

LETTER

OF

MOST REV. DR. NULTY,

Bishop of Meath,

TO

JOSEPH COWEN, ESQ., M.P.,

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE,

ON THE

STATE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN IRELAND.

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PREFATORY LETTER.

TO JOSEPH COWEN, ESQ., M.P.,

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

MY DEAR SIR,

Although I do not enjoy the honour of your acquaintance, and am, indeed, a perfect stranger to you, yet I venture to address to you the accompanying letter. Of all English statesmen, there is not one in whom my countrymen place the same amount of trust and confidence that they do in you. From your very first appearance in public life, you have invariably displayed a just, a generous, and a kindly sympathy to our race and nation, that was exceptional with English statesmen. Irishmen, therefore, have watched your career for years past with the keenest interest and with a deep and an ever-increasing feeling of gratitude. They regard you as the true ideal of an English liberal politician. You love justice and liberty for their own sakes, and you hate oppression and injustice in every country in the world as well as in our own. If we happened to have appropriated the largest share of your sympathies, the

largest amount of your brilliant and invaluable services ; if you felt the deepest and the keenest interest in our country, it was because you saw we were the most afflicted and the most cruelly and sorely tried nation in the world. We were and are still the victims of misgovernment, oppression and injustice, for which there is no parallel in any country. I will not undertake to enumerate the various public occasions on which your eloquent and unrivalled advocacy of our country's rights, her freedom and her liberty have won for you all the warm and affectionate gratitude which the Irish heart is capable of feeling. I will content myself by alluding briefly to the debate on the Coercion Act. That Act was the largest, the most galling, and the most crushing disaster that had ever fallen on our country, at least in this century. I really believe that the Government itself failed to grasp the magnitude and true character of that measure in the beginning. But you, sir, from the onset, fully realized the dangers as well as the injustice that characterized that measure, and its exceptional liability to be frightfully abused, and consequently you met it with a stern, a powerful, and an uncompromising resistance. Throughout the long, weary and trying ordeal of that debate, you never let a single blot in it pass unchallenged ; you never lost a single night's sitting ; you never missed a division in battling bravely and persistently for the liberties of our country. You seized on and dragged into the light, and exhibited to the world, with matchless

ability and skill the most odious and repulsive features of the measure, in speeches that will be regarded as models of parliamentary eloquence, and will be read with interest and profit when the Coercion Bill shall have been forgotten. To convey to you, therefore, the esteem, the admiration, and the deep and lasting gratitude which my countrymen, as well as myself, cherish for you, was the object I had in view in addressing this letter to you. When I allude in it to the police force, I invariably speak of it as a body, and not as individuals; and when I speak of landlords, I invariably adhere to the same rule. I do not deny that there are iust, generous and most considerate landlords, although unfortunately they are by no means numerous. And it is a remarkable fact, and one of which I feel justly proud, that in this diocese—at least as far as I can ascertain—these good landlords have all, with few exceptions, received their rents punctually. Whilst I have freely criticised the public acts of public men, I hope I have not exceeded the bounds of moderation and justice.

I have the honour to be,

My dear Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

✠ THOMAS NULTY.

Mullingar, December 8th, 1881,

TO
JOSEPH COWEN, ESQ., M.P.,
Newcastle-on-Tyne.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have neither leisure nor inclination to take any part in politics, and it was only in exceptional circumstances that I ever meddled in them at all. I have not often obtruded on the attention of the public, and I never did so except under the pressure of a public necessity, or when, for some reason or another, I could not help it. But now that the excitement caused by the late extraordinary action of the Government has subsided considerably, and that the results of that policy can be calmly and dispassionately examined, it becomes the sacred duty of every man who has anything to say in defence of his country not to withhold it. The situation of affairs which the Government has so suddenly and so unexpectedly created in Ireland, has no parallel or precedent even in her own melancholy history; and it has no existing counterpart (except perhaps in Russia) in any other country on the globe. The people of this nation now live under the sway of coercion, and of force, and of arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, and not under the rule of constitutional law and free government. Our liberties had been forfeited *de jure* by the disastrous Coercion Bill of last year, and they are now simply annihilated *de facto* by the excessive severity with which the Government exercises the exceptional powers given them by that Act. By the strange and extraordinary use they have made of these unconstitutional powers, they have profoundly shocked the public feeling of the nation with a succession of sudden and painful surprises. For months past we heard every day with bewildered astonishment of the arrest and imprisonment of innocent, educated, and highly-gifted Irishmen, who in the estimation of their countrymen were above even the suspicion of anything that could be

regarded as criminal or dishonorable. Although the people's patience had thus been sorely tried, they still hoped on. But the sudden and unexpected arrest of Messrs. Parnell, Sexton, and Dillon; the total suppression of the Land League organization; the dispersion by force of peaceful public meetings, and the violent and unnatural silence and restraint put on freedom of speech, all occurring as they did in rapid succession, spread terror and dismay.

