land, by a late Treasury Minute, and doubtless it will be one of the first cares of Parliament to make more effectual laws for the securing the welfare of all classes, and especially of the poor, by ensuring the *cultivation* as well as the *improvement* of the soil.

But here comes the ground of difference between the *practical*

improving landowner on the one hand, and the theoretical—often well-intentioned—writer on the evils of abused rights, neglected duties, bad landlords, and suffering population, on the other; and these, not contented with a legislation which would compel a Landowner so to use his own property as to conduce to the general welfare, would deprive him of the ordinary rights of property, as well as enforce the extraordinary duties which belong to it, and would introduce a system of unjustifiable interference with the Landowner's own property, which would shake the foundation of *all* confidence, first between the Landowner and tenant, and then between all persons dealing with any kind of property, for the vicious principle could not stop at the outrage of justice in merely one kind of property, but would, if not checked in this, extend to all. Not that the persons who would advocate the erroneous principle which I deprecate, *intend* to be unjust; but they go beyond their knowledge, and flattered at having discovered a great evil, and the *general* principle of amending or relieving its effects, they think themselves qualified to draw out the details, and spoil, at the end, what they had well begun.

As an instance—

It is proposed that the property of Landlords shall be improved, the improvement to be brought into effect by means of money laid out in employment on the land, and the improvement then pledged for the repayment of the funds advanced for that purpose.

So far well. But some theorizing improvers of the country, who have no inducement or opportunity to make a deep acquaintance with land or tenancy, propose that the Landowner should charge the tenant, whose farm is improved by the outlay of the money advanced, an additional rent *calculated upon the sum so laid out*.

To a person quite ignorant or excessively thoughtless of the principles of property, and of the nature of land improvement, this may seem fair enough, and I fear that some would stand up for this plan who know well enough that its principle is vicious, but who, with principles still more vicious, would uphold *their own theory*, even though they knew it was unjust, and would bring their wit and talent to the aid of wrong.

A very short statement will prove the unfairness of making the sum laid out upon the improvement of land, the measure of improved rent fairly to be charged to the tenant who takes the improved land, or who occupies it in continuance, *not having a lease*. (The tenant having a lease is as proprietor for the time being.) A Landowner has two farms—one a good soil, deep and easily worked, in a good situation, and favourable exposure, but spoiled by wet—say ten acres ;—

And another farm of inferior soil, shallow, and hard to work, at a considerable elevation, and bad aspect—say ten acres.

Both farms occupied at will by two tenants.

On farm No. 1 the landlord expends, or causes to be spent, £5 an acre in draining, which £50 he borrows at £5 per cent., or £2 10s. a year. The effect is an improvement in the letting value of the land of one pound an acre. (*I have known cases where the effect was more, and cost less.*)

The tenant, according to the principle I condemn, should be charged by the landowner £2 10s. additional rent for these ten acres, supposing five per cent. on the sum, calculated as the fair increase.

The farm No. 2 is also improved by the expenditure of £8 per acre, and its letting value improved eight shillings an acre ; the inferior soil and situation requiring more outlay, and yielding less return. £80 at £5 per cent. is £4, and that should be the additional rent of No. 2.

Thus the supposed *fair* system gives the tenant who had a farm favourably circumstanced, a clear advantage of £7 10s. yearly. The tenant with the ill-circumstanced farm, no advantage !! and the landowner no advantage !!!

If the landowner were to *remove the tenants*, and improve the lands, and re-let them, he would probably ask and receive for No. 1, if it was worth £6 a year before, now £12 or £13, being £1 or £2 under the full value, *apparently* £6 or £7 interest upon £50 ; while No. 2 he would let on the same terms, supposing it formerly worth £4 a year, now for £6 or £7, being *apparently* only £2 or £3 interest upon his £80. In both these cases *the tenant* would be fairly dealt by, for he would get fair and full value for his money. The fact of merely suffering a

tenant-at-will to occupy the farm, while the improvements are being made, may be an advantage to the tenant, but assuredly none to the landowner, and can make no difference in the subsequent fair letting of the lands.

Where, then, is the error?

