

THE  
IRISH LAND QUESTION  
PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.  
A LETTER

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE, M.P.,  
FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY.

BY  
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## A LETTER, &C.

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TO THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE,

SIR,

In the disestablishment of the Irish Church, you have successfully grappled with one great branch of the "Irish difficulty;" another, and a far more complicated, now awaits and demands solution. The removal of the Irish Church, as a State institution, by its disestablishment and disendowment, is the clear and simple method of securing justice as between Churches and sects. The next great demand which Ireland makes on the Government is to secure to the people, as far as may be, justice as respects the land. The land question presses (as I believe you, Sir, and the Government feel) still more urgently than did the Church question for solution, but it is beset with elements of special and peculiar difficulty. The physical character of the country, the climate, the temper and habits of the people, and the prevalent traditionary economy of the landlords, have all to be taken into account. The problem cannot be solved theoretically, it must be solved practically—that is, with a due realisation of its main elements, and in their bearing on each other. Sharing in the sense of responsibility, which you yourself have well said, rests on every citizen as respects the government of Ireland, and more especially as a journalist, having occasion frequently to discuss questions connected with the land economy of Ireland; having been, moreover, during my whole lifetime practically conversant with farming,



I, last autumn, undertook a pretty extensive tour through Ireland, to see with my own eyes the land and the people—how the soil was treated, what were the main causes of failure, and in what direction a remedy was to be sought. During that tour, I had the opportunity of observing the cultivation and land economy of some of the richest districts of the north, the midland, and the south-eastern portions of the island, together with some of the wildest regions of the south-west. The conclusions I then came to, with the main grounds on which they are based, I now venture to submit for your consideration.

The first thing we have to do is to ascertain and determine the problem to be solved; and first of all the question arises—Are the resources of Ireland, or the people of Ireland, to be made the primary object of concern? If the development of the resources of Ireland ought to be the primary object with the State, and the condition and fate of the people a merely secondary concern, or no concern at all, then the policy of certain large purchasers in the Encumbered Estates Court might be encouraged and promoted as the readiest way to success. Take a well known case in the west. Large estates, thickly populated with small occupiers, are purchased. The land is surveyed; plans are sketched; for the *petit culture* is to be superseded at once by the large culture. The cottars are bribed or coaxed into submission by the concession of one or two years of free but final occupancy. The young and able-bodied are proffered employment as day-labourers. All others—the aged, the infirm, the feeble, those burdened with large infant families—must go, to find homes, or graves, where they may. This is one method of regenerating Ireland, and it has had its effects—its direct effects, and its inevitable implications. In it the resources of the soil—to get the most possible out of it by the most summary process—is the great object; the people are of little or no account, save as they can be made use of to accomplish this object.

But, indeed, it is not alone by the promoters of the grand culture that the people have been disregarded, but by Irish landlords, generally, of both classes. By the improving landlords—who are generally recent purchasers—they are regarded



merely as labourers; by the leave-alone landlords as rent-producers. The one class have ejected the occupiers, the other have applied, harder and harder, the screw, until the "good landlord"—the landlord almost worshipped in Ireland at this hour—is the landlord who neither evicts his tenants nor raises their rents. It happened to the writer to be travelling by train one afternoon from Belfast to Lisburn. A shrewd, respectable, middle-aged female forced her way into a second-class carriage (it was an excursion day), having a broad thin parcel under her arm, of which she was taking great care. In the course of conversation with her fellow-passengers, it came out that this was a portrait of her landlord, the late Marquis of Downshire, then only a few weeks deceased. Tentatively, I remarked—"I didn't think you had such regard for your landlords in Ireland." A shrewd business man in the opposite corner responded, "A good landlord deserves to be highly esteemed, there are so many bad ones." The ideal goodness I found to be in this case, and in all cases, throughout Ireland, as I have just stated, that of leaving his tenantry alone—neither evicting nor raising rents. But such landlords are the exception. Even this negative type of landlord goodness is not common, and between the two systems—that of eviction and that of grinding exaction—things have been brought in Ireland to this pass, as it was tersely put to me one day by a Killarney boatman, "Nobody stays in Ireland but those who cannot get away, and those who don't require to go." Those so poor as not to have the means of getting to another country, and those so rich as not to need to better their condition, only remain. This is not because the Irish people do not love their country, for no people could be more attached to their country and their soil. It is force, not choice, that has produced the vast stream of Irish emigration.

The consequences are inevitable, and, over a large portion of the island, they are patent to every eye—they obtrude themselves everywhere. The people are poor; they are despondent, broken-spirited. In the south of Ireland decay is written on every town. In the poorer parts you may see



every fifth or sixth house tenantless, roofless; allowed from year to year to moulder and moulder away, unremoved, unrepaired. As the large farm system, and the substitution of grazing for tillage extend, the cottier population become more and more excluded from remunerative, or any available, labour on the land. What results? That labour is in rags, and merges everywhere into beggary. They are shut out from digging, and to "beg" they are not "ashamed."

Now, that this state of things is a deplorable one, few will deny. That the mere application of capital to farming on the large scale will not cure it; rather, in proportion as it is thus applied, will in the first instance greatly aggravate it, is an inference lying on the surface of the case. To make room for these large-scale operations, evictions must go on, and as the process proceeds the numbers must be augmented of those who are unfit to work for hire and unable to leave the country. The poor must be made poorer; many now self-supporting made dependent. Pauperism must spread, and the burden of poor rates be vastly increased. If the greatest good of the greatest number be the fundamental principle of good government, this is not the direction in which the State should seek to accomplish the regeneration of Ireland. The development of the resources of the land ought to be made compatible with the improvement of the condition of the people.

The great body of the people of Ireland are dependent on the soil. Ireland is not a manufacturing country, and, with all deference to Lord Dufferin and others interested in the welfare of the country and people, probably never can be. The absence of coal would prove a standing hindrance to the establishment of manufactures on any extensive scale, though other conditions were favourable. The great body of the people are now dependent on the soil and will probably continue to be so. Is there scope in the soil of Ireland for the profitable industry of the population—have they the natural means and conditions for realising a comfortable maintenance? In the view of a large class of economists, Ireland is, as she has for long been, our great difficulty, mainly because she is too



prolific of people. "Nature," says a writer in the *Saturday Review*, "has restricted the fertility of Ireland to pasture lands and children—two kinds of production eminently inconsistent with each other." According to Lord Stanley (Speech to his constituents at King's Lynn), the whole Irish difficulty is concentrated in the fact that in Ireland there are too many people on the land—"A tenantry has been created in Ireland, a large part of which approaches to a condition of pauperism; and the subdivision of holdings has been carried so far as to make effective agricultural improvement almost impossible. Well, the landlords of the present day are trying to get back to a sounder condition by a gradual reduction in the number of holdings and increase to their size. With the peasants—who, if left alone, would continue the process of subdivision indefinitely—that policy is, I do not care to deny it, unpopular; and that is in reality the whole of the controversy." "The bulk of the population," says the *Saturday Review*, "despite the terrible warnings of the great famine, still clings to the soil, and if it only might, would carve it into barren morsels for a hungry and multiplying peasantry." "There are," says a writer of another school, "many men who imagine that Irishmen were intended by Providence to serve good agriculture, instead of good agriculture being intended to serve Irishmen." And what those who hold this view, desiderate above all things, is a further reduction of the population.