During the passing of the Coercion Act the Government had solemnly but perfidiously pledged itself to Parliament that the fact of being a member of the Land League organization would be no ground for arresting a man as a "reasonable suspect," and yet eminent and distinguished Land Leaguers were, as a matter of fact, the only persons actually arrested under it. On the other hand, you would search in vain, among the actual suspects, for the "dissolute ruffians and village tyrants" to whom alone it was solemnly promised the operations of the Act would be restricted. No man, therefore, being able to make even a rational guess at the principles by which the Government was guided in forming its estimate of a "suspect," every man now feels that his liberty is not safe for the space of a single hour. Your innocence and immunity from every form of crime, your punctual observance of every law, human as well as divine; the irreproachable testimony of your own conscience, afford you no guarantee against arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. You are forced, therefore, to infer that every hour you are left in the enjoyment of your freedom; every hour you are allowed to live in your own house; in the bosom of your family, and not in the prison-cell, confronted and watched by warders and jailers, is a free gift to which you really have no right or legal claim, and which you enjoy from, and during the good will and pleasure of the Government. And as the youth and manhood of the nation, the most gifted, the most intelligent, and the most highly educated—in fact the very flower of the agricultural, the industrial, and the commercial classes—were all once members of the now proscribed Land League organization, so every man you meet is in fear and trembling for his personal freedom. Many have deserted their business, their families, and their homes, and as all feel the sword of Damocles suspended over their heads, so no one can apply himself with his usual earnestness and skill to the calling in which he earned his living. You feel yourself instinctively

under the baleful influence of a reign of terror. You cannot help mistrusting and suspecting those whom you never doubted before; and no matter how sternly your reason may rebuke the groundlessness of your fears, you still fancy yourself surrounded by spies and informers, ready and eager to misinterpret and misrepresent your most thoughtless and innocent actions.

And fresh grounds for alarm have recently arisen from the decidedly altered tone and bearing of the police force throughout the kingdom. A strange and extraordinary spirit of brutality and insolence seems to have seized on this force, and displays itself ostentatiously on every occasion that offers. It is true they never possessed the moderation, the patience and forbearance of a force that seemed impressed with the responsibility of respecting the rights of citizens, even at the time that it became their duty to act with firmness and vigour against them as offenders, but now they have shaken off even the semblance of moderation, and they scornfully and defiantly irritate and threaten the people, as if they had no right to be regarded as anything better than rebels or slaves. They appear to think that they have a right to do just what they please, to be amenable to no tribunal, and to have relieved themselves from every sense of responsibility. I know of one instance, at least, in which a large body of police, with a resident magistrate at their head, seemed chagrined and disappointed because the peaceable and orderly demeanour of the people deprived them even of a pretext for firing at them, as they had threatened. Under the guidance of men, whose conduct has more than once excited a well-grounded suspicion that they were under an artificial excitement, which, in them, would be highly criminal, this force now assails with wanton and indiscriminate brutality the innocent and the peaceable, as well as the disorderly and the riotous. They fire volleys into crowds of unarmed men, at the very time they are actually running for their lives; and even the dignity and helplessness of woman, which render her personal safety sacred in every nation on earth that is civilized as well as brave, afford her no protection from these warriors, for they shoot down women as well as men; and according to sworn accounts, they bayonet to death young girls even when they are down. Three coroners' juries, on their solemn oaths and on sworn testimony, have found and recorded verdicts of wilful murder against them, and yet the

