

THE DUTY OF IRISH LANDLORDS

AT

THIS IMPERIAL CRISIS.

APRIL 1886.

“If we succeed in emigrating the Irish landlords, the English Government will soon have to follow them.”

[*Mr. C. S. Parnell's speech at Cork,
March 22, 1880.*]

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THE extract from Mr. C. S. Parnell's speech in 1880, which forms the motto or text on the title-page, must be the excuse for the following words.

The difficulty in offering an opinion, more especially when it is unasked, arises mainly from the fact that no human being can know, with any certainty, his neighbour's thoughts, nor recognize, in their fulness, the circumstances that surround and constitute his neighbour's position. This difficulty is admitted, or at least felt, when any man gives an opinion at his neighbour's request; and it is most strongly experienced by him who now offers an unasked opinion to ten thousand neighbours, all having something in their condition in common, but this something as varied as the leaves on any one particular tree.

Mr. Parnell's words are put forward by the writer as his excuse for his self-imposed task; but it is the storm now threatening vast destruction, which those words and similar utterances have raised, that is the true

excuse for this and volumes of writing on the subject which is now more or less occupying men's minds amongst all the civilized nations of the earth.

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” may be offered as a second excuse; and the writer must here state his full belief in the purity and unselfishness of his motives in endeavouring to place before himself and others some of the striking features of the present position of the Irish landlords, and daring to arrive at some conclusion as to what is, in the interests of the Empire—still including Ireland—and in their own, the best and wisest course for them to pursue at this Imperial crisis.

Whatever may be the judgment of men with regard to Mr. Parnell's real motives, there can be no doubt as to his capacity and, up to a certain extent, his foresight, and no doubt as to his power to deduce probable consequences from possible events. Banish the landlords, and away goes the English Government. Fail in getting rid of the landlords, and the English Government remains. This was his view as long ago as 1879. He appeals to greed and spurious patriotism in the one short sentence on the title-page.

Greed, or “land-hunger,” to which phrase the Prime Minister softens it down, is Mr. Parnell's major and definite power. Spurious patriotism his minor and indefinite power.

Every farmer thinks he thoroughly understands what the emigration of his landlord means for him. It must mean, he is sure, at the very least partial release from the obligation to pay rent or its equivalent. It may

mean a fourth F—freedom from any yearly payment for his farm whatsoever.

The counterfeit patriot has naturally a somewhat hazy idea of what Home Rule *vice* the English Government means, and each one makes his ideal suit his wishes ; but the ideal is of the same nature as the farmer's vision of the blank left by the departed landlord filled by a figure representing satisfied greed.

The real and unselfish Nationalist patriot is such a *rara avis* as to be altogether out of consideration.

All Mr. Parnell's words and actions for the last seven years go to show his full reliance on his great and definite means of power, the greed or "land-hunger" of the farmer. If this were wanting, his minor and indefinite means of power would be worthless. He has developed and enormously strengthened his major power by the very Act of Parliament which it was expected would destroy it—the Land Act of 1881—which he, through his major force, compelled one of the most powerful Prime Ministers that England has ever seen to introduce and pass. He boasted at Wexford, on the 9th of October 1881,* that "as Mr. Gladstone, by the Act of 1881 had eaten all his old words, had departed from all his formerly declared principles, now we shall see that these brave words† of this English Prime Minister will be scattered as chaff before the united and advancing

* Four days later (13th October) Mr. Parnell was arrested in Dublin.

† The words were spoken at Leeds on the 7th October by Mr. Gladstone, who said "the resources of civilization are not yet exhausted," so threatening Mr. Parnell and the Land League.

determination of the Irish people to regain for themselves their LOST LAND and their LOST LEGISLATIVE INDEPENDENCE."

Mr. Parnell seems now in a fair way to carry out to the letter his programme. He has at least arrived at the time when, as he predicted, speaking at Cork on the 18th December 1882, an English Ministry would entertain the idea of National Self-government for Ireland. But there is one part of the programme upon which the other part, in his view, depends, which lies very much at the mercy of a still powerful body of men, the Irish landlords. Unless the Irish landlords help, and consent to, their own abolition, the whole of Mr. Parnell's edifice falls to the ground.