But is the population of Ireland too great for the agricultural capabilities of the soil? Is it true that ere Ireland can be prosperous that population must be further reduced? Are such assumptions grounded on practical knowledge of the physical characteristics of the country and the quality of the soil, or are they mere speculative assumptions? That they are the latter, not the former—mere assumptions not grounded on facts, but maintained in the teeth of these, must be evident, on even a cursory glance at the country, to the eye of every practical man. Ireland is adapted to be not merely a grazing country; the soil of Ireland is well adapted to the production of corn and roots, if only the conditions of good husbandry were fulfilled. "Few countries," says Stanyhurst, "are com-



parable, none preferable, to Ireland in wholesomeness of air, fertility of land, abundance of corn, extent of pasturage, and number of cattle." Mr Wakefield, in his account of Ireland, published in 1812, says, "A great portion of the soil of Ireland throws out a luxuriant herbage, springing from a calcareous subsoil, without any considerable depth. This is one species of rich soil in Ireland, and is found throughout Roscommon, parts of Galway, Clare, and other districts. Some places exhibit the richest loam I ever saw turned up by the plough." Mr. M'Culloch, in his account of the British Empire, says, "The luxuriance of the pastures, and the heavy crops of oats everywhere raised, even with the most wretched cultivation, attest its extraordinary fertility." And Arthur Young, speaking of Limerick and Tipperary, says—"It is the richest soil, applicable to every wish. It will fatten the largest bullock, at the same time do equally well for sheep, for tillage, for turnips, for wheat, for beans, in a word, for every crop and circumstance of profitable husbandry."

These testimonies to the natural fertility of the soil of Ireland, I can confirm from personal observation. The "fertility" of Ireland is not limited to "pasture lands and children," though it is richly productive in both. In the elements of natural fertility, only the richer parts of England, and very exceptional parts of Scotland, approach to it. Ireland exports year by year large quantities of agricultural produce—meat, corn, butter, &c. But it is a recognised principle of science, and one which commends itself to common sense, that there is but one way of keeping up the fertility, or full productive power of a soil from which such products are yearly withdrawn, viz., by restoring to it the equivalents of what you take away. But how is this to be done in a country like Ireland, when a great (probably the greater) portion of the money received for the produce exported goes away as rent, and is spent out of the country, and when, as a rule, Irish landlords, whether resident or non-resident, apply none, or next to none, of these revenues to the fertilising or improvement of the soil? Let us reflect for a moment on the different conditions (amounting, under a superficial similarity,



to absolute contrast) under which agriculture is pursued on this side and on the other side of the Irish Channel. In this island we have great mineral wealth, various and extensive manufactures, and a world-wide commerce, giving together employment to a large portion of the population, and presenting ready and remunerative markets for all kinds of agricultural produce. Instead of exporting the staple products of our soil—corn, meat, butter, &c.—we receive vast quantities of these from other countries. Not only is the produce of the island consumed within the island, but a vast deal more. The resources of the soil are not, indeed, everywhere developed as they might be, nor its fertility upheld. But we have the means, were they only properly economised, of doing so. Then, the revenue derived from the land is in great part spent at home, and a not inconsiderable portion of it returned to the land for reproductive uses. In each and all of these respects, the case of Ireland presents a marked contrast. The bulk of its population are engaged in agriculture. It is a country which exports largely of the produce of its soil. The money received for these exports is paid to the landlords as rent. Scarcely any of it is applied to aid in re-production, or keep up the fertility of the land, and great part of it goes out of the country, never in any shape to return. Need we wonder that Ireland is poor, need we wonder that her people are dissatisfied. Under the treatment the soil of Ireland receives, great part of that of Scotland would long ago have ceased to produce any crops at all—would have relapsed into sterility. It is only the natural richness of the soil of Ireland which has averted a like result. But rich as it is, and capable, so far, of recovering fertility, if only let out into grass, it stands to reason that the finer elements are in course of being gradually withdrawn from the soil. Skilful farmers remark that its meadows—beautiful as is their close carpet of green—do not fatten stock proportionately to their apparent richness. Nor is Irish milk equal to that drawn from the more highly manured, though less verdant fields of Scotland. Indeed, only its superior natural fertility has kept the soil of Ireland from being utterly exhausted. That the people should resent a



land economy which is thus ever draining out the life-blood of the nation, is anything but cause for wonder. Rather must every dispassionate observer be led to concur in the view which a shrewd Ulster man expressed to me in conversation on the prevalent land economy—"No other people under heaven would have borne the treatment the Irish have borne in respect to the land."

To such treatment the soil of Ireland has now for many years—I may say, in all but a few exceptional cases, for generations—been subjected. And through this, as one main cause, is it that the people are poor. It is not that the soil of Ireland is incapable of producing abundant sustenance for the population on it. Far otherwise. Were the resources and capabilities of the soil properly developed, it might maintain in comfort as large a population as that before the famine. With only its present population, it might do this, and make a very large contribution—in the great agricultural staples—to our necessities. If the people are poor—and that the body of them are so is undeniable—it is from other causes than that the soil of Ireland is inadequate to produce abundance to meet their wants. There are two ways by which this state of things may be altered—the one, to which Lord Stanley points, is a farther reduction of the population, the other is an increase of the produce. The latter method is the one to which not only benevolence, but self-interest points. It will not be for the national good, but the reverse, that the process of the last 20 years—the process of exhausting Ireland of her people—should go on. We need men for our army, we need men for our navy. We need Irishmen for our great industrial undertakings—as our "hewers of wood and drawers of water." But, above all, the Irish are needed at home. If Ireland is to become what she ought to be—if her agricultural resources are to be developed—it can only be through a largely increased application of labour to the land. For the half-idle half-famished population—ever merging into beggary—so widely diffused over Ireland, there is abundant work, could they only be set to do it. There is treasure, almost limitless in that marvellous soil, but it needs to be "dug" for; and, if Ireland



does not need more diggers, she needs that they should do the digging under more favourable conditions. Unless these be secured, Ireland will be more and more impoverished.

Passing an exhausted farm one day (and by a Scotch farmer too, who was leaving it, having taken everything he could out of the land), I came up with an intelligent man, and who, I found, had passed a considerable life-time as coachman in various parts of Ireland. Making inquiries of him as to how the farm had been treated, and, talking of how its productive fertility was to be restored, I remarked that it wanted an application of "bones." "Bones!" he exclaimed, "What do you mean by that?" "Why, just literally bones ground down and applied as manure." "I never heard of such a thing," was the response. And so it is generally. The most fertilising of extraneous manures is unknown. Even the most advanced farmers use, in addition to farm yard manure, only a little "superphosphate" for their root crops. Bones were at one time exceptionally used, but the demand was so limited that the manure merchants have ceased to supply them. The fact is indicative, and I may say characteristic, of hand-to-mouth farming. The superphosphate acts only as a temporary stimulant, leaving the land no richer, but poorer rather, when the crop to which it is applied has been removed. Its exclusive use as an extraneous manure is quite in harmony with—may be regarded as an issue of—the prevalent uncertainty of tenure. Occupancy depending from year to year on the will of the landlord, how can the tenant be expected to put anything into the soil save what will make him the most immediate return? And to a tenantry, "a large part of which approaches a condition of pauperism," even this inadequate resource is unavailable. But there is this one point on which no practical farmer visiting Ireland can entertain a doubt, namely, that there is nothing in the physical characteristics or the soil of Ireland to prevent it from offering an adequate field of labour for all the population now dependent on agriculture in the country—from yielding abundant produce, in all the agricultural staples for their maintenance—and, over and above, a large surplus for exportation. This is the first



point to be settled in the great problem of dealing with the Irish Land Question, and no practical man can hesitate as to his verdict. The soil of Ireland is well adapted for pasturage, but not for pasturage only; much of it is equally adapted for tillage. Under improved conditions—quite practicable—it might be still better adapted for tillage. The fulfilment of these conditions would afford remunerative employment to the Irish people. How are they to be fulfilled?