accused appear to be still at large, and do not seem to have been inconvenienced, or in the least disconcerted by such insignificant incidents. And if anyone, like myself, ventures to raise his voice and give vent to his feelings in a piercing cry of anguish and of pain over the ruins of the liberties of his country, he is liable to be arrested and thrown into prison, to add one more to the 340 high-spirited, intelligent, and educated men who are at this moment, like so many wild beasts, caged within bars of iron, deprived of their liberty, their freedom, and of every other gift that makes life agreeable, or even endurable. And yet these men have not been convicted of any crime; let them clamour as they may, they will not be brought to trial, and no opportunity will be afforded them for proving their innocence. They are subjected to the indignities, to the solitude and the horrors of prison life, simply because the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary wish it; and they must remain there during their good will and pleasure. This system of arbitrary arrests—of cruel and indefinite imprisonment, for purely political crimes, which are only “suspected”—whilst it continued merely a Continental institution, shocked and scandalized Mr. Gladstone immensely, and he denounced it in burning words that set all Europe in a blaze. But oh, shade of King Bomba, you have now your revenge! The system that had then been reprobated in words that will live for ever; that had been then relegated into eternal infamy, oblivion and shame, has quite recently been discovered among the “resources of civilization;” has been revived, in its own proper living individuality and identity, by the very man who had then so fiercely decried it. It is now one of the flourishing social institutions of free England, and is actually in full swing this moment, plaguing her Majesty’s subjects throughout the jails of Ireland with forms of physical suffering and mental anguish, that to them are all but intolerable, and from which, before the winter shall have passed, some shall very likely escape by going mad, and others by becoming totally ruined in health, and rendered utterly worthless for the rest of their lives.

Surely, then, Mr. Gladstone might have spared that galling phrase with which he mocks and insults us, when he assures the world that to annihilate a nation’s liberties, to crowd her prisons and her jails with the best and noblest of her sons, to silence freedom of speech, and to make every

man in the community dependent for his personal freedom on his sole arbitrary will, are all but departments in the high and accomplished art of governing on principles derived from the "resources of civilization."

Government by force, by arbitrary arrests, by wholesale imprisonments, without judge or jury, by silencing freedom of speech and the right to complain of injustice and wrong, used to be regarded as a hateful despotism which would not be tolerated for one week in any civilized country, and which could not exist at all except in communities that were uncivilized and barbarous. But when men apply themselves to the odious task of oppressing or enslaving their fellow-creatures, they are wonderfully ready in devising smart incisive phrases with which, in defiance of decency and truth, they endeavour to palliate and pass off on the thoughtless forbearance of the public, excesses to which they would not venture to direct attention by professedly justifying or defending them.

History abounds with phrases of this kind, and they are associated with memories of which Mr. Gladstone would feel ashamed. I think it was Cromwell that characterized "as a great mercy of God" the wholesale slaughter of innocent and unarmed citizens; the Red Republicans cut the throats and shed the blood of the best men in France to the cry of "liberty, fraternity, and equality;" and the Russian tyrant announced to the world "that order reigned at Warsaw" at the very time that Warsaw ran red with the blood of Poland's noblest and bravest defenders. Not to talk, then, of the insult wantonly flung at a spirited and sensitive people, an ordinary sense of self-respect and a decent regard for his own character ought to have induced Mr. Gladstone to hold his hand here at any rate.

Now, sir, this is exactly, as far as I can ascertain, the policy which a liberal administration has introduced, and actually upholds and administers this moment in Ireland. I may, of course, have mistaken it in some of its features, and if I have, I am ready to retract and apologize for having done so. But I have deliberately misstated nothing regarding it. Now, Mr. Gladstone having advisedly, avowedly, and in the broad light of day, taken on himself the responsibility of this policy, it becomes competent for the humblest of her Majesty's subjects who feels himself aggrieved by it, to challenge it, and criticise it, and to demonstrate, if he can, by fair argument, that it is at

once unjust, as well as unconstitutional. I do not deny that a Tory Government could be found which would do exactly the same thing, if it were allowed freely to follow its naturally tyrannical instincts ; but I do deny that any Tory Government would have the power or would dare to set up such a form of Government whilst the Liberal party sat on the Opposition benches. A Liberal administration, like the present Government, is then about the greatest misfortune that could happen to our country.

I may be permitted, then, to ask if the *de facto* Government of Ireland at this moment has the sanction, the approval, and support of the principles of freedom and liberty which the great Liberal and Radical parties of England profess, and so zealously propagate in every country on the globe, except perhaps here in Ireland ? Or is it rather an absolute and an unmitigated despotism which these great parties are bound, by their own principles, emphatically to repudiate and condemn ? I will venture to consider the question before the bar of the Liberal and Radical opinion of England, and I am willing to abide by their arbitrament.