It is, however, to be earnestly hoped that this second *Anabasis*, this second retreat of ten thousand, will never have to be described.

That the greater number of the Irish landlords are exposed to the strongest temptation to surrender their land, their places, and their positions, for a supposed equivalent in money for their land, there can be no doubt. This temptation, of course, depends upon whether the inducement offered is something like an equivalent for the property surrendered.

What constitutes the temptation to surrender, is the real signification, in the present case, of the term surrender. It means the exchange, besides other things and matters, of care, anxiety, uncertainty, worry, and worse than worry, the having the mud of angry feeling constantly stirred, the sting of ingratitude and of injustice almost daily rankling in the spirit—it means the ex-

change of all this for the prospect of peace, freedom, and comparative contentment.

It means also, however, to look at another side of the question, the loss of employment, of interests, of objects of beauty once possessed, and once thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed, and of objects that, with no beauty, perhaps, in themselves, are yet dear from old association ; and it means what will perhaps be felt by many as the most serious part of the surrender—the surrender of a post of duty, and that post the very foremost in the bulwarks of defence. It must not be forgotten that the landlords are in the van, some few of them have already actually fallen by a bloody death ; and it must not be overlooked that a surrender on the part of some may possibly be followed by, and may possibly cause the actual death of, some of their fellows ; for the surrender cannot be carried out and completed in a day, nor yet in a year, and if Self-government is given, the process of the withdrawal of the van of the garrison will have to be carried out in an intensely hostile country, where the Home Rule Government will not probably have the power, even if it has, which may well be doubted, the strongest and most determined will, to carry out the terms of the surrender in a spirit of peace. There will be haste to possess.

There will be an influx of deadly and unscrupulous enemies from America ; men who, as long as the British Government, weak though it be, exists in Ireland, dare not come openly, nor in numbers, to the island.

It is impossible to deny that the landlords of Ireland, powerful as they still are, have been brought to a most

painful, embarrassing, and perplexing position, and so brought principally by an Act of Parliament which they were told would give them, as well as their tenants, security, both with regard to the stability of their landed property and their yearly rent.

In effect, the Act transferred a large part of the property to the tenants, and while very largely reducing the rent, made the collection of it more difficult than it was before. Shortly after the Act of 1881 was passed, Mr. Parnell, in retaliation for his arrest (13th October 1881) and that of his fellows, issued his mandate to the tenants to pay no rent, which was largely obeyed by the farmers, whose "legitimate profits in 1880 and 1881 exceeded those of the most prosperous times within the memory of living men."

This No-Rent Manifesto was promptly met by the proclamation of the 20th October 1881, suppressing the Land League, the vigorous act of a brave honest, and manly statesman, who is now, alas! no more; whose death has been announced at the very moment the foregoing lines were being written.

The loss of such a statesman, one with so full a knowledge of the real purpose, and mode of action of the Land League, which has changed its name, but not its organization, its leaders, nor its laws, will at this momentous crisis be felt with deep grief by all who wish the Empire well, and earnestly desire to see Ireland quiet, prosperous, and happy.

It is an impressive coincidence that his "last day of danger and distress" should be the first day of the week in which an English Prime Minister is to ask permission

to introduce a Bill that strikes a heavy, perhaps a fatal, blow against the Empire the dead statesman loved; and against the peace, prosperity, and freedom of the island for which he struggled with energy and honour to the last. Peace be with the true and brave that are taken away from the evil to come.

It is hard to go back to dry details when a prominent figure in the picture is suddenly struck out.

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It must not be forgotten that though the reductions of rent under the Land Act of 1881 have been great, and have hit the improving landlord very much more heavily than his non-improving brother, those reductions are not final; that the landlords have to expect new, and still further diminished, judicial rents in a few years; and that the unscrupulous portion of the Irish tenantry look forward with greedy expectation to the next fair (?) rent fixing process. It is not easily forgotten or ignored that demands of 50 per cent. reduction on the judicially reduced rents have been and are being daily made, by unscrupulous tenants in some cases and by honest hard-working farmers in others. In these latter cases honest men have been compelled by the dire *coercion* of the National League to violate their consciences. There are indications from all, even the most disturbed districts, in Ireland, however, that go to suggest, if not to prove, that the honest tenants who are *coerced* into making iniquitous demands greatly exceed in number their unscrupulous brethren. This is a hopeful sign, and one which, of course, landlords throughout Ireland are taking fully into account.

