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# AGITATION IN IRELAND, ..

FROM

A LANDLORD'S POINT OF VIEW.

BY

ROBERT STAPLES, JUN.



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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS paper, which originally appeared in the *University Magazine*, last June, has been republished by the desire of numerous friends. I have been the more willing to comply with their request as I know that in England there prevails a serious misconception with regard to the real relations between owners and occupiers in Ireland. The invention and circulation of systematic falsehoods with regard to Irish proprietors has also now become so fashionable that it is necessary for the injured party to produce evidence in their own defence. In the hope that a few facts may help to enlighten some whose chief knowledge of Irish affairs may be usually derived from the columns of the anti-landlord press or the mouths of "Nationalist" orators, this paper has been issued. It was written before the latest and most conspicuous "concession to clamour and agitation" was made



by the introduction of Mr. Forster's "Compensation for Disturbance Bill."

Those who desire further reliable information on the subject of Irish tenants and their "improvements" will find it in two admirable papers written by an Englishman long resident in Ireland, Mr. W. Bence Jones, and published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in April and July, 1880.

R. S.

DUNMORE, DURROW, QUEEN'S CO.

July, 1880.



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THE events of the last few months have again succeeded in attracting public attention in a marked degree towards Ireland. It is to be feared that to most Englishmen that country is a painful subject, and one which is apt to be viewed from an extreme standpoint, according to the political bias of the spectator's mind. Sweeping condemnation of one class or another may alternate with a not unnatural wish that the island itself could be quietly transferred to the most remote and inaccessible portion of the globe. Still, as its existence and consequent embarrassments cannot be so summarily disposed of, I venture to offer a few remarks upon certain points that have been somewhat overlooked. I feel the less reluctance in entering upon the subject on account of the numerous speeches and articles in magazines, which have been put prominently forward, having been for the most part directed from the same quarter, and aimed at the same mark. The unanimity of the attacks upon the present unhappy proprietors in Ireland might also, if left unnoticed, help to produce an erroneous impression upon impartial observers, who might perchance recollect that unity



and concord have not hitherto been strongly characteristic of the Irish Nationalist party. If the remarks I now propose to advance from a landlord's point of view should in any way help to show forth some of the numerous difficulties (and dangers) that are so wildly scattered in the paths of the landlords in Ireland, my object will have been fully attained.

The agitation that was carried on so actively during the past season, and which still flickers up in places with a spasmodic flame, may perhaps have served one good purpose, though one little intended by its promoters. It must have shown how extreme and impossible were the demands of those who conducted it, and how vague and illogical were the purposes aimed at. It must have occurred to those who watched its progress that the resolutions usually passed at the various land meetings were of a truly Hibernian, and therefore contradictory nature. They were generally of two classes, those directed against the State, and those directed against the landlords. The English Government was first denounced as wholly incapable to manage Irish affairs at all; it was then widely appealed to to save the greater part of the population who must perish without its aid. The landlords were to be exterminated morally, and often physically; their generosity was then implored to save their traducers from ruin. Amongst the merits of this agitation the promoters claimed for it that it had



“checked every disposition to violence,” and that “outrages had been fewer than could have been expected.” It is scarcely to be supposed that Englishmen who have kept themselves informed of the state of affairs in parts of the West, and which for some time almost amounted to an insurrection, should be found to endorse this view. The increased forces of military and police, and the iron police barracks hastily erected in many places, and the organized resistance and outrages offered to men employed in their duty of enforcing the law, tell a different tale. The charges of the judges at the recent spring assizes in almost every county that has been the scene of frequent land meetings, would alone clearly prove the effect that the agitation has produced on the general peace of the country. When, moreover, the outrages that were committed, are found to be chiefly confined to those counties that were the scenes of numerous land meetings, and to diminish or increase in number in proportion to the area embraced by the agitation, few will be content to accept Mr. O’Connor Power’s recent statement that the tendency of the agitation had been “to check every disposition to violence.”

