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*French Spectacles in an Irish Case.*

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LETTERS  
ON  
THE STATE OF IRELAND.

BY  
G. DE MOLINARI.

TRANSLATED BY  
L. COLTHURST.

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DUBLIN :  
HODGES, FIGGIS, & CO., 104 GRAFTON STREET.  
LONDON : WILLIAM RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

1880.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.







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## PREFACE.

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WHEN I obtained from Mr. G. de Molinari permission to translate his letters on Ireland, it seemed almost like ungracious presumption to select one or two for republication when all are so good, so witty, and so true; but at a moment like this, of intense anxiety for the possible fate of our country and ourselves, it was thought that those parts only which give the author's opinion on the grave questions which agitate Ireland, and the summary of his reflections during his visit here, would be most acceptable to that class of readers who, knowing the country well, would have more interest in hearing his political opinion, and following the deduction of his wondrous powers of observation, than in conning over his travelling experiences, hotels, and personal adventures, amusing and original as the relation is made.

The first letter, containing the analysis of the famous Disturbance Bill, so wonderfully clear and effective, the second, giving a short history of past events, and latent causes of irritation, and the last, a masterly sketch of the present situation, and recapitulation of the various nostrums proposed for the benefit of the suffering people, and



pointing out the simple remedy for their cure—are translated for the benefit of those to whom in their French dress they might be less familiar.

I can only say, that if a perusal of these should bring me a general assurance that more would be welcomed, I should be delighted to continue a task which, in procuring me the daily companionship of such a mind, is an honour and a reward in itself.

Some men of great ability, judgment, and daily practical experience, have assured me that every opinion pronounced and every conclusion arrived at by M. de Molinari was the soundest and truest they had ever heard. Had he been working in the country for years, he could not, say they, have given a more far-seeing and truthful dictum on this vexed question; and seeing how much prejudice, exaggeration, and falsehood prevail on the subject, I venture to hope that truth may have its weight in the struggle, and win were it only a chosen few from the error of their ways.

Parts of these letters have been published in the *Times*, but a re-perusal of them can scarcely weary the reader; and I trust that all may be interested at a peep at the great question of the day, seen through a pair of French spectacles.

L. C.



LETTERS  
ON  
THE STATE OF IRELAND.

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I.

10th Aug., 1880.

LET us suppose for a moment that the municipality of Paris were to announce a decree to the effect that, considering the hardness of the times and the great difficulty with which the inhabitants of certain localities—say Belleville Menilmontant Faubourg St. Antoine, &c.—can be brought to pay their rents, and that great numbers are in arrear, and are threatened with eviction by their landlords, rapacious, or, to say the least, impatient creditors, the municipal council decree—1st, that all landlords who should attempt to eject a tenant occupying houses under £28 value in these districts, till the 31st December, 1881, on the plea that this tenant has neglected to pay his rent, will be considered as a disturber of the public peace.

2nd. That if made clear to a competent tribunal that the non-payment of rent is caused by the utter impossibility of payment, and that the tenant



does not refuse to come to a reasonable understanding with his landlord with regard to his future rent; also settling by arbitration the amount of arrears to be paid; if it can be proved that the landlord has obstinately refused to accept these offers without making on his side any reasonable proposals of arrangement, said landlord will be declared guilty of disturbing the public peace and be called on to give compensation to the tenant for disturbance, which compensation may be cited at a third of the capital represented by the rental.

If our municipal board had attempted to bring forward a scheme of this kind it would be accused, and most reasonably, of an unjustifiable attack on property, and of offering a direct premium to communism and mob rule; and yet, this decree of which I have analysed the clauses, is an exact transcript of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill passed in the House of Commons, and is at this time under consideration of the House of Lords!!! with the idea of succouring the tenants of those parts of Ireland suffering from pauperism and famine.

It appeared to me that a situation requiring such very extreme measures deserved to be specially inquired into, and therefore I decided to come over and pass three or four weeks in Ireland. I leave to-morrow for the West, where I hear of fever and famine, though it be in a much less degree than in '47. I will relate my impressions as they arise, without favour or prejudice, though I cannot but feel a deep sympathy with this light-



hearted, intelligent people, who seem to deserve a brighter destiny and greater exemption from social evils.

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## II.