Why should not Ireland be cultivated—as effectually for the land, as advantageously for the people—as, say, for example, Scotland is cultivated? There must be certain hindrances to this; and when the problem is practically regarded, these hindrances will be found ranging themselves into three classes. There are (1) the physical requirements of the case; (2) the pecuniary difficulty; (3) the—as we may call them—moral obstacles. Now, in treating of the regeneration of Ireland, it is necessary, if possible, to get sound notions on each of these points—notions in accordance with the facts. On a superficial examination it might seem the more natural way to discuss these points in the order in which I have stated them; but on looking a little deeper into the matter, the preferable course appears to be to take the last first. Are the Irish people—as many seem to have all but finally concluded—hopelessly at fault, either as regards their sentiments or their industrial capabilities? Is their disaffection so rooted as to be beyond the power of just and conciliatory treatment to reduce it? Are their indolence and slovenliness to be no otherwise overcome than by dislodging them from their native soil? Were we shut up to an affirmative answer as respects either of these questions, I should at once give up the case as hopeless. But facts do not compel to this in either the one case or the other. Let us look for a little at each.

The Irish are far from an essentially disloyal people. Indeed, they are, by natural temperament, very much the opposite. The sentiment of reverence for hereditary rank has a deep ground in the national character. If anything, it tends to be excessive rather than defective. I have already referred to the reverence for the “good” landlord; and a very



moderate amount of goodness, or even the mere negation of bad qualities (especially if he be a lord) will suffice to secure it. There is a tendency to worship the class which has inflicted on the country the greatest wrong, if only the wrong is bearable. In fact, paradoxical as it may seem, the virulence of Irish discontent may be taken as measuring the capacity of the people for loyalty. As respects the body of the people, I believe it to be quite possible to make their attachment to us as conspicuous as has been their alienation. I have seen no reason to conclude that the taint of Fenianism has deeply infected anything more than a fraction of the Irish people. The dream of an Irish Republic is an exotic which only continued injustice and injury can keep alive in Irish soil. Do justice to the Irish people in two vital matters—in respect to the Church, but especially in respect to the land, and it will speedily die.

The habits of the Irish people present more formidable difficulties than their sentiments in the way of those whose aim it is to make them a prosperous and contented nation. The common people possess those susceptibilities which form the basis of taste, but unfortunately there is among them no standard of either comfort or personal presentableness. Hence it is that Irish families can live in community with the pig and the donkey, and that the Irish labourer is not ashamed to be seen anywhere in garments however tawdry and ragged. In my visits to Continental Roman Catholic countries, I used to be pleased to see the people going freely into the churches in their working clothes, as indicative of the absence of what, in the case of many in England, constitutes a formidable barrier to taking part in religious observances. But a brief experience of Ireland forces on the observer another side of the question. The habit of resorting to the churches in ragged and dirty clothes, precludes one important means—perhaps the most potent of any—of training to self-respect. Where there is no standard—however moderate—of personal decency, any more than of domestic comfort, there is hardly anything on which to base efforts for the elevation of a people. There is, in this respect, a great educational work to be



accomplished in Ireland, and one requiring the combined efforts of all who have any competence and influence in lending a helping hand. The school might be made to do a good deal. But if school tuition and discipline are to have fair play, there must be concurrent improvement in the homes and habits of the people. What effect can the wisest and most pertinent lessons be expected to produce where the home life proceeds in direct counteraction and antagonism to them? It is here that a resident gentry—a land-owning class alive to its responsibilities and opportunities—might render an inestimable service. Through the ingrained regard—we might call it reverence—in the Irish nature for hereditary rank and wealth, they can wield an influence beyond that exercised by any other class of the community. A body of landlords actuated by a due recognition of the maxim that “property has its duties as well as its rights”—maintaining in every district a model farm, presenting a high and pure type of social life, leaders and exemplars in matters of taste, culture, and moral progress—might, within a generation, produce an entire change throughout the country, both as respects industry and social habits. That from absence, from incompetence, or from indisposition, land-owning families of this type are the rare exception, not the rule, is—directly or indirectly—one of the main causes of the social depression, the industrial stagnation, and the chronic discontent of the Irish people. It is not the genius of the people that is at fault. They are not a dull and insusceptible, but a quick, lively, and most impressible race. They are by their national temperament most amenable to influence; but this fact only makes it the more important that they should be brought under healthy influences, only the more perilous that they should be exposed to misleading and delusive influences. And if those who are, by the structure of society, and by the laws, constituted their natural leaders, have failed—as they have all but universally and lamentably failed—to exercise their appropriate influence, need we wonder at finding such a people grievously *mised*?

In default of the landed gentry, and next to them as to power over the people for improving their habits, come the



priests. Now that, through the establishment of religious equality, we are in near prospect of the removal of all ground for ecclesiastical jealousy and agitation, a weighty responsibility will attach to the priesthood as respects improvement both in the temper and the habits of the people. We may regret that Protestantism has made so little progress in Ireland, nevertheless we must deal with the facts of the case as we find them. Nor need we, in this respect, look for any sudden or rapid change. The priesthood have immense influence, and that influence is likely to continue for a good while to come. Nor am I of those who regard that influence as wholly and necessarily evil. On the contrary, I believe that it might be so exerted as greatly to promote domestic and social improvement; and now that all just cause of complaint, as respects the Roman Catholic Church, is removed, I am not without hope that a different spirit may be induced from that which has hitherto prevailed. Under the new order of things, we may hope by and bye to see men like the late Archbishop Murray taking the place of Cardinal Cullen, and substituting conciliation and reason for ill-disguised sedition and Ultramontane "blarney." Nor do I apprehend that the real influence of the Protestant clergy will be reduced through disestablishment; but rather, through being purged of invidious and factitious elements, much enhanced.

Then, the introduction of a just land economy would give a stimulus to improvement, the force of which, antecedently to experience, it were impossible to estimate. If we are to advance the agriculture of Ireland through, and by means of, the industry of the people, we must stimulate as well as encourage them. It will not do merely to invite and facilitate; we must induce, not to say, compel. There are those—and among them men of high name and influence—who regard security of tenure as enough. But such assumptions proceed either in ignorance or in disregard of the facts and practical conditions of the case. It will not do to make the Irish cultivator secure in possession and then leave him to himself. There are proofs of this in the cases—not by any means absolutely few—of perpetual tenure. By uniform



testimony, the cultivation of such holdings is not the best, but the worst. It is the fact—and a fact which it will be fatal to ignore—that there is in the Irish nature a strong tendency to *vegetate* on the soil. Its prevalent richness tempts to this, while the absence of any standard of domestic comfort or personal respectability reconciles to it. The famine had its weighty practical lesson, which we must neither disregard nor misinterpret. The famine was due, as Mr. Disraeli lately truly enough said, to the people having become dependent on one root, which failed. Left to themselves, a great portion of the Irish people would subside into the same dependence again. A large farmer in Wexford county (a Scotchman) remarked to me, that one year when there was a full crop of sound potatoes, he could scarcely get hands to reap and gather his harvest—"He hoped he might never see a full crop of potatoes again."