The charges brought against Irish landlords are almost too numerous to recapitulate. Want of capital, want of enterprise, extortion, undue interference with their tenants, eviction, absenteeism, form the general refrain of the chorus of denuncia-



tion. There was at one time a danger that judgment might have been given by default against the Irish landlords as a class. Few came forward publicly to rebut any charges brought against their order, and, whether from contempt of their adversaries or from reluctance to put themselves forward in their own defence, their voices were seldom heard.

When Mr. Parnell's campaign in America began this want was to a certain extent remedied, and in the *New York Herald* appeared a most able and comprehensive letter from Mr. A. Kavanagh, M.P., dealing fully with the various charges that the land agitators were trying to establish. This was quickly followed by others, amongst them one by Lord Dunraven, and the effect was at once apparent by a change in Mr. Parnell's tactics. These letters have been further followed by an able defence and contradiction of the charges brought by Mr. O'Connor Power, which was written by the Knight of Kerry in the March number of the *Nineteenth Century*. A still more unanimous and better organized plan of defence was, however, thought necessary, and a committee of the majority of the chief owners of land in Ireland was formed for the purpose of collecting full information to show their habitual dealings with their tenants. The evidence that this committee can produce will probably be brought before the Royal Commissioners on agricultural distress when they hold inquiries into



questions relating to agriculture in Ireland. That this evidence will prove a complete and thorough answer to the charges recklessly brought against Irish proprietors, nobody who has any real knowledge of the management of Irish estates can doubt. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to ask Englishmen in general to suspend their judgment, and to accept with the greatest reserve all statements made by the anti-landlord party until the whole case, charge, and refutation, is before their eyes. The subject thus opened up is a comprehensive one, and the evidence to be adduced almost inexhaustible. If I may be allowed to touch lightly upon some of the points contained in it, it must be to endeavour to show, however imperfectly, some of the difficulties to be encountered in Ireland alone, by one who, as an improver, wishes to develop his estate to its fullest extent.

Amongst the many causes which hamper and embarrass an Irish proprietor, none is perhaps more fertile in mischievous results than the doctrine repeatedly instilled into the people, that all their ills are directly to be traced to the system of land tenure imposed by conquest. By this teaching they are led to infer that in the "good old times" the state of the tillers of the soil in Ireland was far happier and better than it now is. Therefore, it is argued, if you get rid of the owners that conquest introduced and maintained, the people will revert to their former happy condition. What



condition that was can be discovered by even a very few references to authentic history. Few real well-wishers of the country could desire its revival, or maintain that the nation has *fallen* into a state of starvation and misery. In the annals of Ireland, as it was before the English invasion, there is little to be found descriptive of the social and domestic habits of the people. No evidence of national union or national strength can be discovered, while proofs of intestine broils, battles, and feuds are patent in every page. "The ancient condition of the common people of Ireland," says Sir James Ware, "was very little different from slavery."

"We must give little credit to the fanciful pictures of prosperity and happiness in that period of aboriginal independence which the Irish, in their discontent with later times, have been apt to draw. We find by their annals that, out of 200 ancient kings, of whom some brief memorials are recorded, not more than thirty came to a natural death. While, for the later period, the oppression of the Irish chieftains is the constant theme of history. Their exactions kept the peasants in hopeless poverty, their tyranny in perpetual fear. The perpetual warfare of these petty chieftains had given rise to the employment of mercenary troops, partly natives, partly from Scotland, known by the uncouth name of Kerns and Gallowglasses, who proved the scourge of Ireland down to its subjection



by Elizabeth." (Hallam, Const. Hist. of England, vol. iii., ch. 18.)

Three centuries ago Ireland was covered with forests, bogs, and morasses. It had not been reclaimed from that condition by the cattle farmers, who lived and slept with their cows and pigs in dark and noisome dens; whose nationality demanded desolate tracts of pasture land for their cattle to the exclusion of civilized men. Partiality to cattle and a pastoral life was one of their characteristics. Hence, what Spenser observed of them in the sixteenth century "that neither landlords would give, nor tenants take land for any greater term than from year to year or at will." Hence we infer one of their habits, viz., "the landlords there used most shamefully racke their tenants, exacting of them what he pleaseth." (View of State of Ireland.)