*20th Aug., 1880.*

Our forefathers had not, like ourselves, a choice of paths leading to fortune or independence, but they could exercise perfect liberty of migration unfettered by the claims of social rights. When the family or clan found their homesteads had grown too numerous for the soil, or disease thinning the too crowded ranks of their cattle, they, like the patriarchs, divided their forces, and departed under the conduct of some distinguished leader, to the conquest and occupation of new territories. If their enterprise succeeded, they seized without scruple on the lands, with the cattle and inhabitants, and made the best profit out of their new possessions. Thus the Normans, military speculators, conquered first England and subsequently Ireland. According to an old chronicler, their object was gain, and they showed great astuteness and perseverance in attaining it. What industrial speculation has ever succeeded better than the conquest of William of Normandy? What project, organized on the modern plan of shareholders in a company, would give easier and more advantageous dividends? The conquest of Ireland was not nearly so profitable a speculation; the country was



poorer and less extensive, though not to be disdained as a prey. Not only could the conquerors drain a very tolerable revenue from their new estates, but their zeal for converting the aborigines, infected with papal idolatry, created for themselves a monopoly of the lucrative professions during the space of nearly two centuries.

In recalling these painful memories, I am far from wishing to associate myself with the Fenian or socialistic party. The conquest of new territory was always considered in the good old times as the legitimate and even most glorious aim of labour and capital; and admitting that the Irish had possessed the energy and unscrupulous avidity of the Normans, they would certainly have attempted and perhaps achieved the conquest of Great Britain. The English soil would now be in the hands of the O'Donoghues, the O'Briens, &c., the parliament of the United Kingdom be held in Dublin, the debates would be conducted in the Irish tongue, the Protestants of all sects must have been converted to the true faith, under penalty of being excluded from becoming lawyers, or professors, doctors, or even sportsmen, for no Catholic in Ireland was allowed, as no heretic in England would have been permitted, to possess a horse of higher value than £5 sterling.

But the case was not reversed, the Irish did not conquer England, and that is supposed to be the primary cause of all the miseries and discords of this unfortunate country.



There is another cause, of purely economic character, which has had a fatal influence; and that is, the introduction of the potato, and its adoption as the principal if not the only food of the masses.

Previous to the cultivation of the potato, the Irish, like the Scotch, made use of oatenmeal and some articles of farm produce; but as their knowledge of cultivation and production were essentially primitive, the quantity of food was uncertain and restricted, and, as a result, the increase of population was proportionably small. At the commencement of the 18th century, when the potato came into general use, Ireland did not possess more than 1,500,000 inhabitants. A census taken in 1766 gives the result as being 1,871,000, which A. Young thought under the mark, and estimated at three millions. The potato once established, the situation immediately altered. The amount of food to be obtained by a certain amount of labour within a certain superficial acreage of land was tripled and quadrupled. It is true that the food was of inferior kind; but Paddy, not too fastidious, naturally preferred the culture which gave the greatest return for the smallest amount of labour. The potato, therefore, rapidly took the place of every other food; and as this generous esculent secured a four-fold increase of nourishment, the population showed immediate and proportionate increase. In less than a century Ireland became a human warren. From hardly three millions in 1766, her population rose in 1845 to 8,295,168—almost trebled in 75 years!



What has resulted from this frightful multiplication of human beings in a country of which the resources (the potato excepted) did not increase in the same ratio? A progressive increase of importance to the small class of men whom conquest had invested with the monopoly of land—that is to say, of the workshop, so to speak, most indispensable to the production of materials necessary to human subsistence.

I will not trespass on your patience too long with statistics; still a few figures are absolutely necessary to give an idea of what this monopoly has been, and still partly remains.

The 20,047,572 acres which Ireland contains, allowing for lakes, rivers, and roads, are in the hands of 19,288 proprietors, possessing a rental valued at £10,182,681, but which, admitting of course that rents are paid, may be estimated at one-fourth more, viz., about 13 millions; 742 proprietors having more than 5,000 acres, thus owning half the entire of the territorial demesnes!

We are not in a country, as you will perceive, in which one can reasonably complain of a too infinitesimal partition of the soil. The number of tenants living on the land belonging to these 19,288 landlords owns a population of about four millions, and before the famine it was more numerous still, while the proprietors were still fewer, the sales under the Incumbered Estates Court only dating from 1849. This, then, makes about 30 tenants to each landlord, and amongst these tenants 236,000 are quoted as having from one to



fifteen acres only. Let us observe that, excepting in the North, where there are extensive linen factories, Ireland possesses no manufactories or industrial resources whatever; also that up to a recent period travelling or displacement was difficult, not to say impossible, in the absence of all means of cheap and easy communication.

The Irish tenant was thus absolutely at the discretion of his landlord, and this dependence increased in proportion as the number of tenants increased, the number of proprietors remaining the same. In fact, he was a free man; serfdom being abolished long since in Ireland, where, indeed, I do not believe it ever existed, at least in the form in which it was known to our ancestors; but neither the Russian serf nor the African slave were ever more completely under the dominion of their master than the tenant, nominally free, was under the influence of his landlord. This power did not depend upon law, but upon circumstances; and as long as this state of things lasted, legislation was powerless to end it. But when legal power was unequal to the task, Providence, in the shape of famine, swept over the land—a fearful but beneficial scourge—and accomplished its terrible mission of mercy. Abuse of the potato culture ended by exhausting the soil; and in 1847, after three bad seasons, famine—as it was known in the middle ages, as it is still seen in China and India, as it will no more, we trust, be seen in Ireland—famine appeared, and ruthlessly drained this human quagmire!