The circumstances that immediately led to the present deplorable situation of affairs are still fresh in the memory of everybody. I forget the name of the old Roman who said that no one but a fool would argue with the master of twenty legions. Mr. Parnell had the rashness, in his speech at Wexford, to reply to the Prime Minister's speech at Leeds. Further, he had the misfortune, in clear, logical and irresistible argument, fairly to vanquish him. Mr. Dillon's singular haste to repudiate Mr. Gladstone's questionable compliments, and Mr. Shaw's famous lynch-pin process for ridding the world of civil-bill servers, furnished Mr. Parnell with a retort which was simply crushing, and which must have wounded the Prime Minister deeply. Now, all the world knows that Mr. Gladstone is an intellectual giant ; but as he is not infallible, he sometimes makes mistakes, and if challenged and vanquished on these mistakes, he bears his defeat very badly. When smarting under the defeat and fall of his former administration, chiefly through the action taken by the Irish bishops, in the vast, varied, and almost boundless grasp of his intellectual powers, he sought relief for his wounded feelings in the various departments of ancient and modern literature, and even of Theology. Everybody remembers how he applied himself to the study of Theology ; had a fling at the

Syllabus, at the infallibility of the Pope, and at the degrading influence which the Catholic religion exercised on all who had the misfortune to belong to it. And everybody remembers, too, how powerfully and how scathingly his rash and ignorant accusations were exposed and refuted in about the most beautiful and eloquent brochure that ever emanated even from the pen of Cardinal Newman. In the soreness and irritation then created by Parnell's intellectual victory, lies the source of that impetuous, precipitate, and impassioned policy, which Mr. Gladstone then suddenly inaugurated, and to which he has since steadily adhered. That policy exhibits in all its leading features the visible impress of feeling, of irritation, and, apparently at least, even of resentment. Incidents have cropped up from time to time as adjuncts of that policy, such as Parnell's dismissal from a magistracy which he did not prize; Dr. Kenny's dismissal by a sealed order; the threatening notices served on the telegraph boys, &c.; all of which seem so low, so petty, and so mean, that any man in his senses, and not in a passion, would scorn to stoop to them. Now, sir, it appears to me that a man who holds in one hand the absolute disposal of the liberties of a nation, and in the other the tremendous responsibilities of his position, has no right to lay himself fairly open to the imputation of irritation or feeling in the exercise of the exceptional and dangerous powers entrusted to him. For passion and feeling blind every man who allows himself to be influenced or governed by them; and something has blinded Mr. Gladstone certainly.

He rests the whole justification of the sudden and extraordinary policy he has adopted on the fact that Mr. Parnell was preventing, by intimidation and other unlawful means, the tenantry of Ireland from availing themselves of the benefits they could derive from the Land Bill. Now, sir, that accusation, though often made, has never yet been proved, and in my judgment it never *can* be proved, simply because it is not true. That Mr. Parnell advised and warmly exhorted the Irish tenantry to hold their hands off the Land Bill till he had brought forward and had the decision of the Land Commission on his test cases, no one will for a moment deny. Therefore, infers Mr. Gladstone, he unlawfully prevented them from appropriating any of the advantages which the Bill held out for their acceptance. Now, anyone will at once see that this is a "*non sequitur*"

which must be supported by proof, and as far as I know, at least, no such proof is as yet forthcoming. For might not the Irish tenantry hold aloof for a time from the Land Court (and might they not be advised to do so) for another far more rational and important purpose, viz., to facilitate and expedite the progress of business in the Court, and at the same time to draw from the Land Bill the largest possible amount of gain it was capable of yielding. That these were the objects really underlying Mr. Parnell's advice to the tenantry can very easily be made clear.