These exactions were countenanced, not by English Government or English laws, but formed a part of ancient *Irish* dealings of landlords with their tenants, and were protected by native Irish laws until restrained by a statute in the 10 and 11 Charles I, c. 16, entitled "An Act for the Suppression of Cosherers and Wanderers." "These practices had been borrowed from those native chieftains, whom our modern Hibernians sometimes hold forth as the paternal benefactors of their country." (Hallam, Const. Hist. ch. 18.)

Again, Mr. Froude says: "The Irish when the



Normans took charge of them, were scarcely better than a mob of armed savages. They had no settled industry and no settled habitations, and scarcely a conception of property. The poor-spirited and the weak were told off for such wretched tillage as could not be dispensed with. The only occupation considered honourable was fighting and plunder, and each tribe roamed within its own limits, supported either by the pillage of its neighbours or the wild cattle. Their chief characteristics were treachery, thirst for blood, and inveterate detestation of order and rule. To such a people, needing bit and bridle, liberty was only mischievous, and the Normans came to take direction of them. (Froude's *English in Ireland*, vol. i., ch. 1.)

Macaulay, speaking of Ireland in 1686, says: "The English settlers seem to have been, in knowledge, energy, and perseverance, rather above than below the average level of the population of the mother country. The aboriginal peasantry, on the contrary, were in an almost savage state. They never worked till they felt the sting of hunger. They were content with accommodation inferior to that which, in happier countries, was provided for domestic cattle. Already the potato, a root which can be cultivated with scarcely any art, industry, or capital, and which cannot be long stored, had become the food of the common people." (*Hist. of England*. vol. ii., ch. 6.) Swift,



again, at a later period, reciting the wishes of the nation, says: "That some effectual methods may be taken to civilize the poorer sort of our natives in all those parts of the kingdom, where the Irish abound, by introducing among them our language and customs, for want of which they live in the utmost ignorance, barbarity, and poverty, giving themselves wholly up to idleness, nastiness, and thievery, to the very great and just reproach of too many landlords." (Letter VII., Draper's Letters.)

Volumes of similar extracts throwing light on "Irish Ideas" when carried out unhindered, could easily be collected. Those who study them can scarcely fail to perceive that many of the characteristics that tended to produce and encourage this state of things still exist. The Irish are, above almost all other people, attached and blindly devoted to old customs and traditions. Unable to discriminate between facts and falsehoods, they are ever ready to listen to those who represent to them their condition as intolerable. Taught to regard all the owners of land in the country as aliens and oppressors, it follows that they must regard all the incidents of that ownership with suspicion and dislike. All improvement and all change must be based on harshness or oppression. It is this utter want of judgment that produces such a fruitful crop of agitators upon Irish soil. It is everlasting agitation that tends to prevent the people striving with industry and



energy to attain real practical good. This is also of no modern origin. We find that Swift complained of the evil done by political agitation. "Few politicians, with all their schemes, are half so useful members of a commonwealth as an honest farmer, who by skilfully draining, fencing, manuring, and planting, hath increased the value of a piece of land, and thereby done a perpetual service to his country, which it is a great controversy whether any of the former ever did since the creation of the world ; but no controversy at all that ninety-nine in one hundred have done abundance of mischief." (Letter VII.) Incessant agitation from that day to this has been a prominent feature in Irish affairs. It is not to be wondered at that in a country liable to this disease few should be found willing to invest their capital, to promote manufactures, or to embark in any enterprise. That great material progress should have still been effected in spite of the insecurity of life and property, caused by these perpetual eruptions of discontent, is perhaps one of the few hopeful signs of future advancement. The chief material evils of Ireland, want of capital and want of a wealthy middle class engaged in trade and manufacture, such as England possesses, are clearly to be traced to the general insecurity consequent on this never ending agitation. That the elements of prosperity are not wanting is evident. The country possesses harbours, and water power



in abundance, countless wealth might be earned from its fisheries, minerals are not wanting, and in few countries in Europe is a greater supply of labour to be found. Still an excessive population is reduced to support itself exclusively by agriculture, and that of a most backward style. Even a partial failure of the crops is found to produce periodical famines. Clearly since a field for industry exists there must be something in the character and habits of the people to prevent them availing themselves of it. On examination we may see that ignorance and indolence are marked characteristics of the inhabitants.