Though England came forward generously to the rescue—though in the month of March, 1847, the number of sufferers relieved by charity reached the enormous figure of 734,000, representing more than three millions—fever and other maladies consequent upon famine, in conjunction with the drain of emigration, carried off in a few years more than one-third of the population.

This emigration took the proportions of a regular exodus, and increased from year to year. I gather from Thom's Almanac, the great authority on Irish statistics, that the enormous number of 2,458,430 emigrants left the country between the months of May, 1851, and December, 1877. From 8,295,061 in 1845, the population fell to 5,838,906 in 1877, nearly three millions less! At this time England, more equitable and humane towards the sister island, zealously continued the work of reparation begun in 1829 by the Act of Catholic Emancipation.

In 1849 the Incumbered Estates Act authorised the sale of estates overladen with debt, the system of poor-law was applied to Ireland, national schools were founded; later on the Irish Church was disendowed, and in 1870 Mr. Gladstone's Land Act limited the power of landlords, obliging them not only to give the tenants allowance for improvements, but compensation for disturbance, save only in case of non-payment of rent. This indemnity amounted to the value of seven years' rent for the smaller tenants. Besides this, advances were made by the Government to enable



the occupiers to purchase their holdings. The object of these measures instituted by the Liberal party was to raise the moral and social condition of the Irish people ; and if they have not had the beneficial influence that was expected, especially from Mr. Gladstone's Bill, much has been done to diminish the undue power which an entire monopoly of land had given to the proprietors. One might object to Mr. Gladstone's Bill as trenching on the rights of property, but we must remember that these rights can only be justly guaranteed in all their extent when restricted by a wholesome competition, and such was not, is not yet, the case with regard to landed property in Ireland.

It was a practical, if not a legal monopoly, which it was as reasonable and just to subject to some regulation or law of maximum as it is to restrict by arbitration, in the case of railway companies, the unreasonable demands which exist when competition is insufficient to oppose a reasonable limit to them.

Above all, much more than the remedial policy of England, the social revolution accomplished within the last forty years by steam and increased locomotion has tended to modify the power of the landowner and the abject attitude of the tenant. This subjection, which seemed years ago to be almost of a fatal and inexorable character, is easily avoided now by seeking employment in England, and then from their savings to create a little fund with which to seek fortune and liberty in America.



The passage only costs £6 by the admirable steamers of the Anchor line, who compete with feverish activity for the transport of emigrants. The Irish established in the United States come to the help of their parents and friends, and one may count by millions the sums that have been expended in this way since the commencement of the Exodus. I would not say that these political measures and this civil revolution have entirely destroyed the abuse of this landed monopoly. No; like all half-civilized populations, particularly that of the Celtic race, the Irish are hard to uproot; and while the Scotchman, for instance, will cheerfully travel to the Antipodes to earn a few shillings, the Irishman will not emigrate until driven by want or famine. He does not care to change his locality, even in his own country; the result being that there is no fair market value for land, excepting for the pastures, which are let to a superior class of tenants, frequently Scotch. It is a purely local matter, depending much less on the laws of supply and demand than on the personal character of the proprietor on the one hand, and the dogged intensity which attaches the peasant to his cabin and village on the other. They contract early marriages, though rather less than heretofore; but children abound, the Malthusian League of Mr. Bradlaugh not having established any branch in this country, and emigration becomes almost impossible. The poor tenant, overburthened with a numerous family, remains, though perhaps not quite so much as before, at the mercy



of his landlord. Does he abuse his power? From all I have heard and seen lately, I should say, on the contrary, that he uses it with extreme moderation. The large landowners make it a point of honour not to raise the rents in prosperous times, while in bad seasons they are generously ready to make every allowance to their tenants. Of course there are exceptions to this general rule, but more especially among the smaller proprietors brought into the country under the Incumbered Estates Bill; these, in less easy circumstances themselves, and lower in the social scale, more particularly the class of money-lenders, frequently make use of their power to its fullest extent.

It would, perhaps, seem natural that when England strove to repair past injustice, and laboured to remove the legitimate grievances of the Irish, and in proportion also the undue power of landed monopoly was lessened, that Irishmen should become reconciled to their old oppressors, and the tenants more satisfied in their relations to the landlords; but it is precisely the contrary that has taken place. And it is not in Ireland only that we see this phenomenon of political psychology. It is manifested in all countries which have long bent under the yoke of despotic power, or been subdued under the influence of a foreign, or even national aristocracy.