The fact is, the dealing between the landowner and tenant has really nothing to do with interest of money. It is a bargain where *value* is given and received. It is nothing to the tenant if the landowner gives £20 per cent. for his money, or if he has it of his own, free of all interest. The *land* is the *landowner's*, with whatever *improveable fertility*, or *hidden mines* it contains. And the money which the landowner borrows, *by pledging his own property*, is the landowner's own money, and the tenant has nothing to say to its high or low interest; all the tenant has to inquire is, if the land be worth the rent. The government, in the present case, is just in requiring the money to be laid out in developing the improveability of the soil, because that development is the pledge given for the repayment of the money. But the government having advanced the money, and looked after its security, has no right to interfere farther with the property of the owner; its place is to protect both owner and tenant in the enjoyment of their free rights and liberties and not to favour one nor to fetter another.

A tender-hearted, but short-sighted clergyman or lady, or other person, whose avocations do not bring them into the dealings and business of the world, may think that this is very uncharitable doctrine, but the question is not of charity but of justice; and these good persons little know how ruinous to the interests of the *poor* an unjust tampering with property is.

Some newspaper editors and pamphlet writers, who understand the matter as little as the reverend or fair arguers, may maintain honestly and truly the wrong side. And some of those writers who know right well the injustice and unfairness of the principle, and its ruinous consequences to those very poor whose cause they hypocritically pretend to defend, will go on writing what they know to be false.

But Landowners must be firm, if they would maintain their position, and that of their tenantry. They must not give way

to a popular cry, headed by the false-hearted part of the public press. Let them do their duty as men and as Christians, and manage their estates for the real and mutual benefit of themselves and their tenantry. Let them consider the poor who may be congregated upon their lands, and not *wait* for legal compulsion to demand a sustenance for these, but rather make haste to be generous, where being merely just will not reach their poorest brethren's wants; and so doing, they may bid defiance to the wanton and wicked attempts to attack character or property, and will convince those, whose honest error makes them advocates of a false principle.

Other cases could be added illustrative of the incompetence to judge, of many self-constituted judges. Let it be remembered that *Irish* Landlords, in the present crisis, availing themselves of the government facilities for raising means upon sufficient pledges, are not supplicants for *English* money, but as an integral part of the *nation*, are the subjects of *national* legislation. They receive no *gift*, though a boon it may be, but the boon is from the *united* legislature, and *united* treasury, and ample pledges are required and given, so that the *value* advanced becomes *bona fide* the property of those who gave the pledges. An attempt is made to represent Ireland as supplicant or mendicant at England's feet, by part of the English newspaper press. There may be *some* in Ireland who have the mendicant's spirit, and some in England who feel no heart of unison for Ireland's woes, as a *part of the Empire*. But such are the *exceptions*; and what we ask, we ask as the Queen's subjects, from fellow-subjects; and what boon the government or legislature grants, or may grant, we receive as fellow-subjects from fellow-subjects. The sovereign, the legislature, the government, are *ours*, as a united empire; and every honest and true English and Irish mind and heart thinks and feels thus. Would they were all so.

The bounteous charity of many *individuals* in England, every Irish heart gratefully feels; but the question is not of them, but of the *state*.

There remains still a cause for casting more weight upon Landowners in the taxation for the support of the poor, and laying responsibility on them more than at first *seems* just. It

is ground delicate to tread upon, and will meet, and gall many prejudices, but it must be opened.

Landowners are not mere owners of land. With their ownership they possess, and lay weight upon *lordship*, and are *Land lords*. If not legally, yet virtually they have a rank and a position, and the tenantry and population are generally felt and claimed to be in some sense *theirs*. Witness the interest in elections, and the tendency in tenantry to apply to their landlords to *get them justice*, instead of looking to the law to do them justice.