That there is a strong tendency among cultivators of the soil to adhere to traditionary habits and ways is a well known fact. Even among Scotch farmers the influence of habit and routine is great. Among the Irish we might expect to find it much greater and more inveterate, and such is actually the case. I will only refer to two examples. All through Ireland, the native cultivators plough or dig the land in ridges, 6 to 8 feet wide, clearing out a deep narrow trench with the shovel between. This is done partly for drainage, but also, and where drainage is not needed, under pretence of throwing up mould to cover the seed. Of course, deep or thorough culture under such a system is impossible, whilst harvesting and carting on the land are both much obstructed; yet the native cultivator will go on practising his old method side by side with the broad ridges and smooth level fields of his Scotch neighbour. The other example is in the traditionary style of building hay and corn stacks. The universal shape of hay ricks, whether in field or in yard, resembles that of a broad-based druggist's bottle broken off at the neck, giving the maximum breadth of bottom to be damaged on the ground, and the largest extent of roof exposed to, or requiring protection from, the rain. The style of corn stack—and especially in the south of Ireland—



instead of that of a cone upon a cylinder, is as near an approximation as may be to a double cone. The foundation is narrow, and the stack expands to the eaves. Being also built low, thatching involves about double the really proper amount both of material and labour. I asked a young man, son of a farmer near Lisburn, "Why don't you build your hay stack straight up, with a short roof?" "Don' know," was the reply, "never thought of it." Yet this lad had been in Scotland; had observed and could describe our approved style of stackbuilding.

Another proof that the Irish need stimulus as well as encouragement is found in the fact that the most exemplary industry and energy are shown where the difficulties and natural discouragements are the greatest. Whilst the richer parts of the country are too often cultivated in a perfunctory, slovenly way, in the poorer parts,—in boggy and mountainous localities,—you may see a persistent industry and energy, in bringing every available shred and patch of soil into cultivation, not to be exceeded anywhere in Scotland, or in the world. For example, between Mountpleasant and Dundalk, is a district occupied in small holdings where the soil is comparatively poor, either the bottom of what had been a peat bog or almost half the surface encumbered by irremovable rocks and boulders, yet cultivated throughout with a most indomitable industry. The same persistent industry, pursued under correspondingly disadvantageous circumstances, may be observed over a vast district in the south-west. From Tarbert (on the Shannon) to near Tralee had been originally one immense peat-bog, which is being gradually cleared away as fuel. As the peat is removed, cultivation presses on, corn, grass, potatoes, turnips, occupying the subjacent soil, hard under, and even between the peat-banks; while all around, and far as the eye can reach, may be descried the thickly-planted homesteads of a painfully industrious population.

These, and like instances, afford incontestable evidence that the Irish are capable of sustained persistent industry applied to their native soil, whenever the conditions are such as to call it forth. What is the practical lesson we should



derive from such a fact, viewed in connection with that other fact (equally undeniable) that, as the natural conditions become more favourable this industry tends to diminish? Why, clearly this, that where nature does not impose the same stern necessity of exertion, some other effective stimulus must be applied ere we can hope to realise the desiderated results. Where nature makes the conditions too easy, so to speak, a just necessity arises for the application of the complement of stimulus by either the landlord or the law. To the landlords it has been wholly left to apply the stimulus to the Irish cultivator, and they have applied it only in one form—by the exaction of high rents. That this acts as a spur to industry, so far, cannot be denied, as ejectment is the consequence of failure to pay. But when the exaction is dissociated from all security of tenure, the stimulus is, not to any permanent improvement of the soil, but simply to get the most out of it from year to year. Under this system, the soil of Ireland is, as I have shown, becoming gradually impoverished, instead of having its productive resources developed and its fertility increased.

Here, then, is the case. The Irish people want employment, and the land wants labour. Out of their own country Irishmen do the kind of work which the land wants, and there can be no doubt but that, under fitting stimulus and encouragement, they can be made to do the same kind of labour in it. They are not indifferent to the land; on the contrary, they are intensely attached to the land. It was the duty of the landlords to have utilised and directed this passion of the people to the development of the productive resources of the soil. But as they have lamentably and utterly failed, it becomes the State seriously to entertain the question, whether it may not take on itself this great and exigent duty, and if it may, whether it is not bound to do so?

What, then, is the first thing to be done? The physical conditions of the problem must be thoroughly realised to begin with. In order to any adequate development of the resources of the soil, Ireland wants drainage. But the drainage of Ireland is a large undertaking, not only from the extent to



which it is needed, but from the physical characteristics of the country. The structure of Ireland has this peculiarity, that the mountainous parts lie at corners or near the coast, while the inland and central parts are comparatively level, presenting vast stretches of plain. In these circumstances, it will be evident to every practical man, that the first difficulty to be overcome is that of outfall. There must be arterial drainage, carried from district to district, and often from county to county. It is altogether hopeless to get the landlords of Ireland—many non-resident, many separated by religious and race alienations, all, or nearly all, looking to rent as the primary object—it is quite hopeless, I say, to get the landlords to unite in such undertakings. If this primary requisite of all thorough agricultural improvement is to be secured, the Government must take it up as a great public work. In India, we recognise a corresponding duty, and are labouring in its fulfilment, and why not in Ireland? The necessity is about as great in the one case as in the other—whether we regard its physical or its moral elements—and the prospective return in both respects at least as hopeful, and likely to be sooner realised.

And there exist special facilities. The Ordnance Survey of Ireland is complete. On the maps, every boundary is distinctly laid down, with every house and building. The elevations are marked by gradually darkening tints, bog being distinguished from all other land. Thus the tracts specially requiring drainage can be readily discerned, and the course of the great arterial cuttings and main outfalls provisionally traced, by means of these beautiful maps, which are so minute and perfect in their delineations as to show even garden walks. The whole surface of the island being thus portrayed, these ordnance maps form a ready and reliable basis on which to proceed at once to practical measures.

The first step to be taken is for the Government to issue a mixed commission of engineers and practical agriculturists, to determine on the great arterial lines of drainage to be opened, and which, like the great irrigation works of India, must be undertaken as a public work. Otherwise, as I have



said, it will never be undertaken at all. And without these great arterial cuttings, Ireland cannot be thoroughly drained, and, by consequence, its productive resources never other than imperfectly developed. With a humid climate, a prevalently flat surface, and a soil in many parts unduly retentive of moisture, thorough drainage lies at the very basis of adequate and remunerative culture. Effectively drained and well manured, the soil is capable of bearing large, and, in many parts, magnificent crops of all kinds. Indeed, it is speaking only moderately, to say that, under thoroughly efficient cultivation, the produce of the island might be doubled. The next duty of the Commissioners would be to trace the lines of sub-outfall, leading through the various districts, and to, and between, different properties. This would conduct to the third and final step in its labours as regards arable lands, and the most laborious and difficult one, that, viz., of determining in detail where drainage is required, and guided by the nature of the soil and subsoil, indicating what amount would be efficient. The geological formation on which the soil rests, and of which it is the detritus, will of course afford valuable guidance here; and the case is much simplified by the fact that by far the largest proportion of the soil of Ireland rests on the limestone formation.

So far I have in view arable, grass, and meadow lands. The bog land of Ireland forms a category by itself. A great deal of nonsense has been talked and written about the Irish bogs. That they are undrainable; how the peat is to be got rid of, and so forth. I agree with a shrewd gentleman whom I happened to meet in the train going from Dublin to Limerick, that the peat will be got rid of fast enough by being used as fuel. In a country where there is scarcely coal, and very inadequately supplied with timber (for the landlords, among other neglects, have almost wholly neglected planting), peat, wherever it is found, forms the staple fuel of the common people, and when the peat is removed, the subjacent soil is quite susceptible of being drained. Indeed, one wonders at seeing such crops as are produced on it, with the very inefficient drainage the poor people can extemporise.