One who cannot be accused of ignorance of his countrymen was fully aware of this. Bishop Doyle (Pastoral Letter on Tithes, 1832) was found to upbraid them: "Your situation never can or will improve until unceasing industry succeed to idleness ; until obedience to the laws and self-respect become the character of the Irish people. All the laws that ever were enacted would not render an idle or a vicious people rich or happy. And if men become sober and industrious, abstaining from evil and doing good, such a people without almost any aid from law or government would enjoy comfort and happiness." This letter, written nearly fifty years ago, might well be commended to the notice of those who deduce all the evils and poverty of the present day from an oppressive system of land tenure. That the small



farmers of Ireland are as a rule ignorant of their business, can be seen fully shown by the evidence of Professor Baldwin in his Book of Small Farm Management. This book was written for, and specially addressed to, the very class now suffering most from the losses of last season. All through this book he endeavours to point out the losses annually incurred by most Irish farmers through ignorance or carelessness, and the manner in which they are to be remedied. His description of the manure used by them is instructive: (p. 8.)

Again, with regard to sheep, p. 164: "We know excellent sheep pasture, the letting value of which would be 27s 6d an acre, the occupiers of which are satisfied if they keep three sheep and their lambs to the acre." The low price of Irish butter is now frequently put forward as a claim for reduction of rent. We find this price accounted for by Professor Sheldon, in a lecture lately delivered at the Royal Dublin Society's House, when he showed that, "by greater care and skill in management, this butter (now worth 1s per pound) could be made worth 2d per pound more. The farmers of the Cork district alone would thus pocket annually £233,000 more than they do, and the farmers of the whole of Ireland would be benefited to the extent of upwards of £1,000,000 a year." Mr. Baldwin, in the same work before alluded to, corroborates this, and says (p. 143): "We are quite safe in



saying that if the dairy were well managed it would increase the average value of the butter produced at least £1 a cwt., and add to the wealth of the country at least £1,000,000 a year. In this country the meat is frequently kept in a bedroom, or some other apartment equally unsuited to the purpose. When we bear in mind the state of the apartments in which milk, cream, and butter are kept by the small farmers of this country, we need not be surprised at the enormous quantity of inferior butter produced." Again (p. 139): "There are nearly 1,000,000 of milch cows in the possession of small farmers." By proper management he estimates an increase on the produce of these cows on the small holdings of Ireland of not less than £2,000,000 sterling. The careless and slovenly tillage usually practised was lately pointed out by the Knight of Kerry in his address to his Valencia tenantry, who demanded an abatement of rent: "You should also ask yourselves if you had it in your power at any time to obtain a substantial abatement without any appeal to your landlord, if you had chosen to devote a reasonable time and effort to the destruction of weeds. It is not too much to say, that we frequently see one-third or more of the produce of a field consisting exclusively of weeds, and you are bound to remember that in such case you are paying one-third of your rent, one-third



of your taxes, and one-third of your labour for weeds and nothing else."

When we consider these descriptions of the management on the average Irish farm, and recollect that out of the whole number of farms in Ireland (about 586,000) 304,628 are of from five to thirty acres, and held by men to whom these descriptions might apply, we can easily perceive at what a disadvantage the Irish owner is placed in respect of the men he has to deal with. The English public seem to believe that it is the fault of an Irish landlord that the tenants and cottiers on his estate are not as comfortable as the farmers and labourers on an estate in England or Scotland. They forget the capital of the English or Scotch farmer, and the skill, and industry, and submission to law both of farmers and labourers, all of which are so signally wanting in Ireland. Take away these elements of comfort, abolish the thriving towns, and distribute an excessive population over country districts, deprive them of diligence and skill, incite them to perpetual disturbance, and then see what an English landlord can do for them. With an estate subdivided into farms, not only minute but often scattered about like squares on a chess board, what must be his most necessary step to improve the condition of his tenants? Surely he must eject and consolidate. Yet for adopting this course he is