Owing to the extraordinary character of the powers vested in the Land Commission, its first decisions became matters of vital importance to the tenant farmers of Ireland. This is by no means an ordinary Commission, authorized simply to interpret and administer an Act of Parliament. It seems rather an extraordinary Commission, vested in certain contingencies which will frequently arise under the Act, with *quasi* legislative powers, virtually to enact new laws as well as to administer them. Let us take the important clause of the Act which fixes a fair rent as an illustration. This clause originally contained a practical and intelligible principle, by which, had it been retained, the Commissioners would, of course, be guided in fixing what should be regarded as the "fair rent" of a holding. But this principle, which declared a fair rent to be that which a solvent tenant would be willing to pay, has been struck out of the Act; and now the only principle left for the important function of fixing a fair rent, is the free and unfettered discretion of the Commissioners. The Commissioners, therefore, are not *now* bound to conform to any rule, to follow any instruction, or to be guided by any specific principle in fixing a fair rent. Whatever be the consideration of justice, equity, or common sense by which they may suffer themselves to be influenced, the conclusions at which they arrive, and the judgments they pronounce, have, the moment they are declared, all the authority and force of law.

The Legislature, therefore, in this important clause, and in others also, has, as it were, abdicated in their favour; has transferred to them all its authority and power, and, as it were, speaks, acts, and legislates through them, and hence all their decisions, as well as the principles of justice on which they are declared to be founded, have the same sanction and binding force as if they had emanated directly from the Legislature itself. No appeal is very properly

allowed from these decisions ; for that would amount to the Legislature appealing to itself. The settlement, therefore, of the *Irish Land Question* has only *commenced* with the passing of the Land Act ; it is, as it were, still before Parliament ; it is as yet under the consideration of the Legislature in all the vast and varied comprehensiveness of its *practical details*. Very many of the great principles of justice, equity and right between landlord and tenant are as yet to be determined, defined and declared, and have as yet to receive, through the judgments of this Court, the sanction and approval of the Legislature.

A court vested with such exceptional powers, owes it to a proper sense of its own dignity and self-respect, to hold itself above even the suspicion of undue precipitation and haste, especially in the discharge of its *quasi* legislative functions. It must keep itself, too, above the imputation of ever acting on incomplete, one-sided or *ex parte* knowledge of the cases it has to adjudicate on ; and it must never betray an unwillingness to give a full, fair and attentive hearing to the legal advocates on both sides. Above all, it must pronounce its decisions only after a patient and exhaustive enquiry into the whole case, and after a thoughtful consideration of it among themselves. On the other hand, the amount of business that will necessarily come before it is enormous, and it must get through it with reasonable expedition and despatch. To enable the Court therefore to discharge its duties with deliberation and dignity, and, on the other hand, not to weary and disgust its suitors with intolerable procrastination and delay, Mr. Parnell, with the deep practical sagacity for which he is remarkable, devised the scheme of submitting at the onset his test cases to it for its arbitrament.

The great leading feature of these test cases was, that they were essentially typical and representative of classes numerous enough to be counted by hundreds, and perhaps by thousands. The Commissioners, therefore, by fixing a fair rent for these test cases, and by imparting the force of law to the principles of justice on which they had been decided, virtually pronounced judgment on the thousands of cases of which they were typical and representative.

Before fixing, however, a fair rent for any holding or any number of holdings, the Court was bound, in justice to the landlord as well as the tenant, to ascertain its true and just value, not indeed with mathematical accuracy, but in accord-

ance with the highest and fairest standard of justice practicable in the circumstances. Now, assuming that the prices of agricultural products (including in these beef and mutton, as well as oats and barley, &c.) range at a certain average level, the value of any holding will entirely depend on its *productiveness*, under an ordinary and *reasonably expensive system of cultivation*.

I have often seen bad lands, under a high and expensive system of farming, yielding abundant and luxuriant crops for some six or seven years in succession; but when the price of the whole product was compared with the enormous expense incurred in creating it, the balance in favour of the farmer was all but *nil*. When it was found that this "high farming," would not pay, it was abandoned, and the lands gradually returned to their primitive sterility and barrenness, and their true value was then found to be, as indeed it had been always, no more than what it was originally estimated at. The great question then to be determined is, how can the productiveness of a holding under a fair system of cultivation be ascertained.