The drainage of the delta and swamps of the Upper Shannon would be a special work; but as I had not the opportunity of visiting that part of Ireland, I only refer to it as, probably, the greatest undertaking of the kind which the country presents, yet one likely to yield an ample and speedy return. Nor do I more than merely note that the coasts of Ireland present here and there extensive diluvial reaches, laid bare at low water, which a people like the Dutch would long ago have walled in from the sea, and converted into fertile fields.

It may be urged that it is not the proper function of Government to undertake such works—that it is enough if it stimulate and encourage such undertakings (as was done in the case of Scotland, for example), by a Drainage or Improvements Loan. To this the conclusive answer is, that such a loan has now been available for many years, and has been taken up only to so limited an extent as to show that it is not in this way Ireland is ever to be effectively drained. During an extended tour—from Dublin through to Limerick, from Limerick to Tralee and Killarney, from Killarney across the southern part of the island by Mallow, Lismore, Cahir, Waterford, and New Ross, to Wexford; and from Wexford all along the eastern side to Belfast—with excursions in the north, south-west, and south-east—I did not observe drainage operations in more than about half-a-dozen places, and these on a very limited scale. Yet, being the month of September (1868), and an early gathered harvest, it was the season of the year of all others for having such operations carried out; and had they been other than so exceptional as to be almost singular, they must have been every now and again meeting the eye. Yet “drainage,” “drainage,” is the prominent entry in my notes, almost all through. From the want of drainage, in a wet season, not only do the grain crops suffer, but in the more retentive soils, the root crops are liable to prove an utter failure. A Scotch farmer in Wexford, with whom I spent a day or two, pointed out to me a field on his farm (not distinctly wet, but only too retentive of moisture), where one bad season he failed to get more than one-third of his turnips



sown down at all. In the midst of operations, and when great part of the land had been manured, a continuous flood of rain came on, which completely soaked the soil, and it was impossible to touch it again till the season for sowing had quite passed away. What makes drainage of more importance than in the more rigorous climate, for example, of Scotland, is the comparative absence of frost. When ploughed land gets into such soaked condition, it is extremely difficult to pulverize it. From this cause, my friend told me that next season, when the same field was sown with barley, he scarcely reaped the seed. Yet, if thoroughly drained, such land would be most productive,—capable of bearing heavy crops of all kinds.

Thus, then, when most landlords do nothing spontaneously, and the Government Improvements Loan fails to stimulate them,—when it is hopeless to look to the tenants, who have generally no security of tenure, and whose capital is quite inadequate to such undertakings in the few cases where they enjoy leases,—how is the work ever to be accomplished unless the Government take the initiative? No doubt it is a great and formidable undertaking. But, Sir, is not the case urgent—its requirements such as to warrant and prompt to enterprise? Things cannot go on as they have been doing. A heavy responsibility will attach to the Legislature if it allow them to drift into a still worse state; and I have shown that, apart from its intervention, there is no ground whatever to look for their becoming better. The soil of the country must become gradually more and more impoverished; the people continue poor, helpless, and discontented. But once let the Government show a really practical interest in their condition. Let it be clearly understood that the aim of the Legislature is not to drive the people out of Ireland, but to give them food, labour, and homes on their native soil, and a new spirit would be infused into the whole nation. “Ireland for the Irish,” would become a rallying cry, with more in it of genuine, practical reality than has ever yet been. Travelling one day by mail car in the south of Ireland, the driver picked up a man near the end of the journey, who would not have



been taken for other than a beggar in this country, whose shirt, if he had one, had long ceased to be a luxury. In the course of conversation, the driver, who was evidently familiar with him, remarked, "I heard from Jane from America yesterday." "Well, how is she getting on?" "She does not complain, *but Ireland is better. Everything is taxed there.*" There was a world of suggestiveness in these few simple words. When the feeling begins to prevail that Ireland is better than America, then will be our opportunity for conciliating the Irish people. In the view of many, we owe Fenianism to the American war. It will be a curious example of the law of compensation, if to the same cause we should owe the antidote to Fenianism. Nor do I doubt that it will be so, if we have only the wisdom and the courage to give this new feeling free scope to operate. "Ireland is better; in America everything is taxed."

In order to the agricultural resources of Ireland being developed, it is essential that Ireland be drained. In order to the drainage of Ireland being other than partial and inefficient, there must first be a great system of arterial drainage. Arterial drainage will never be effected by voluntary concert and combination. The landlords will not combine to effect it. As to the tenants doing so, that is entirely out of the question. If accomplished at all, it must be as a great public work, undertaken by the Government. It *would* be a great undertaking. That is readily to be acknowledged. That, indeed, must be realised. But it is the key to the regeneration of Ireland. Through this, and what this would tend to, we might give the people employment at home, improve their condition, double agricultural production, attach the people to the Government, and lead them into the path of contentment and prosperity. Do not such results warrant a little boldness—justify a slight infringement on old routine? As to the expense: the cost of now governing Ireland, in excess of what the cost of governing Ireland ought to be—of what, in a sound state of the body politic, it would be—amounts to more than would yearly be required for carrying forward this great work. I need not ask you, Sir,



whether it were not better to organise and pay an army of industry than an army of coercion and repression? If it is objected that such undertakings are beyond the scope of Government, let us reflect what Government has for object and end. That object—let us call it justice, or the greatest good of the greatest number—will be found (if we only adequately realise it), not only to warrant, it will be found, in the case of Ireland, to demand the course I recommend.

Trial, through a period of more than ample duration, has been made of the system of leave-alone. That has proved a failure, not only as respects the national industry and the development of the resources of the soil, it has proved a yet greater failure as respects the government of the people. It has utterly defeated itself. We have left them to themselves—the lords and the tillers of the soil—until their relations had become such that we could leave them alone no longer. We left landlords free to do as they would with their own, till the spirit of lawlessness became such as to compel us to suspend the Act which lies at the basis of our freedom. In a four years' suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act we may read the emphatic condemnation of our policy. Nemesis has overtaken us. We have been compelled to interfere, and in a way at once the harshest to the people and the most costly and discreditable to ourselves. Is it not time, Sir, to turn over a new leaf—to see whether a system at once so costly and abortive may not have an end—whether part of the money we now expend in governing Ireland may not be made reproductive—and the disgrace attaching to our rule proportionately wiped away? Through your perspicacity, high patriotism, and courage, one great act of justice has been accomplished. That measure will yield us the means of initiating a yet greater—a great process of agricultural improvement and industrial conciliation.

In resolving that the Irish Church surplus should be reserved for the future disposal of Parliament, I cannot but think, Sir, that the Lords have done much better than they intended. They meant to intercept it with the view (on the part of many of their number, at least) of applying it anew to



ecclesiastical objects. But schemes of concurrent endowment are dead and buried. Their most zealous advocates confess to the hopelessness of all such proposals. The current of popular opinion is dead against them. But this bone of contention out of the way for good and all, there is a general concurrence as to the principle which should guide the application of these surplus funds—they are to be applied for the good of the Irish people. Now, as these revenues are derived from the soil, I hold, Sir, that there can be no application of them more legitimate than to the development of the resources of the soil. Under a wise and comprehensive scheme, I am persuaded that thus a portion (and it would need no inconsiderable portion) of those funds could be applied more beneficially for the great body of the Irish people—more effectually as regards the development of the national resources—than in any other way.