Special causes in Ireland contributed to stir up and develop the deep animosities excited by oppression. So long as the penal laws existed, and Roman Catholics were debarred from all the



liberal professions, the Irish were unable to raise their voice against this injustice. There was, indeed, liberty of the Press, and meetings could be held; but the Press was in its infancy, and their meetings were abortive attempts to be heard. In Parliament, where Catholics were excluded, the representatives of their enemies only possessed liberty of speech. The mass of the population were unable to read, and so complete was the power of the landlord, so chimerical seemed the idea of evading it, that it seemed accepted at last with the resignation of fatalism. From time to time, a few wild and resolute spirits combined and opposed tyranny, or what they considered injustice, with murder and incendiarism. White Boys and Ribbon Men practised Lynch law without mercy towards those landlords whose power knew no other limit; but all this brought no permanent remedy to a situation caused by the force of circumstances.

As this became insensibly modified, partly by the efforts of English policy and by increased means of material and intellectual communication, Ireland gradually found a vent for her accumulated grievances. By the introduction of national schools, instruction was placed within reach of the poorest class, and mechanical progress facilitated the establishment of a popular Press.

Coincident with this, the emigrants who flooded America, learnt notions of personal independence totally unknown to the humble tenant crouching before his landlord, and brought also from thence



a renewed antipathy to England. The daily papers and meetings gave utterance to these sentiments, in glowing language, for Ireland is naturally eloquent. She has given to England some of her finest orators, and numbers of distinguished writers, reporters, and journalists; and it is well known what influence the daily press and personal eloquence can exercise, specially on a population too little accustomed to such display to be over critical as to its truth and merit. The old grievances then, buried and half forgotten, were eagerly disinterred, the smouldering ashes were worried into flame, and blazed anew. We must, however, acknowledge that the English have unconsciously contributed by their attitude and manner to this retrospective explosion. With so many noble and admirable qualities, they neutralize them by an offensive pride and incurable want of tact. They are haughty and awkward, discrediting the benefits they confer by the way in which they bestow them. Their favourite journals let no opportunity pass of treating the Irish as an inferior race, a variety of white nigger. It is sufficient to glance over *Punch* to see the contemptuous comparison established in the national mind between the robust and prosperous personification of John Bull, and the meagre, poverty-stricken attitude of the conventional "Pat." It is greatly owing to these small offences, that England, although daily perhaps more deserving of esteem, became daily more odious to them. We may say the same with regard to the feeling of the tenant towards his land-



lord. The more his power diminished, the less he abused it, the more were the tenants persuaded that his tyranny was insupportable. In vain was the rent diminished to a rate that would gladden the hearts of our French farmers, no concession could satisfy them; they had no other effect than to make them dispute the entire validity of his title; for if the landlord did not exercise his right to all its extent, was it not a proof, that he was uncertain as to that right, and of his own power? Thus it only won for him the pleasant *soubriquet* of "land robber," now the favourite term of opprobrium at the meetings of the Land League. Mr. Gladstone's Bill, which may have been useful in some respects in limiting the power and influence of landowners, has greatly contributed to invalidate their titles, and is ominously pregnant with socialistic tendencies, that will more than compensate for any possible advantage.

It was in this condition of affairs that occurred a recrudescence of national misfortune. After having enjoyed a period of prosperity without precedent, Ireland has just suffered from three successive bad harvests—last winter especially, potatoes, hay, and oats failed in a large part of the western and southern counties, while heavy and continuous rains destroyed the turf on which so much of their comfort depends. Bad times also in England and America interrupted the emigration that annually relieves the overcrowded cabins. The loss on the crops has been valued at not less than ten millions sterling, and numbers of small tenants were



reduced to the direst distress. Public and private charity came to the rescue. The Government advanced considerable sums to allow public commissioners and private individuals to make roads, drains, or buildings, or any useful work, the rate of interest lowered from £5 per cent. to £3 6s. 8d. Subscriptions were opened everywhere, and produced the respectable figure of ten to twelve million of francs, of which America furnished about the one-half. In short, the evil was arrested, and scarcity did not darken into famine. Rents suffered of course from the hardness of the times; many tenants could not, and some would not, pay. The generality of landlords proved most patient. Most of them agreed to a reduction of twenty or twenty-five per cent., but there were necessarily some exceptions, and evictions for non-payment were more numerous. In 1877, the number of families ejected for this cause in the nine counties of Cork, Galway, Donegal, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Meath, Roscommon, and Waterford, was only 98. In 1879 this number increased to 264, and finally to 395 in the first six months of 1880. Then it was that Mr. Gladstone judged it necessary to produce the famous Disturbance Bill, of which I spoke in my first letter, and which proposed to suspend the payment of rent and the chance of eviction for eighteen months in those parts of the country where scarcity had been experienced.