Now, the productiveness of a soil is not a plain, public, obvious fact, like a house, a man, or a tree, which you see with your eyes, and touch with your hands. It is rather an obscure physical fact, which, from its very nature, lies hidden and concealed beyond the reach of the senses, and can only be brought into light by the intervention of an argument of some kind or another. The great German chemist, Liebig, originated some thirty or forty years ago a system for ascertaining, on antecedent or *a priori* grounds, the productiveness of any given tract of land. This theory required you to ascertain by analysis the chemical elements or ingredients that go, as it were, to make up and actually constitute the ordinary classes or kinds of agricultural products. Then *the degree* of plenty or copiousness with which these elements or ingredients abounded (as shown also by analysis) in the soil from which these agricultural products were to be raised, was the *true test* for determining its productiveness. Agricultural products having a specific character and constitution, require a particular description of food, on which alone they can live and thrive; therefore, the soils that possess that food in greatest abundance are the richest and the most valuable, whilst those that possess it only to a limited extent, or do not possess it at all, are comparatively barren and worthless.

This theory was plausible and attractive, and became at once immensely popular; but it has long since been exploded, and it was found that the scientific farming to which it gave rise would not pay.

The productiveness, then, of a holding cannot be determined on any antecedent grounds as yet known, and likely never will. The argument *a posteriori* is founded on the principle of judging of a cause by its effects—of estimating the productiveness of a soil by the rich and luxuriant crops it had yielded, when these yields are reasonably numerous. Professional valuers, in estimating the productiveness of a soil, are guided, as a rule, by another principle which logicians call the argument of analogy. Certain phenomena are observed in connection with soils of ascertained degrees of fertility; and because these phenomena are found in union with these soils in a very great number of instances, it is inferred that their combination cannot be the result of accident or chance, but must be owing to a natural physical connection existing between them. The presence, therefore, of these phenomena indicate fairly enough the productiveness of the soil on which they are found. Among these phenomena may be mentioned, as examples, the depth of the soil of a holding, its consistency and colour, and the rich and abundant growth of natural or artificial vegetation on it, &c. Now, both these kinds of evidences are facts which, like all other facts, can be ascertained only by observation and experience, and can be proved only by the testimony of witnesses who, like their fathers before them, if they had not noticed *both*, could not fail to observe *one*, at least, in the agricultural returns which they saw with their eyes a holding year after year had yielded. There will be always found in every locality a number of thoughtful, intelligent, and observant witnesses, who will have as clear, as certain, and as practical a knowledge of these facts as of any other fact that comes under their observation. The productiveness of a holding is a fact of great importance to its owner, and it affects, directly or indirectly, the interests of so many others in its vicinity, that there will be always some found to pay it considerable attention. The productiveness, therefore, of a holding cannot be satisfactorily proved except by the testimony of such witnesses, and their testimony proves it beyond all reasonable doubt. Now, if Mr. Parnell demanded correct and accurate information on the productiveness of any hold-

ing in Ireland, he would have all the local knowledge existing on the subject absolutely at his disposal, and dozens of intelligent and trustworthy witnesses would voluntarily come forward to furnish the required information.

The Land League was about the most perfect and the most highly-disciplined organization that ever existed in any country. It was everywhere present, everywhere active, intelligent, and discriminating. The local branches were, as it were, so many deliberative assemblies, which absorbed all the talent, the intelligence, the experience and knowledge of every kind in the various districts in which they were situated. Their members were, for far the greater part, the very flower of the industrial, commercial, and, above all, of the agricultural classes of the locality. Each branch possessed within itself all the local knowledge existing on the productiveness of the land, on the value of the land, and on every circumstance of interest or importance connected with the land of all the holdings in its district.

Further, in the conferences that were held, and in the discussions and debates that were encouraged and carried on by the members of the branch, that knowledge was systematized, defined and arranged, so as to be ready for use at a moment's notice, when called on. To classify the holdings of an entire district on any principle you pleased, would be, with the knowledge at their command, or which was easily accessible, only an agreeable excitement—a subject, as it were, for recreation and amusement. They could classify the holdings of their district into groups that had improvements, and to the extent these improvements had been carried out, and into groups that had no improvements at all. They could classify them, on the principle of showing the various degrees of difference in the productiveness of their soils, into holdings having a soil of best or first-class quality, of second-class quality and third-class quality, and into holdings where the land was indifferent, bad, or of little or no value at all. As this classification would be made with the fullest knowledge, and with absolute certainty, by intelligent, discriminating witnesses on the spot, and who were all their lives long looking at the facts to which they bore testimony, it could defy the most rigorous, the most searching, and severe inquiry to which it might afterwards be subjected. In fact such an inquiry was expected, and was very much to be desired, if for no other reason than to satisfy the world of the justice