What I propose, then, in the first instance, is that the Government should undertake the necessary arterial drainage. The money requisite at the outset might be advanced by way of loan, the Government to be recouped as the tithe-rent-charge fell in to the State. Thus funds which have hitherto been monopolised by one small section of the community (and that the richest), would be applied beneficially for all. Revenues, which have been a source of alienation and bitter animosity, would be made to link county to county, province to province, and even class to class. National funds would thus be applied to a truly national purpose—to works which, if followed up, as the Government must see to their being followed up, would greatly benefit the whole Irish people, and not any mere section of them. By such an application of the funds of the Irish Church, no religious or sectarian jealousy could be stirred, whilst it would be free from the objection of favouring one social class at the expense of the other, by relieving it of its due share of public burdens, or otherwise. This would benefit the landlords, no doubt, but on the clear condition of its being the initiatory step of a process which is ultimately to benefit the tenant as much.



The next step in that process is the connecting of the sub-arterial and main drainage with the great arterial lines, and this I would propose to make a direct charge on the land, the charge being apportioned on each estate by the Government Surveyors, proportionately to the extent of land requiring drainage, for which an out-fall is opened up. This, with the cutting of the drains, and the cost of drain tiles (or the quarrying of stones where at hand or preferable), I would charge on the landlord, allowing him, however, to draw a certain proportion of the sum yearly expended from the Irish Improvements Loan Fund. Then, lastly, I would charge the tenant or occupier with the filling of the drains, and performing all the necessary carriages, say of stones, or drain pipes, from the railway station or brickwork, to his land.

A national undertaking on so large a scale would require time for its completion—a series of years, say, fourteen, perhaps twenty-one years. But then the Legislature must see to it that the work is accomplished. In order to this, it will be necessary to pass an Act of the Legislature, making the performance of the shares assigned to landlord and tenant, respectively, obligatory. In the case of any landowners declining, the Government would be prepared to take their estates off their hands at the present value of the land, as ascertained and fixed by competent valuers. And, similarly, as respects tenants; their engaging to execute the part of the work falling to them being one clear condition on which they retain their holdings. Where the landlord and the tenant agree to do each his respective part, it would only be further necessary to fix, as regards the former, the period (say 21, or more, years) within which the money drawn from the Improvements Loan Fund must be repaid, whilst the latter should have a lease of his holding for 21 years, at its present rent, or at valuation, as the case might be. Removals of tenants or occupiers of land should be limited to the three cases following:—Either voluntary, on the part of the tenant (as preferring removal to undertaking the required improvements), or where the occupier was to have accommodation otherwise on the estate; or, on due cause shown by the land-



lord before an arbiter appointed by Government, and whose decision shall be binding on either party, and final.

Where the landlord might decline to carry out the requisite improvements, the Government, I have said, should be prepared to relieve him of his property, paying him for the same at its present value. The estate might then be put up for sale, and where the Commissioners, through the District Surveyor, might so recommend, the occupying tenants might have the first offer. All sales, however, to be made on the clear condition and undertaking that the requisite improvements be made within the specified time. By the working details, attached to each deed of conveyance or lease, would be set forth the proportion of improvements or quota of work to be effected year by year; and the District Surveyor, with, of course, a certain limited discretion, would have, as one of his duties, to see that this due proportion of work were, year by year, accomplished.

As respects improvable waste land, and pasture lands rendered, through drainage, suitable for tillage, these might, to some extent, supply outlets for the surplus agricultural population. On owners declining to undertake the task of reclamation, such lands should revert to the Government at their present value. They might be divided into holdings of, say 5 to 10 acres (not to be further subdivided), or farms of say 50 to 80 acres, and each by itself put up for sale, under, of course, the like condition of carrying out the works necessary for bringing the land into proper cultivation. This, together with such holdings as might be purchased by occupiers on lands reverting to the Government, would open the way for a gradual introduction of peasant and small properties—a far safer course than any wholesale scheme of transference or transmutation. Indeed, I must regard all such schemes as purely theoretical, and such as (were they possible to be accomplished, which they are not) would, I am satisfied, prove, in the majority of instances, a grievous failure. No system will succeed which does not supply a practical stimulus to the cultivator; and when the landlord fails to apply this stimulus, and fails of his own proper part and duty as



well, the Government must step in and apply the requisite stimulus to both. Where either proves recalcitrant, the Government has only to say—"Very well; these are the conditions which, in the public interest, we require to have fulfilled, if you decline to undertake their fulfilment, we relieve you of your land (or holding, as the case may be), and dispose of it to those who will."

Next in importance to having the requisite system of arterial and main drainage carried out, would be its maintenance in an efficient working state. In order to this it would be necessary to place the main and outfall drains under charge of a public officer, who might be designated Conservator of Drainage. He would be responsible for their maintenance in a clear working state; for the repair of temporary and accidental breaches, &c., and should present an annual report to be laid before Parliament. The yearly cost of maintenance and cleaning would be considerable, and should be made a charge on the land, and proportioned to the extent of the property served and the benefit derived from the works.

A preliminary to the undertaking would be the valuation by competent valuers of the whole lands to be affected by the drainage works; these valuations, duly attested, being recorded and preserved in the Lands' Office, Dublin. At the close of the first term of lease, embracing what may be called the drainage period, there should be a re-valuation of the whole lands, in the same manner, by public valuers, and every holder should have offer of a renewal of lease at the annual rent put on it by the valuers, but subject always, as before, to reference to a public arbitrator, in case of the landlord expressing dissatisfaction with a tenant. In the case of all lands which, by the report of the Commissioners, could not have been efficiently drained apart from the outfall works, and where one-fourth, or upwards, had by the drainage been added to the annual value of the land, a percentage should, from the period above-named, be charged proportioned to the increase of annual value accruing from the works.

Such is a brief indication of the scheme I propose. It



is, it will be seen, conceived with the view of giving the least possible disturbance to the present order of things, consistently with the work being accomplished. It requires no wholesale transfer of estates, and no wholesale removal of occupiers. It does not require that even absentee proprietors should relinquish their lands, only that they cannot continue to retain the rights of property while shirking all its duties. The good of the people is the supreme law, and the conditions both of land-owning and land-holding must be brought into conformity with it. The Government, which is not wise enough to know, or, knowing it, wants strength to compel this to be done, will proclaim and signalize its incompetence. The land is the one great resource of the Irish people; to place the land under a just economy must therefore be about the first duty of the Government. Habitual neglect of the duty will not alter the reason of the case, and the melancholy issues of that neglect ought surely to open our eyes. Our laws proclaim their inadequacy when they fail of the ends for which all laws and Government exist. Then, is it not the duty of the Government to enact such laws as will tend to prevent evil and promote good, as well as redress injustice and punish wrong-doing? And, as of the laws, so of those who administer and enforce them. I cannot see why it should not be as appropriate a judicial function to prevent wrong-doing as to secure redress (often costly and unavailing) when wrong has been done. We can now see some dawning recognition of this in the institution of Courts of arbitration for the settlement of the price and conditions of labour; and is there anything *outrè* in the proposal thus to settle the conditions of occupancy and the rent of the land? In the case of the Irish occupier, at least, the necessity of intervention is as great,—the evils are on such a scale of magnitude as to be national. On the old system of leaving the landlords and tenants to themselves it is hopeless of remedy.