denounced by the agitator as an exterminator, he is dogged by the Ribbonmen, cursed by the priest, and mulcted in compensation by a Land Act. If he leave his tenants alone he is accused of being listless, wanting enterprise, and responsible for the miseries of his tenants. Execrated for harshness if he be vigilant, for neglect and carelessness if he be lenient, the position of an Irish landlord is indeed an enviable one. An Irish agent once said, when enumerating the difficulties of managing an estate, "there is one thing you must *not* do ; you must not be what is called an improving landlord, you must not throw farms together, you must not add to your demesne, in short you must not diminish the number or extent of the holdings on your estate." An English Liberal, the late Mr. Senior, after some experience of Ireland, and its ways and ideas regarding the management of land, thus expressed his opinion : "There are three ways of dealing with land in Ireland. One is the *laissez-aller* system, to take the old rents, submit to the old arrears, and leave the tenants to themselves. It ruins the property, and it degrades the people, but it is the only popular one. Another is to exact as high rents as you can, and to require them to be punctually paid, but subject thereto to let the people treat the land as they like. This conduct is not popular, but it is tolerated. The third course is, to stimulate the tenants by exacting the full value of the land, but to return



to the land a large part of those rents in the form of road making, drainage, lime burning, consolidation of farms, building houses, and the introduction of good breeding stock—in short to be an improver. This is *not* tolerated.” (Journals, &c., relating to Ireland, vol. ii., 1868.)

Yet from tenants such as this, averse to all improvement, we are told by “their friends” that wonders are to be expected if they only had security for their improvements. What these improvements are likely to be, those brought into daily contact with Irish peasants, are too painfully aware. We are told that on English estates all the improvements are done by the landlord, whereas in Ireland they are the work of the tenant. It is no doubt true that on many estates tenants have built houses and offices—such as they are—though usually (before the Land Act almost invariably) assisted by the landlord by aid in the shape of slates, timber, or allowances.

A moment’s consideration would prove how impossible it would be under existing circumstances for a landlord to do much more. On an English estate, on an average, the farms would be probably of not less extent than 200 acres; on an Irish estate they are too often of less than twenty. So that, where in one country one farmhouse and offices, together with a labourers’ cottage or two, would suffice, in the other ten farm houses and offices would be required. It is clear that to build



and maintain all these small farms in a satisfactory state little short of the fee-simple value of the land would be required. The want of security for improvements can however no longer truthfully be urged as, by the Land Act of 1870, full compensation for his improvements can be awarded to an outgoing tenant. So far from being in an inferior position, in this respect the Irish tenant is at an advantage compared with the Englishman. Nor are his legal advantages confined to this alone. In England the tenant pays the whole poor rate. In Ireland he pays only half. In the case of tenancies created since the Land Act, he possesses the same advantage with regard to the county or grand jury cess. Preservation of game is often alleged as a grievance by an English farmer. In Ireland game is comparatively scarce, and it is not long since a measure for the preservation of hares was introduced, which were becoming nearly extinct in some districts. Moreover, the tenant possesses a concurrent right with the landlord to kill game in Ireland, unless the sole right has been specially reserved to the owner by deed or lease. It certainly appears that in some respects the Irish tenant is exceptionally favoured in comparison with his brother in England ! Eviction is another well-worn cry. It is greatly to be desired that an accurate return could be obtained of the number of actual evictions carried out in Ireland during the last ten years. Such a return, if properly prepared to show the cause of eviction