His intention might have been excellent, to prevent griping or needy landlords from taking advantage of the opportunity to rid themselves of their



tenants; but how would it be possible to pronounce between the tenant who could, and those who could not or would not, pay? and would not the natural consequence of such a Bill be greatly to increase the number of these last-named defaulters? Also, by suspending the rights of property in a country where a crusade has already begun against the so-called land robbers, would it not be justly inferred that the Government was full of sympathy for the opinions of the Land League, and would not the collection of any rent become more and more difficult, not to say dangerous and impossible? These objections, which made but a slight impression on the House of Commons, had, as would naturally be expected, much more influence in the House of Lords, who reckon amongst their number many of the largest and most influential landowners in the world, and the Disturbance Bill was rejected by a formidable majority of 282 to 51. This vote was applauded to the echo by the landlords, and greeted by the murmurs of the opposite faction, and as these are as 600,000 to 200,000, it is easy to see how unpopular the House of Lords and the great majority of landowners must become.

At this moment the meetings of the Land League are multiplying, and each day discloses some fresh outrage against life and property. Here, we are told, the son of a land agent has been shot; there, a herd of inoffensive animals have been brutally mutilated. Government has sent 1,000 men to reinforce the garrisons of Ireland. There is great



and general excitement, but I believe no serious revolution need be feared. As long as British power remains intact, there may be emeutes, and isolated instances of violence, but there will be no revolution.

I ask my readers to excuse this long preamble, but it was necessary, to explain something of the moral and social condition of the country.

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### III.

*22nd Sept. 1880.*

I will try to give a slight summary of the impressions received during a month's sojourn amongst the poorest and most disturbed districts of Ireland. In spite of adverse circumstances her social condition is sensibly improving, and I would add, that the progress would be infinitely greater if she were left in peace to the action and influence of natural causes.

No doubt Ireland is suffering, and from one of the worst forms of poverty—agrarian pauperism. Amongst 530,000 tenants who live upon the land, 230,000, representing a million, one-fifth of her population, can hardly drag on a miserable existence in favourable seasons, and if summoned to show a debtor and creditor account, must turn out hopeless bankrupts. Given—a bad year, this million are left on the brink of famine and utter destitution. The resources of the poorhouse and the extra contributions of the Board of Works do not suffice to feed



them, and, as Mr. Davitt remarks, Ireland is obliged to appeal to the charitable sympathies of the whole world. But this social malady, this chronic suffering, is not absolutely confined to Ireland, though perhaps its symptoms may be more acute there than elsewhere, and one may inquire if—at least in late years—quack doctors with their various nostrums have not greatly contributed to aggravate the disorder. I speak of doctors of social science—a species unfortunately unknown to Moliere, who have, as all the world know, a special mission to cure all social evils. If they have not the flowing robes and pointed caps of Moliere's quacks, they have in common with them a blind confidence in the infallibility of their own systems, and in the virtue of their own elixirs. This poor Ireland, with her gaping wounds, unjustly accused of exhibiting them to excite public commiseration, festering sores that the inveterate use of whiskey may well have largely contributed to inflame—this poor Ireland, I say, has attracted from all points of the horizon doctors—socialistic, philanthropic, political, revolutionary, or Parliamentary quacks or theorists—hotly disputing the virtues of their several nostrums and remedial systems over the prostrate form of their unfortunate patient.

I seek in vain for serious remedies in this parti-coloured codex. The most popular are not only inapplicable and inefficacious, but perfectly unreasonable and hurtful. We will first examine in the category "Home Rule," whether as regards the



complete separation of England and Ireland, or of the re-establishment of the Irish Parliament, with simple federative union between the two countries. England is not disposed to repeal the Union. On this point the most vehement Radicals and the most bigoted Tories are agreed. How would it be possible to force her hand? Yet many, and not the least intelligent, Irishmen, delude themselves with a pleasing dream of this kind. The power of England (say they) is declining; she only occupies a second or third rank among military powers, at a time when political influence more than ever depends on overpowering battalions. She could not stand against Germany or Russia. Where could she find soldiers? Time was when Ireland supplied the flower of her armies; but since her young men prefer to emigrate rather than serve under the British flag, she only gets the refuse for recruits, and even that with difficulty. Her power in India is precarious. Canada and Australia will soon become independent.