It has over and over again been pointed out that the benefits to the tenants, in giving them, by the Land Acts, the three Fs, is not nearly so great as is imagined ; for while the creation of the dual property in the land, combined with the judicial rent, has had the baneful effect of creating division between the landlord and the tenant, and setting class against class, it has only given the tenant what he almost always received as a kindness from his landlord, and received it a time when he was most in need of help. The effect of the law has been, also, to deprive the tenant of very great advantages, namely, improvements, both by building and by draining, road-making and fencing, made, sometimes partly and sometimes solely, at the landlord's cost. Besides such substantial benefits as the tenant received under the old system, there was the unspeakable advantage that accrues to both the giver and receiver of kindnesses.

There will, if law and order be enforced, come a time of reaction. There are signs of the approach of this reaction already, in spite of the reign of Nationalist law, the reign of terror, without order, which is rampant in the land. In the most disturbed districts, and because of the disturbance in those districts, these signs are plainly to be discerned.

There are, perhaps, no people who understand what right and justice mean more clearly than the mixed races who inhabit Ireland ; and there are no people more intelligent, though they have the peculiarity of running mad every ten or fifteen years, and the frailty of being most readily gulled.

There are, besides, no people who are more easily ruled, if the right methods are used to rule them.

Irishmen, under steady, strict, but not harsh discipline, are most easily managed and controlled. Look at the Irish Constabulary and at Irish regiments.

In ruling Ireland, kindness, but no weakness, should be shown. A shifty policy is fatal. Concession, the supposed result of fear, disastrous; and this is just the cause of the present state of Ireland. (1) Unguarded words led Ireland to believe that dynamite would give her what she pleased. (2) The chief evil of the Act of 1881 is the belief by Ireland that England was coerced by her to pass it. (3) The words of Mr. Parnell, spoken at Wexford in October 1881, quoted in a previous page, have heralded the present crisis, and the present crisis gives those words a strength they never had before. However the crisis ends, the difficulty in ruling Ireland will be, for a time, enormously increased.

One of the chief duties of a landlord is to help on civilization, and this duty is most easily performed. In fact, it cannot be avoided if the landlord resides upon or often visits his estate. It cannot be avoided when the landlord is represented by someone living on the estate who is of a higher class than the surrounding tenantry. In such cases the civilizing process goes on, more or less rapidly, as the case may be, even without any endeavour on the landlord's or his representative's part. Of course this process of civilization is very much affected, it is scarcely necessary to say, by the character, the manner of living, and the mode of thought of the landlord or his substitute.

Civilization brings troubles in its train. The Christian religion does the same. But the fault lies not in civilization : not in Christianity.

Civilization helps government. The landlord class helps civilization ; *ergo*, get rid of the landlords.

The landlord gives employment, which, if he leaves the locality altogether, no other person can give. The landlord cannot help himself, he must give employment ; a law obliges him—not a Nationalist law, not a British law, but a universal, unchangeable law. Employment carries wages, which support life. If the landlord goes, the employment goes, the wages go, the life goes, or dwindles ; *ergo*, get rid of the landlord.

It seems utterly silly to write in this way in the nineteenth century, in a civilized country, with any pretence of seriousness. The writer, however, intends to be serious, but is in doubt whether he is, or some English statesmen are, mad or dreaming. One or the other must be the case ; there seems no escape from the dilemma. There is anguish in the thought either way. Greater anguish to even the writer, if he be sane and dreamless, than if the reverse is the case.

The most painful part of the whole matter seems to be that wise words, simple words, of admittedly wise and true men appear to fall dead upon the public ear, no matter what may be their wisdom, their clearness, their moderation, and their strength.

Words seem to have lost their old meaning unless they in some way appeal to self-interest.

A very few more of these disjointed hasty lines.