in each case, whether for non-payment of rent, subdivision, or other valid reason would, there can be little doubt, show that cases of capricious evictions are extremely rare. It would be also interesting to know in how many cases evictions are carried out, not by landlords, but by tradesmen or money lenders who have obtained power over the tenant. Even if a landlord now wished to evict a tenant without substantial cause, the desire is too costly to be carried into effect, and the compensation might in many cases exceed one-third of the fee-simple value of the holding. Nor can it be truthfully said that land in Ireland, as a rule, is too highly rented—on many estates rents have been rarely raised for thirty or forty years. The poor law valuation, which at anti-rent meetings is invariably held to be the highest rent that a tenant ought to pay, all contracts to the contrary notwithstanding, was never intended to be any criterion of the letting value of the land. It was made solely as a basis for taxation, and about 25 per cent. below the fair letting value at that time. It was, moreover, based on a scale of prices of agricultural produce far lower than those which now prevail. As a positive proof of this we find in the valuation reports, published in 1844, that Sir R. Griffith states in the “outline of system of valuation,” issued from the Valuation Office in 1844: “In regard to the difference between the valuations of land adopted by me under the Act and the actual



letting value, I have to observe that our valuation is generally about 25 per cent. under the full or high rent value, but very near that of many of the principal landed proprietors of the country. To bring it to a rent value, if one-third be added, the result will give very nearly the full rent value of the land under ordinary proprietors." Since the prices of agricultural produce are now from 20 to 50 per cent. at least higher than they were at the time this valuation was made, the absurdity of claiming abatements on all land let at rents exceeding that valuation is too apparent. If further proof however were wanting, the evidence of Mr. Lecky can show that "land in Ireland as a matter of fact has never generally been let at the extreme competitive price. Of this fact the great place which the middle men occupy in Irish agrarian history is a decisive proof. The land was chiefly let at moderate rents on long leases. The tenant usually sublet his tenancy, the sub-tenant usually took a similar course, and the same process continued till there were often four or five persons between the landlord and the cultivator of the soil. The peasants, accustomed to the lowest standard of comfort and encouraged by their priests to marry early, multiplied recklessly. Many landlords bound by their leases were unable to interfere with the process of division, while others acquiesced in it through laxity of temper or dread of unpopularity." (Leaders of Irish opinion, Daniel O'Connell.) So far, therefore, from



the custom of rack-renting forming a tangible ground of complaint against the Irish land owner, it would seem that he has rather erred on the side of over indulgence. The effect of this has been to facilitate subdivision and consequent over population, the results of which have been unfortunately but too well known. Want of capital or enterprise cannot fairly be charged against Irish land owners. Immense sums have been borrowed from the Board of Works and spent in improvement of estates, besides much more drawn from private resources. It must also be borne in mind that (according to the evidence of Mr. Nassau Senior) most of this money has been laid out in improvements, not, as in England, with the cordial co-operation of the tenants, but in spite of their opposition and dislike. Absenteeism forms another frequent and in some instances unfortunately a just ground of reproach. Still in this quarter until lately there was a ray of hope. It can be found, on reference to Arthur Young, that a long though incomplete list is furnished by him of the names and rentals of the chief absentees at that time. Out of the sixty-eight names at the head of the list with rentals of £4000 a year and upwards, we find that the representatives of thirty-four with a gross rental of £293,000 are now well known to be constant or frequent residents. Many of these have built residences, and the great majority are now known to be amongst the best and most improving of Irish landlords. Of the remainder of



those returned as absentees, in several instances the estates have been sold, and it is to be presumed that at least a portion has gone to residents. Many of the remainder I am unable to trace. It is idle, however, to expect further improvement in this respect while hatred and violence towards their landlords are inculcated as the primary duties of the patriotic tenant; and while cries of "lead," "lots of lead," "shoot them," are the echoes in response to incendiary platform orators. The foregoing are some of the chief charges usually reiterated with slight variations against the mass of Irish landlords, and fully expatiated upon by the Nationalists during an electoral campaign. The remedies suggested seem to be broadly reduced to two,—reclamation of waste lands by the State, to be parcelled out to small occupiers, and the substitution of peasant proprietors for the present owners. The former subject has been often treated of and by innumerable writers, from Mr. Mill and Mr. Thornton down to Mr. O'Connor Power. Few, however, seem to consider how small a proportion of the 2,000,000 acres of waste, bog, moor, and mountain could be really reclaimed and cultivated at a profit. The great expense of reclamation, even assuming that the purchase from the present owners would cost but little, added to the cost of building farm houses and offices, and of starting the tenant proprietors to be settled there with seed, implements, stock, &c., would be found to be a costly philanthropic experiment. It is, moreover, entirely



a mistake to class the bogs as waste land. The turf produced on them is most valuable and necessary for fuel, and the threatened scarcity of that turf, owing to the wet summer, formed during part of the autumn a very grave cause of anxiety.