What remains, then, of her strength? A century ago the emancipation of Greece and Bulgaria would have been looked upon as a dream; this dream is now a reality. Why should it not be the same with the project of Home Rule? Why should we not succeed as well as the Greeks and Bulgarians in shaking off the fetters of our Sultan, and re-constituting Irish nationality? I might have made some few objections to this rhapsody, and reminded our Home Ruler that English credit is not yet exactly on a par with that of Turkey, but, *cui*



*bono*? Passion is deaf and blind, and this Home Rule is purely a matter of passionate monomania. Even admitting that, by some marvellous political cataclysm, Ireland recovered her independence, would her situation be in the least degree improved? She only contributes now £6,781,000 to the general expenditure, while England and Scotland contribute £62,893,000. In fact, she is a charge upon her two partners. If she became independent, all the expense of her home and foreign administration would fall upon herself. Her expenditure would be doubled, and, in consequence, taxation must also be doubled. Would her administration be improved? The management of her local interests is often most unsatisfactory. I was struck with the neglect and defective arrangement of the workhouse in Galway, and the daily papers abound in untoward revelations about the same institutions in other places. The towns are badly paved and ill-kept, though the rates and taxes show a daily increase, while the prisons and the Constabulary, dependent on Government, are models of careful organization. I could say as much for post-offices, save in Dublin, in which, though occupying a sumptuous palace, there is little room for the public. Here one is elbowed in a narrow corridor opening on a side street, and the service most imperfectly performed. In smaller localities one has but to acknowledge the zeal and good management of postal officials. The recipients, then, of the benefits of this public service—that is, the mass of the population—would have nothing to gain by the acquisition of a



National Government. The same must be said of that intellectual *élite* who share in the various brilliant openings that the British Empire affords to every capacity. Admitting that these politicians, journalists, &c., intelligent men, but of the terribly excitable genus, were pressed back upon the straitened platform of Irish nationality, could they find all the desired facilities for their merit and ambitions? and would their restless competition tend to secure the public tranquillity?

Ireland, once independent, said an Irishman to me (not a Home Ruler), would soon be torn to shreds by different parties. Before ten years, we should have civil war. The North, where capital and industry are concentrated, would end by beating the South, as in America. The Catholics would fall under the yoke of the Protestants again, and who knows that they may not implore the help of England to save them from this fate. Is it necessary to add, that this agitation, organized to realize the most chimerical of Utopian schemes, distracts one's attention from present possible progress, frightens away capital, and obliges England to reinforce all her garrisons, without speaking of Coercion Bills and Peace Preservation Acts. Behold the numerous benefits of Home Rule!

Are the aims of the Land League agitation more wholesome and less chimerical than those of the Home Rule movement? What do they propose as their object? To suppress landlordism, and replace the landlords by peasant proprietors. They would also universalize the Ulster Custom,



which allows a tenant to choose his own successor, and to cede his rights of occupation for a certain sum. But, above all, they desire to deprive landlords of the right to evict defaulting tenants, and would persuade these last to keep the fruits of their harvest—that is, not to pay a penny of their rent to the rightful proprietor, the so-called odious land robber—this under penalty of being stigmatized as traitors to the cause of the people, and of exposing themselves to the awards of popular justice. This popular tribunal is not always of the most suave and discriminative kind, and does not, moreover, possess much choice of punishment, for Government has not yet thought fit to acknowledge this division of executive power, and instead of sharing fraternally the use of its prisons and gibbets, goes so far as entirely to prohibit this amateur competition with its legal authority.

Disobedience to the agrarian law pronounced by the people is generally punished with death. Sometimes, indeed, mutilation, whether of cattle or of the owner of it, may satisfy its requisitions. Lately, for instance, a bailiff was allowed to escape with only the loss of one ear! It might not be quite just to attribute the establishment of this *Vehm Gericht* to the Land League only. It has existed for centuries; and perhaps when the agricultural class was entirely at the mercy of the proprietors it contributed to modify their irresponsible power, as the despotism of Oriental potentates was tempered by cord and poison. But tenants have ceased to be under the entire



control of their landlord. The law guarantees them every just and reasonable right, and even something more. Agrarian justice, such as it is practised now in Ireland, is a barbarous anachronism, and the Land League has committed an inexcusable error in adopting, for the sake of popularity, this heritage of White Boys, Ribbon Men, and Molly Maguires. The moderate men of the party, it is true, repudiate the agrarian atrocities, and the more violent abstain from absolutely advising their adoption. Mr. Dillon, for instance, declared that he had not recommended the mutilation of stock at the Kildare meeting! Most considerate, no doubt; but is it not clear that in advising tenants to repudiate their contracts, and in declaring those men who do pay their rents, or those who take the farms from which a tenant has been evicted, traitors to the cause of the people, half of the decree is pronounced, and the other plainly pointed out to the quick eyes and ready hands eager to execute the sentence according to the old fashion of summary punishment? And when the blood of the victim has been shed, have the instigators to the deed the right to exculpate themselves from its consequences? If agrarian outrages continue to increase, will not Government be inevitably forced to bring forward some coercion bill which will put an end to Land League agitation? Supposing even that it should pursue its victorious course undisturbed, and succeed in stopping the general payment of rents, would the condition of the tenants be greatly improved?