Mr. C. S. Parnell spoke as follows at Liverpool, 30th November 1879 :—

“ Deprive them (the landlords) of the position of an English garrison in Ireland, and then the last knell of English power would have been sounded.”

These words are but a paraphrase of those on the title-page, used four months afterwards in Cork, when Mr. Parnell was still harping on the same string, as he has been doing ever since. They have now been quoted merely because he describes the landlords as a “ garrison.”

The landlords are the van (or outward post defenders) of the garrison that represents at the very least a million and a half of people. The ten thousand landlords (so estimated by Mr. Parnell in September 1880) represent very largely officers of the garrison. The safety, the existence, of the garrison, the rest of the million and a half, depend principally—at least in Mr. Parnell’s view, and he has amply proved his foresight—on the faithfulness and courage of the van. Now, does this million and a half of loyalists represent the whole of those dependent on the steadfastness of the van? How many tens of thousands, nominal Nationalists, really peaceful Unionists, are dependent not only for safety, but for daily bread, upon the van? Suppose there is no war, but suppose the emigration of the ten thousand landlords to have taken place. How are their direct, and those *indirect*, dependants, whose name is legion, to obtain their daily food which was through them supplied? This is a difficult question, and cannot be answered by another, “ Am I my brother’s

keeper? ” There are few, very few, of the much abused, and apparently little understood, Irish landlords that have the will, that have the daring, thus to answer it. The landlords have suffered injustice, and have felt bitterly the sting of ingratitude ; but they are not the hardened greedy wretches they are represented in Parliament to be by the counterfeit delegates of the Irish people.

Thrown over as they have been by some of those in England, who should have been foremost in their defence, they as a body have the proud satisfaction of knowing, that while the verdict of 1881 fully and honourably acquitted them, a righteous verdict would acquit them now after a cruel and merciless trial which has lasted for five years. It is to be hoped their present trial, and that of their dependants, and the honest, but pitilessly coerced tenants, will soon be over. Not over for the landlords by their exodus ; for their dependants by desertion and distress. Not over for their honest tenants through their eviction by unscrupulous returned Irish-Americans ; but by—for all—the restoration of freedom, peace, and consequent prosperity in the only way such restoration can be brought about, by steady government, not wild legislation. Then let the landlords sell, the tenants purchase, at their will. The law is open to them, let them use it.

England has somehow lost the power of understanding the ordinary meaning of a word. She passed a law to stop garotting. Suppose that London now was infested by garotters, and that they baptised that law and called it *Coercion*, would its nature be altered ?

would it be repealed ? That law is an exceptional law, to meet an exceptional offence.

Suppose garotting over the whole of England, Scotland, Wales : because of such extension, would the exceptional law for its suppression be repealed ?

What are all laws to prevent crime but coercive, restraining laws ?

If England cannot or will not begin a work of restoration, and steadily persevere till that work is done, in an island that is her own, close to her, and totally dependent on her ; if she cannot or will not maintain the right, relieve the oppressed, and help those who in heart are honest, who have the secret will to show they are so, but dare not ; if she cannot or will not set a people free, her own people—four-fifths, perhaps, of Ireland's five millions—free from a worse bondage than any despot could enforce : she is not fit to hold the place she occupies on earth, and she will lose it. Some other English-speaking land will take that place, and carry on the work once offered her.*

The Irish landlords have already done much towards showing England what her duty is. If, in addition to this, by refusing any inducement that may be offered them to leave their post of duty, by striving to the utmost against any forced eviction, if in any way they can secure that England's duty will be done ; then their position in the Empire will be a proud one, whether it receives acknowledgment or not.

* The work alluded to is something far beyond her duty to Ireland : a work that no human being can estimate, or know the import of.

But if, in spite of the exertions of those who in Great Britain and Ireland so plainly foresee the dire evils that must follow the wicked abandonment of Ireland, that abandonment takes place; then, in the day of distress that will surely come, and which must fall upon the guilty and innocent alike, the Irish landlords, in common with others who have struggled manfully and failed, will be spared the remorseful cry, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."

(Concluded on the morning of the 8th of April 1886.)