The latter remedy of a peasant proprietary seems, however, to be the most generally popular, probably because it seems to be the most difficult to realize. Few popular orators have as yet endeavoured to prove why a man, having failed as a tenant, should succeed as a landlord. Nor is it clearer why, after having found it inconvenient to fulfil former engagements, he should be ready and willing to pay the interest on his purchase-money to the State. The subject is one which can hardly be meant for serious discussion. The experiment of peasant proprietors, moreover, is one not totally untried in this country. The condition of peasant proprietors in the parish of Templecrone in Donegal was not long since noticed by a writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, and the Commons of Ardfert have been lately commented on by the Knight of Kerry. That the state of the small farmers in the poorer districts in Ireland generally would be one bit better if they were the actual owners of their patches of land, nobody can really profess to believe.

Yet it is precisely from these districts that the cry is loudest for relief and for peasant proprietors. In one of his appeals for aid, Mr. Mitchell Henry put prominently forward as a plea, "We have no



landlords in Connemara." What a mockery of Irish ideas to find the absence of landlords pleaded as a reason for assistance, while their existence is equally asserted to be a cause of destitution !

But if proof were wanting as to the absurdity of this cry for peasant proprietors, it is to be found in a remarkable document lately issued. The people of Liverpool resolved, before distributing the funds they had collected or subscribing more, to obtain testimony as to the state of the country from persons upon whom they could rely. They accordingly appointed a deputation, of whom the Rev. Father Nugent was one, to come over and examine. In their report as to the condition of Donegal and the north-western districts, they attribute the misery of the people to the excessive population which has to be supported upon wretched holdings of from three to five acres. They observe, "It is all very well for agitators to abuse landlords and land laws, but if the land were given to the people for nothing, they would be in a worse plight ere long, because the check on the sub-division of their holdings which the landlords now exercise would be withdrawn. In many of the poor districts a man, when asked how much land he holds, says £2 10s or £3 worth. How much further from the brink of starvation would the abolition of rent place him ?" That is a pointed and practical question for the advocates of small holdings to answer. The true remedy for the evils which the deputation saw is



also clearly stated. "The foundation of any improvement in the condition of such a population lies in emigration, which would benefit those who left the country and those who remained." From this source alone can we hope for any real improvement. If the number of farms in the country can be reduced so as to afford to those who remain sufficient land to maintain themselves and their families in comfort, then the time for the establishment of peasant proprietors will be near at hand, but attempts to "root" in their holdings a class of occupiers, such as the Liverpool committee describe, can only serve to perpetuate misery and poverty. It seems strange that nobody has yet been found to propose a scheme of emigration assisted by Government. It could not require any very great amount of legislative ability to frame a measure which would enable boards of guardians to offer assistance towards emigration to many of the applicants for relief in distressed districts. Combined with the advantages already offered by the Canadian and one or two other Colonial Governments, in the shape of assisted passages, and free grants of land, many might thus be induced to avail themselves of the opening afforded to them.

Much misconception prevails in Ireland as to the prospects opened to an emigrant, and this, coupled to the tenacity with which an Irish cottier or small farmer clings to his native soil, does much to hinder many from leaving the country. It is not too late to hope that the coming summer may



find numbers who are now in the depth of hopeless poverty, induced to emigrate. The recurrence of another bad season would produce a state of destitution too frightful to contemplate.