There are two kind of tenants. Those who possess a sufficiently large farm and cultivate it with intelligent economy, and those who have wretched small holdings that hardly enable them to make both ends meet in prosperous times. The first pay their rent without difficulty, besides, their landlords seldom refuse any necessary or reasonable indulgence in bad seasons, for good tenants are rare, and those who have such are anxious to keep them. Rents in general are moderate; and let, as far as I could judge, in comparison to the value of the land, at about half the usual rate in Flanders. The small tenants would be miserable even were they given the land gratis; rent is by no means the most onerous of their charges, even exclusive of their expenses in whisky. They are almost all burthened with small debts that careless habits and improvidence have accumulated; and if the landlord waived his claim to-morrow, it would have no other effect than temporarily to augment his credit, and leaving him at the mercy of other creditors.

“I evicted a tenant last month,” writes an Irish agriculturist to *Macmillan's Magazine*, “and during “the fifteen days that elapsed between the summons “and the execution, not less than five or six decrees “were issued against him, and others were to come. “The occupation of a farm by a ruined tenant is a “loss for everyone; beginning by himself. Then “how can capital be expended on land when rent is “virtually suppressed, and no one can demand it “under penalty of being stigmatized as a robber,



“and exposed to public reprobation? Will tenants  
 “then be likely to undertake the work and improve-  
 “ment of the land? Till now, at any rate, they  
 “have only laboured to exhaust it.

“The advocates of Tenant-right declare that the  
 “tenant has a right to compensation for having im-  
 “proved the land. Whereas the truth is that they  
 “have deprived it of all that nature had bestowed  
 “and left it a ‘*caput mortuum*.’ Improvements have  
 “been made chiefly, if not entirely, at the ex-  
 “pense of the landlords. I have drained more land  
 “than all the tenants within twenty miles, and if I  
 “said twice as much I should speak within consider-  
 “able limits of the truth; and yet my tenants are  
 “better off and more advanced in agricultural know-  
 “ledge than their neighbours. At the time of the  
 “Land Act, in ’70, I inquired into all details on this  
 “subject, and found that the improvements made  
 “by tenants, from father to son, did not amount  
 “to eighteen months’ income; and admitting that  
 “proprietors who possess more capital and more  
 “credit, were thrown overboard, would agriculture  
 “flourish any the more?

“One must be totally unacquainted with the Irish  
 “tenant to suppose it. The fact is, that the land  
 “would require all the disposable capital of both  
 “landlord and tenant during two or three genera-  
 “tions to put it into real good condition.”

In reality then the “eviction” of landlords would  
 not only deprive Ireland of the best part of her capital,  
 but the staple of her respectability and civilization.  
 Doubtless, this eviction is not to be feared as long



as the Act of Union subsists. With the exception of a few crack-brained monomaniacs, the promoters of this agrarian agitation have but slight illusions as to its ultimate success; but, in the meantime, capital is scared away from a country where the celebrated aphorism of "property is robbery" has become a pet phrase with hedge orators, and the less capital there is in a country, the greater the depreciation of labour. If only they understood the simplest laws of political economy! But, political economy is no here a popular science. It is well known that political economists are committed to the doctrine of developing the resources of a country by the investment of capital, and that is why those in Ireland who reject this doctrine all religiously believe in the efficacy of panaceas, political, socialistic or philanthropic, to cure the evils of society, as they trust in the virtue of sacred wells to cure the diseases of the body.

Let us consider another of these panaceas, the Ulster Tenant Right. It was a custom established in the North, at a time when rents were very badly paid. Landlords allowed their tenants to sell their interest in their farms, on condition of paying the landlord the arrears of rent out of the bonus received from their successor; but, is the condition of the tenant improved by this? Instead of paying one rent, they pay two: that owing to the landlord, and the interest of the sum given on taking possession, the payment of which deprives him of the necessary capital for working his farm.

In virtue of the sophism, "*post hoc ergo propter*



*hoc*," the prosperity of the North and its surroundings has been entirely attributed to the Ulster Custom, without remembering the active industry and flow of capital from Scotland and England, which have made a second Glasgow of Belfast.

The Ulster Custom is in full force in Donegal, and does not in the least prevent this picturesque angle of the North-west from being one of the poorest and most miserable parts of Ireland.