And if it is not unfitting for the Government to do what I propose—if it is an urgent requirement, yet certain not to be otherwise fulfilled—no mere conventional claims of the landowning class should be allowed to stand in the way. I



do not propose to rob the landowners of anything,—only require of them (while helping them to perform) those duties they have hitherto utterly neglected. If they decline to undertake the more cardinal duties of their position, we relieve them of the obligation, by giving them full value for their property. Either way we shut out all ground of complaint, unless it be on the untenable plea that their mere will or caprice shall continue to over-ride the public weal. “A man,” says Mr. Fitzgibbon, “who neglects the duty of cultivating the land confided to him, and leaves it in its original sterility, or who lets it to others on such hard or uncertain terms as to disable or discourage them from performing the duty which follows the land, and attaches to the precarious possession which he hires to them, not only justifies interference on behalf of the State, but makes it the duty of the Government to apply a legislative remedy for this plain abuse.”\* “The only question,” Mr. Fitzgibbon adds, “is as to what the remedy should be, and how it can be justly and efficiently applied.” The scheme which Mr. Fitzgibbon suggests is described in the following passage, which I quote, as being (so far as it goes) more conformable to the practical requirements of the case than any other which has come under my eye—“Pass an Act by which every tenant in the country, great and small, having a term less than seven years in his land, shall be entitled to transmit to some public functionary, constituted for the purpose, a written notice that he desires to improve his farm, and undertakes, within three years, to add twenty per cent., or some other substantial and specified amount, to the present yearly value, and let him have liberty to do so, if he only specifies before-hand a reasonable and practicable plan of his intended work. If, on inspection, his proposal be approved of by an impartial public officer, let him have a protecting

\* “The Land Difficulty of Ireland, with an Effort to Solve it. By Gerald Fitzgibbon, Esq., Master in Chancery, author of ‘Ireland in 1868,’” pp. 33-34. Mr. Fitzgibbon, while he writes with a keen and even vehement conservative animus, has the advantage of wide practical experience in the management of Irish land, having, as Master in Chancery, to deal with about 400 estates, belonging to minors, lunatics, debtors, &c., and occupied by some 20,000 tenants.



certificate, during the time of execution, and on completion of the work, to the satisfaction of the public Inspector, let him be entitled to a certificate equivalent with a Parliamentary grant of a term, at the old rent, and of duration proportional to the magnitude of his addition to the permanent agricultural value of his farm. Let an addition of twenty-five per cent. entitle him to thirty years. Give him sixty years, if he adds fifty per cent.; ninety years, if he adds seventy-five per cent.; 120 years, if he doubles the present value; and let the scale ascend, so as to make it possible, in certain cases, to acquire a perpetuity, and convert the old pecuniary payment into a fee-farm rent. This would be possible only when the original value was small, and the capacity for improvement very great. Provide justly for the case in which the tenant may have miscalculated, and fallen short of the improvement which he undertook to make. Visit him with no worse consequences than to curtail the term in proportion to the deficiency in the effect of his works. Give him a term equivalent with the improvement which he has produced, and encourage him to continue his efforts, if perseverance is likely to succeed."

The passing of such an Act would be an improvement on the present state of things, inasmuch as it would secure to improving tenants the benefit of their improvements. It would, however, not only leave improvements entirely optional; embracing no provision for the pre-requisites to thorough improvement above specified, it must be in many cases partial, whilst in others, through physical hindrances, the necessary improvement would be altogether precluded. I will give one example of what I refer to from the letters of the Special Commissioner presently reporting on the Irish land system to the *Times*. Speaking of Queen's County, he says—"The whole county suffers greatly from the want of a system of drainage, many thousand acres being surcharged with water, and in winter rendered completely useless. There has been some improvement during the last 20 years. I saw a good deal of careful draining on lands that afforded a rapid fall; but nothing comprehensive can be ac-



completed until the Barrow shall have been made a suitable outfall for the whole tract." "This," adds the Commissioner, "is a work, perhaps, beyond individual enterprise." It certainly is so, even of landlords; whilst there is an insuperable physical barrier in the way of the tenant, though both able and willing to improve.

With a landowning class, in the great majority of cases disposed to do nothing, and under no legal obligation to do anything, how shall the indispensable pre-requisites to efficient and general improvement of the Irish soil ever be secured, unless the Government undertake the work.

The leave-alone system has had, as I have said, more than sufficient trial, and has issued in a state of things unparalleled in the civilized world. The Irish land system combines all the worst vices under which land can be held and cultivated—the worst vices of territorial ownership, and the worst vices of extreme sub-division. It gives a monopoly of the soil to a mere fraction of the people, and acquits them of all duty to the land, and to those who till it. Over the greater part of the Continent of Europe, the owners of the soil are also its cultivators—their living depends on their bringing its productive resources into action, and they are secure against being deprived of the fruit of their outlay and industry. England, and parts of Scotland, have vast mineral and manufacturing wealth. Capital is abundant, and a capitalist and enterprising tenantry make up for the landlord's lack of service. Then, though many of our landowners are non-resident, the greater portion of them spend their income somewhere within the island. In some shape or other the money they draw from the land circulates in payment of labour, and thus helps to support the people. In feudal times, the land was vested in the chief for common benefit. The head of the clan was responsible for the maintenance of his sept. There is in the Irish land system, with the presence of the evils of territorial ownership—the absence of every counteractive and compensatory element. The owners own, but do not cultivate. They enjoy all the rights of property, while they shirk its primary duties. They are territorial; many of them are habitual



absentees. Year by year, they suck the fatness of the land, and render no return. The Marquis of Hertford, for example, draws some £60,000 a-year from his Ulster estates, has, in 23 years, only once visited the property, and never expended so much as a £1000 in any year upon it. The great body of the cultivators are poor, their holdings are small, they are wedded to old routine, have no security of tenure, are, consequently, dependent, broken-spirited, and helpless. Yet the soil is naturally rich. In the soil, indeed, lies the main resource of Ireland. In the comparative absence of mineral resources, and consequent paucity of manufactures, there is a proportionate richness in the soil, but which, under a miserable economy, we are either failing to develop, or allowing to be, year after year, withdrawn. Now, if the soil of a country is the great patrimony of the people, specially is this so of the Irish people. If the State vests it in the hands of individuals, it is in trust for the benefit of the whole. When the trust comes to be practically ignored, when landowners regard and pursue their own selfish interests only, and pursue them in utter disregard of the public interest, there is then an imperative call on the State to interpose. As there is no more fundamental wrong a people can be made to suffer, a Government can have no clearer duty than to secure redress.