But perhaps the most serious evil that could be inflicted on Ireland would be a measure that would help to withdraw her more wealthy and intelligent classes from the island. It is characteristic of the country that while absentees are denounced, and rightly so, measures that must tend to increase absenteeism are loudly demanded. Those districts in Ireland most notorious for the want of resident owners are precisely those where want, outrage, and ignorance are most prevalent. What is really wanted is not an increased number of small farmers or starving cottiers, but a greater number of persons of education and property resident in the country. Men of that class not afraid of unpopularity and able to be good jurors, poor law guardians, and magistrates are urgently required. How a body of peasant proprietors, isolated and unaided by advice, example, or assistance, are to be elevated to that station is a problem hitherto unsolved. It is highly probable if a measure that would enable the present owners to part with their property on fair terms could be devised, that it would be eagerly taken advantage of. In certain districts the country would be left almost entirely to the newly created peasant proprietor. He would be at once grand juror, magistrate, rate collector, poor law guardian and



sheriff. The priest would in many instances be the only person in the parish with any education. It would be hard to find a medical man to undertake the care of some districts where there would be no hope of private practice. One person certainly might remain. The local money lender's trade would flourish, and he would soon obtain complete command over the district. Foreclosing of mortgages and evictions would again soon result.

A very slight encouragement to present owners to get rid of their estates might have the effect of producing a general exodus of the intelligence of a whole county. There is little attraction in Ireland to induce those to remain who might leave without serious loss. One of the most discouraging features of the time is the facility with which any adventurer, if his tongue be glib and his promises profuse, can succeed in obtaining the representation of a county. No matter how respected or constant a resident, in spite of a fortune spent for the good of his tenantry and his estate, few candidates with any stake in the country can now expect to be successful in any constituency in the South of Ireland.

The multitude of "carpet baggers" now courting Irish support whose only recommendation consists in letters of introduction from the London Home Rule League, and whose antecedents show them only to have been conspicuous for socialistic or seditious speeches, is a proof of this. How far it will still more tend to discourage those who



have striven and still strive in spite of all opposition to effect real good in the country, remains to be seen. It is, however, certain that amongst the better classes a feeling of disgust and indignation is gaining ground. After bearing for years of turmoil and strife the first brunt of outrage and disaffection, each subsidence of the wave of agrarian violence leaves them only to be harassed by legislation tending to injure them still more. Every concession to clamour and agitation has been made at the expense of those who have proved the most loyal. Every sop thrown to the Irish Cerberus has been wrung from those who alone have made Constitutional Government in Ireland still possible. The comparison of the relative value of life in Ireland and in England is most striking. The murder of an Irish landlord or bailiff is scarcely noticed in a newspaper. A murder in England is commented on by the whole Press. To no class in the country is less protection for life and property afforded than to the Irish landowners. It is certain that no class in the kingdom has been more injured by class legislation. All concessions have been granted directly at their expense. Seventy millions of property were said to have been transferred by the Land Act alone from landlord to tenant. If a few years have effected so much, what wonder, as Mr. Lowther lately said at Kendal, that the demand should still be "give more," and that part having been granted it should be asked "where is the rest." It seems hopeless to expect that Englishmen will



ever recognize the futility of concessions to Irish demands. It is not, however, too much to expect that in common justice a class in one country should not be granted privileges from which a corresponding class in the other is debarred. Because an Irish tenant is poor and ignorant, and too often indolent and disloyal, is he, therefore, to be placed in a position superior to that of the Englishman, who has shown skill, energy, and respect for law? Because the owner in one country has to contend with difficulties and dangers from which in the other he would be exempt, is he to be placed at a still further disadvantage because of those difficulties which he did not create? Because he tries to remove and overcome those difficulties, is he therefore to be still further hampered and discouraged?

Stability and order are the real wants of Ireland. True grievances have been long since redressed. Equal laws firmly administered without favour or affection, and a stern denial of all demands based on injustice and supported by violence, can alone put an end to visions of confiscation. A thorough conviction that from no English party, be it Liberal or Tory, are concessions to be won by menace or violence can alone put an end to strife and agitation. That party which in the future can most effectually and firmly restore confidence and establish a reign of law and order, will surely merit and receive the thanks and gratitude of all Irishmen.