There is a kind of feudal, or feudal-like feeling, and it has its winning points; it is quite distinct from mere *landownership*. It is supposed to bind the people of an estate to the landlord by a different bond than that of ordinary dealings about property of other descriptions, not merely a *closer bond*. This is right and natural, arising from the more constant, and regular, and long-continued communication between landowner and tenant. But what I speak of is a different bond, and *while it exists* the landlord makes a *claim* upon the tenant, virtual, though not legal, and the tenant, *vice versa*, has his claim upon the landlord, beyond that of a tenant upon a mere landowner. This landlordism thus loads its possessor with a real weight, for a very unreal return; and it is worth inquiry if it does not very much prevent, or at least retard, the improvement of landed property in general, as well as give the public voice a handle against landlords, whenever the population of their estates require assistance. Does it not also tend to keep the tenantry behind the progress of the age, and render them of a dependent spirit; and is it not true, that a dependent tenantry never made an independent landlord; his income is less certain; the energy, industry, and peacefulness of such a tenantry is far less, than that of a tenantry of free, independent spirit, no more *bound* to the landowner, than to any owner of other property for which they may deal with him, unless the *personal worth* and generous conduct of the landowner bind the tenant, not to a *mere landlord*, but to a tenant's friend. I am persuaded that the spirit of the times will soon overthrow landlordism; and if it be not separated from *landownership*, this may be shaken in the convulsion. If landowners will not have their pro-

perty to be like other property, how can they expect it to receive the protection and have the advantages of other property? If they will be lords, they must needs keep, in some sense, and at some cost, their vassals or retainers.

But let Landlords look at their land, as property—see how it may yield them most; work it prudently, actively, extensively. Not suffer it to be a clog or burden upon them: deal openly, fairly, generously, with their tenants, as *customers* for the property they deal in. Try to keep up a *respectable* and *wealthy* body of customers; use their ownership of land as good citizens; sink their lordship of estates and of tenantry; and the public will soon learn to treat landowners with the same justice, and land with the same jealous carefulness, as the owners of other property, and as other property itself. It requires no formal *abdication* of title or state to secure this, but a simple, steady exercise of the ordinary rights and duties of ordinary property, making allowance for a deterioration of the independent and energetic spirit of the people by means of the *lordship* which *has been* over them.

This truly politic plan would soon improve the people. The present crisis, *kindly and steadily* used, may be made a great national blessing, if Landowners will exert themselves manfully, Christianly, lawfully, and perseveringly. If not, their *lordship* and *ownership* will go to wreck, and no one, rich or poor, be the better for their loss.

The line of conduct just and necessary to be pursued by the owners of land, with regard to their tenantry, and to the occupants of any portions of their lands, as well as the duties fairly required of them, are very different from what these would be in a more favourable state of society.

The glaring evil is pauperism.

The *first* care must be, to keep paupers, already destitute, from starving, or suffering extreme privations.

The next care should be to *prevent pauperism*, with all its painful sufferings and demoralizing influences.

Though the *poor* never cease to be in the land, yet the nation may be in a prosperous, happy state. The *poor* man or woman is, perhaps, on the average fully as happy and as high-minded as

the rich, so long as the *pauper spirit* is kept away—I mean the tendency to throw themselves upon public or private charity, and want of shame to beg, or to be supported in a poorhouse, so long as they can avoid it.

I do not cast dishonour on the poor, unable to work, or able, but, after using all exertions to find employment, still unemployed. If these beg, or receive charity, it is right; they are “God’s poor.” Sympathy, and tenderness, and kind respect be theirs.

But in the whole empire a pauper spirit too sadly prevails among the poor; and are the rich guiltless of its existence? In England and in Ireland how many are the evidences of its prevalence; and in England, witness the many horrifying details in the *Times* newspaper of late weeks, in evidence of the utter inadequacy of the English Poor-law to meet the evil.

Some may hang down their hands and say, it is in vain to combat with such a spirit, when it takes possession of, and depraves a class of the people. Nay, it is not in vain. A more desperate case is that of the persons who are so little gifted with love to their unhappy fellows, as to be able, for a moment, to tolerate the idea, that their amendment is a vain project, or who are so little endowed with energy, that they can sit still and see their fellows carried down the torrent of pauperism, without a determined endeavour to rescue them. Yet even the case of these is not hopeless. They, too, shall amend.

The providence of God has ordered that our people should so multiply, that, *in the present state of things*, many of them are always nearly, generally quite destitute.

The providence of God is *good*. The present state of things is *bad*.

With God’s blessing, the bad must be amended; and there are no persons placed by Providence in so evidently favourable a position for aiding in this, as landowners are, as a class.

And it is so ordered by a merciful power, that the very crisis which *forces* the duty upon them, *enables* them to benefit by the performance of that duty, especially in Ireland.