Comes last, not least, the panacea, *par excellence*, that which socialist radicals and liberal philanthropists join in applauding, viz.:—the transformation of all tenants into peasant proprietors. By an operation, similar to that in Russia by which the serfs were emancipated, Government must buy the land at a reasonable rate, and transfer the ownership to the tenants, being paid in thirty-five years both interest and capital. Thanks to the exceptional credit of the British Government, although threatened with the fate of Turkey, the tax on the tenant would be very small, and all his grievances would be redressed when once placed on the sacred ground of independent proprietorship. Examples from France and Belgium are quoted in aid of this assumption only, the fact is utterly ignored that this property has been created in France and Belgium by the patient work of years, the habit of quiet industry and thrift, so indispensable to the successful management of property. Those men have worked and saved, little by little, the capital to purchase, and later on, to increase their small domain. No qualities of this kind, no



apprenticeship of this sort, is expected from the Irish tenant. They simply propose during thirty-five years to replace the landlord by the State. In Russia this has been done; but it is by no means proved that the popularity of the Government is increased by it, or the condition of the peasant improved, whose taxes are heavily augmented by the added interest of his purchase-money. We might also remark, that the Czar was revered and adored by his people, while the Irish peasant is far from feeling any tender sentiments towards the Queen's Government. He occasionally detests his landlord, though that is far from being the rule! How will it be when the English State becomes the landlord? the detested tyrant, the merciless destroyer of the brave Afghans? Let us remember that this new landlord must necessarily levy his rate with official regularity, without personal consideration or abatement, such as they have been in the habit of receiving from their present landlords; and we may well ask if the position of the official creditor would be tenable. But the worst result of this artificial combination would be to perpetuate agrarian pauperism. We cannot find a better comparison for the situation of these small tenants, than that of the hand-weavers and spinners, at the time of the introduction of machinery in their work. The small agricultural workshop, with its old-fashioned tools, is now passing into utter disuse; and since agriculture has become, so to speak, a manufacturing science, those who hold to their old grooves must disappear



in the struggle, and be swamped as the hand-weaver must be who undertook an impossible competition with machinery, or the stage-coaches who would aspire to rival the railways.

Would a government that made the hand-weavers owners of their old looms, be supposed to have bettered their condition? Would it not, on the contrary, have aggravated their situation by encouraging, even forcing on them till their debt was liquidated, the use of worn-out and antiquated instruments? The small farms, where land is farmed according to the old-fashioned systems, represent the refuse of agricultural resources—the worn-out machinery, condemned by progress and enlarged experience; and the philanthropists who seek to tie down the tenant to it by the bait of ownership, are acting in inverse ratio to the deductions of common sense and the laws of progress.

It is important also to observe, that this retrograde panacea until now, has been in no favour with Irish tenants. In the Land Act of 1870, special clauses were inserted by Bright to facilitate the sale of land to tenants. Government was to advance two-thirds of the money. Notwithstanding, in ten years, these clauses have only been taken advantage of to the amount of 45,000 acres. But, say even the landlords, something must be done. Of what use are doctors without prescriptions? Something must be done, no doubt, but remedies are not all equally good. First of all, we should study the physiology of the patient, inquire into the causes of disease, and, above all, seek not to disturb the *vis medicatrix naturæ*.



The cause of Ireland's distress and poverty—and this is the root of all the others—is the existence of from 200,000 to 300,000 tenants representing a million of individuals, who persist in clinging to the old system, and whom the slightest accident reduces to within an inch of ruin; while a glance at the agrarian statistics of Ireland will show that nature herself is working her own cure, and that if she were only left alone, before a quarter of a century had passed, the cottier tenants would have disappeared. In 1841 there were 310,426 farms of from 1 to 5 acres, and 225,799 of from 5 to 15 acres; in 1878 there were no more than 66,359 of the first, and 163,062 of the second class; on the other hand, the number of farms 15 to 30 acres had reached in the same interval from 79,342 to 137,493, and those over 30 acres had increased from 48,625 to 161,264. This progress is tending to decrease since the Land Act has established a special system of protection in favour of small holdings. It continues, however, steadily in spite of every hindrance, and will end in spite of doctors, by curing Ireland of the miseries of pauperised tenancies. What will become of these small tenants? Some will emigrate, others become labourers. "My best labourers," says the correspondent of *Macmillan*, "are my quondam tenants, and their pride is to show how much better clothed and more comfortable they are than the small farmers of the neighbourhood. Many thousands have acknowledged the truth of this, and there is no doubt that their position is far preferable." It would be sufficient



to leave matters to natural causes to determine this solution. The only real way to help it would be to thin the labour market, and advocate the expedient of advancing money for emigration. The Canadian Government was disposed to encourage this system, by making special arrangements for the repayment of loans and advances. Let the Land League establish an agency for deposits and emigration for the small tenant whom progress "evicts," as the loom and hand weavers have been evicted, and this inevitable transformation will be accomplished with a minimum of suffering. Need I add, that this modest function of simply aiding nature does not satisfy the army of doctors, political, socialistic, and others, in whom Ireland, seduced by their flattering tales and noisy promises, has chosen to confide. My conclusion is, that Ireland is suffering, but quite as much from her numerous physicians, as from her own ailments.



# Houses of the Oireachtas