I have thus, Sir, endeavoured, as briefly as possible, to place before you the ways and means by which, as it appears to me, the productive capabilities of the soil of Ireland might be developed, concurrently with and through the improvement of the condition of the people. Before closing, allow me to refer to one or two incidental adaptations of the scheme to meet the social requirements of the case, or to correct evils which have become chronic in the national character. The one deep plague spot in the Irish character is agrarian crime—the inextinguishable hate in which it originates, its frequency, and its almost assured impunity. A claim to remain undisturbed on the land, pervades, as a deep hereditary sense, the minds of the Irish people. An Irish landlord may fail of every duty to his tenants and the country, which the law does not rigorously exact (and we have seen that it exacts very



little), but all will be overlooked or condoned, if he does not disturb those in possession of the land. But a proposal to remove any tenant stirs the deepest resentment—nay, even still, may (as we have seen by too many recent examples) cost the landlord his life. The attempt to turn the occupier out of his holding will still be resisted without any scruple as to means or results. This does not arise from any exceptional bloodthirstiness or brutality in the Irish character. On the contrary, murders occurring otherwise than from agrarian resentment, or in faction fights, are comparatively rare—from domestic causes or individual passion, much rarer than in England or Scotland. The distinctive characteristic of these agrarian crimes is that they spring, neither out of individual wickedness and debasement, nor are the deeds of a criminal class. They spring from a public sentiment which is ever anew revealing its unextinguishable vitality—still ready to doom to death him who acts in disregard of it, and to screen the slayer. This sentiment—the deepest and most powerful in the breasts of Irishmen—is, as I have said, that of a right to live on the land. A claim taking precedence of and over-riding all claims and rights established and enforced by law. Writing, less in extenuation than in justification of the murder of Mr. Baker, *The Irishman* says—“The real question between the Irish people and the English Government is the right to the Irish soil. . . . Is the land of Ireland to be held for the purposes of the interest, the tyranny, or the caprice of a few individuals, or are proprietary rights to that soil to be so modified and controlled as still to leave the land of Ireland a property to which the mass of the Irish people may assert some claim—at the least the claim of a right to live on their native soil.” A sentiment so rooted in the instinct of justice has in it too much of a moral element to be either trifled with or readily overcome. It is at the peril of life that a landlord recklessly or rudely violates it. And you cannot in such circumstances, make the people feel that killing is murder. *The Irishman*, in the same article, says—“The law is on the side of the landlords; the popular conscience is against them. More than this—not only the popular conscience, but the popular in-



instinct of self-preservation calls for a penalty which may deter men from acts which aim at the life of a people. Agrarian crime is the necessary, the inevitable result of a system which places the very lives of the people at the disposal of a few men." It is a serious thing for the law and the deepest sentiment of the people to be in such intense antagonism. A spirit of lawlessness becomes the characteristic, not of the vicious and criminal merely, it pervades the whole community. Those leading otherwise a quiet, industrious, moral life, are ready to obey its promptings, if not to perpetrate the very deeds which so startle and shock the general feeling on this side the Channel. In the course of my tour, I visited the farm at which the organised and deadly resistance to Scully's proceedings, in August last year, took place, and found it occupied by a family as quiet, industrious, and well-behaved as any of the like rank of life in Scotland.

In these circumstances, the landowner needs protection as well as the occupier, and the scheme I have ventured to submit to you, would protect both. In protecting the one against capricious eviction, it would assure the personal safety of the other. No one would be removed, save either to find accommodation elsewhere, or on cause sufficient shown to the satisfaction of a public officer. Then, the claim of the people, as a general fact, to live on the land being recognised by law, the sentiment which, under the present land economy, constitutes the great difficulty in governing Ireland, would operate in support of the law—instead of prompting to its violation. As life would become sacred, the law would become honoured and obeyed.

Then, the scheme I have mapped out would not allow—as mere fixity of tenure would allow—the occupier to merely vegetate upon the land. It is not enough to bring the law and the popular sentiment into harmony; there is an industrial difficulty to be overcome. As respects the bulk of Irish cultivators, it will not do to make them secure and leave them alone. They need to be stirred up, prompted, trained, and led. By making exertion and improvement conditions of occupancy, you can utilise the passion for land—



convert what is now a difficulty and an obstruction into an instrument of progress. A glance at native Irish farming shows what an amount of inertia—of feckless, indolent routine, has to be overcome. And it is here that farming on a large scale in Ireland encounters a main difficulty. As a hired labourer the native Irishman is not, generally, efficient. He is slack and slovenly, and by no means very scrupulous in matters of *meum* and *tuum*. Though there were not any other objection to transmuting the small holdings of Ireland into large farms, labour would be found an insuperable difficulty. The worse rather than the better features of the Irishman's character become developed when working for another on his native soil. If the better elements of his character are to be cherished and brought into action, it will be through working on the land for himself. The Irish peasant regards the immigrant capitalist farmer with a measure of the dislike he cherishes towards the evicting landlord. And quite naturally, the one as much as the other contributing to his extrusion from the soil he clings to with so tenacious a grasp. To serve the one faithfully is no more felt as an obligation than it is quietly to submit to be served out by the other. It is hopeless to teach the Irish to be faithful in that which is another man's, until they have had a training in care and thrift in that which is their own. Were they energetic and trustworthy as workmen, Irish peasants might doubtless earn a better living as hired labourers on large farms, than as holders of small ones, but as a matter of fact they don't make efficient farm labourers in their own country—or do so as the exception, not the rule. With a labouring population in excess of the demand, low wages and lax service act and re-act the one on the other, precluding the hope of improvement through a conversion of the land into large farms. That system tends to diminish labour and intensify disaffection. Large farms mean (to a great extent) conversion of arable land into grazing land, and proportionately, the removal of the people, not only from their holdings, but from their country. I happened one day to enter into conversation with a man who was breaking stones by the side of a road leading out of Bray.



He stated that until lately he had been in occupancy of a cottage and two or three acres of land, but had been turned out, because the landlord would not have any holdings under £5 yearly rent. He had nine children, none of them able "to earn sixpence a week," save his eldest boy, who drove a water car. "How did he get food for them?" "Glad when he could pick up a barrel of potatoes." "Clothes and Shoes?" "Perhaps some of them as naked as crows." This man (who was evidently shrewd as well as industrious) I found, like most of his class, possessed by a deep sense of wrong in being thus shut out from his land. "Cast your eyes all round," he exclaimed, "it is all grazing; there is nothing for a labouring man to do." The more the grazing system is extended the more must the Irish people be excluded not only from the occupancy of the land, but even from any means of obtaining a livelihood by labour on it. The scheme I propose would give the people abundant employment—employment at home—employment on the land, with the fruits of their labour made secure to them, and directly their own.

A settlement of the Land Question on a sure and comprehensive basis is likely to become, not less, but more urgent in consequence of the disestablishment of the Irish Church. Intense sectarian antagonism has kept the Catholic and Orange democracy apart. But there are symptoms that they are now about to coalesce. The process is indeed begun. A month or two before the general election, the Rev. Dr. Drew, Grand Chaplain of the Irish Orange Institution, entered an emphatic protest against the evils of the present land system, and proclaimed himself a zealous advocate of tenant-right. And the success of the liberal candidates in Belfast, Londonderry, Newry, &c., bears testimony to the changed state of feeling. The demand for security of tenure, urged by the combined voice of Protestant and Catholic, of North and South, will become more loud and irrepressible than ever. But to give security of tenure without the necessity of exertion—free from improving conditions—would be to stereotype stagnation and make poverty perpetual. Both landlords and occupiers fail of the primary requirements of good hus-



bandry, and both must be made (concurrently) to fulfil those requirements, or give place to others who will. But there is only one power which can enforce these requirements, and convert this necessity into a practical realisation. That power is the State. We have to govern Ireland. We dare not abandon the Irish people to their own passionate waywardness. But our government of Ireland cannot continue the costly and disgraceful failure it has been. Indeed, if we do not make the case better it must become worse. Ireland will cost us more and yield us less until a fundamental change is initiated and enforced. That change is to be effected through a development of the resources of the soil, by the labour of the Irish people. But the Government must take the initiative—must secure those conditions, material and legal, in the absence of which the work cannot be either generally or efficiently performed.

I am,

SIR,

Your obedient humble Servant,

WILLIAM M'COMBIE.