The power of the fertility of the soil is unknown; but this is known, and ascertained by selected agents of the Board of Works, that the work of profitable improvement of the soil of many

estates in Ireland *would occupy the whole available population of those estates for many years to come*, and the calculated *improved fertility* would allow of good and sufficient wages being given to every person employed.

And the land so improved, and made like a garden, would return produce for the support of a population, employed then in dressing and keeping it fertile, sufficient for their abundant supply and wealth.

Should any landowner then hang back, and leave his people sinking into degraded pauperism, and his land lying in unholy unproductiveness?

Should the Legislature and Government *suffer* any landowner to hang back, *if* one could be found so unfaithful to his country, and so unwise towards himself?

The estates which have been examined and reported upon, as above-mentioned, are such as may give a fair average of all Ireland; and if some localities are peculiarly circumstanced, such might be the subjects of peculiar legislation or arrangement; but, in general, even where a *district* cannot furnish profitable employment for its whole population, some other parts of the same landowner's property will make up the deficiency, and afford a field for labour.

The Government are now offering fair and easy means of employing all his tenantry, and the poor on his property, to every Landowner who will take the trouble to avail himself of it. Is there one who will take less trouble to save *many men* from destitution, from starvation, from DEATH, than is often taken to pursue and destroy a miserable fox? Trouble there will be, much more, too, than if the work had been *sooner* begun; but the trouble is not intolerable, the difficulties not invincible, and both are much less now than they will be in a month, if neglected till then, and infinitely less than if deferred still longer. The downward course is begun; *demoralization* to a frightful extent is going on, by the working of pauper gangs, degraded to letters A and B, as marks of abject destitution, working lazily under their taskmasters at useless work on the public roads.

Women are there! Women—mothers of your fellow-men! working in the snow, at the work of men.

We can find men among us to lead a forlorn hope, to storm a castle, to conquer an army, to brave the terrors of the cannon and sword, to defy fever and cholera, to leave house and home in *what is called* their country's cause—in war.

And shall there be a shrinking here? Is the call less urgent, the cause less holy?

Is the labour greater, or the success more desperate? Is the reward less desirable, the victory less glorious?

Landowners have been cast down in mind on viewing the position they are placed in, especially in Ireland.

Cast down! because they are in the van on the day of their country's battle! It is a post of *danger*. Yours it is to make it one of *honour*. Is not the field before you? Are not the weapons with which, under God, you may assail want and hunger, placed in your hands by the arrangements of government?

Why delay, then? Why are the poor people, in miserable pauper gangs, spoiling your roads, instead of, by honourable toil, improving your fields? Why does not your energy and credit import provisions? Your presence and example cheer your poor neighbours? Your steady countenance put down the marauding thieves who take advantage of the cry of hunger to cover their evil deeds? Why do you not rush to save your people, your property, your country, and yourselves?

Be faithful to your own best interests, and the government *cannot*, if it would, fail to stand by you (but the government has shown every readiness to aid).

Be faithful to your duties as citizens of your country, as bearing the name of Christians, and God's blessing will not fail you.

Landowners! you are proud of your position. Lead the way, and the rest will follow, and we shall see a result of our labours—a fruit of our pains, for which the country will bless you, while it will thank God for deliverance out of its forlorn and suffering state.

Are not many *perishing*? Is not the time passing? Then
 THINK DEEPLY—DETERMINE BOLDLY—ACT QUICKLY.

To those Landowners who *are acting* as men and as Christians, (and these are not a few,) I would say, go on; urge others on, and, above all things, let no light thing hinder us from *working in unison*, and God will command a blessing thereon.

NOTE.

Irish Landowners, by applying to the Board of Public Works, and department of *drainage*, will be instructed and aided in the best means of availing themselves of the facilities given in the present emergency, to those who are not in a condition to expend the necessary sums *themselves*, for the honourable maintenance of their population, their property, and lastly, of themselves. I have proved it, and found it so, and speak accordingly.

The subjects of emigration, manufactures, proper female employment, and others of themselves important, I have not touched on. To those who look on the state of the people with the eyes of true patriots, good men, and real Christians, these details will present themselves, and be acted upon in a spirit of steady, persevering determination, and if so, with success.

THE END.