and exactness of the classification. After these preliminary preparations had been made, Mr. Parnell would submit the land of Ireland to the arbitrament of the Land Court, not in isolated solitary holdings, but in large lots or classes of holdings of the same kind and character. The Court could examine at its leisure the test or representative cases that he submitted, and subject them to the most rigorous and the severest judicial inquiry it thought proper; or it could take any individual case out of a class and make it a test case of its own, and subject it to a similarly trying investigation. Whatever judgment it pronounced on any of the test cases, would have virtually been pronounced on all the cases of the class to which it belonged, and of which it was representative. After the test cases had been decided, the subsequent proceedings of the Court would simply be practical applications of the principles that were sanctioned and accepted on the decision of the test cases. As case after case then came up for adjudication, it would at once be recognised by its family likeness; and though judgment might be given on it off-hand, and as a matter of course, it would still always be with the fullest knowledge and with an absolute certainty of its intrinsic merits.

The proceedings of the Court would thus always be just, dignified, expeditious and satisfactory. It would be in no danger of the block, the muddle, the inextricable confusion, and the intolerable procrastination and delay that are unavoidable, where each case has to be examined and decided separately and independently on its own individual merits, and with little or no assistance from previous decisions and inquiries.

Although this scheme was conceived with ability and skill, and was admirably adapted to enable the Irish tenantry to draw from the land the largest amount of good, and draw it speedily, yet it required as an essential element of success that the tenant-farmers, eschewing undisciplined, individual action, should hold their hands and keep back their cases for a time, with the view of presenting them afterwards, and with increased chances of success, when the test cases had been decided. And thus the very circumstance on which Mr. Parnell relied to furnish the tenant with the means of drawing from the Land Act the largest amount of gain, is the very ground on which Mr. Gladstone accuses him of the crime of preventing him from drawing any benefit at all from it. And now, sir, I have wearied you not only with

the outlines, but with the details of Mr. Parnell's policy for the administration of the Land Act ; and I have to ask, is there anything in it immoral, unconstitutional, obstructive, or criminal to the degree of deserving the punishment of imprisonment in Kilmainham gaol ?

If Mr. Parnell's policy had been allowed to develop itself freely and naturally, the Land Act would have proved itself the great salutary, remedial measure it was expected to be, and it would infallibly have pacified and contented the country. Mr. Gladstone could then to-day (with laudable pride) point at the peace, the prosperity, and contentment it had diffused over the land. The country had just then been weary and heartsick of the tumult, the strife, the intense and unnatural excitement in which it had lived for nearly two years, battling bravely and at the greatest sacrifices for its rights and its liberties, till *it had won substantially* all that it had claimed. The victory it had just gained improved its condition immensely. The tenant-farmers had discovered, to their infinite delight, that they could now breathe freely—that they were no longer slaves, but freemen. They felt it to be an immense relief to have shaken off for ever the mortal terror of rack-renting and exterminating landlords, that had hung over them like a nightmare for centuries. The benefits gained through the Land Act had been large, substantial, and important, and their intrinsic value would be vastly enhanced by the justice and generosity of the court that administered it, and by the promptitude and despatch with which its valuable results had been brought home to them. They would have been then vastly larger gainers by the Act than they can expect to be under the system by which it is now actually administered.

Whatever may be the fate of the "Margin Landowners" under the present arrangements, under Mr. Parnell's system their doom was inevitably sealed. A rather numerous class of *fictitious* landlords still manage to draw a considerable income from the lands with which in all justice they had already parted, by mortgaging them to money-lenders to the last shilling of their value. These men have really nothing to live on except on the fruits of injustice and fraud—that is to say, on what they can extort from the tenantry over and above the real value of the lands of which they are merely the *nominal* owners. No one would regret the extinction of a class of men who, having nothing

of their own, still manage to live sumptuously on the hard earnings of the poor tenant-farmers. Then the total abolition of rack-rents would be a source of considerable gain to the tenantry from whom they were hitherto exacted. Lastly, the circumstances of the tenant-farmers could be enhanced exceedingly without trenching to the value of a single penny on the *net* income of *bonâ fide* owners, who were willing to accept a fair rent for the use of their properties. The vast sum of money which the tenant must *now* pay, and which the landlord never receives, but which is expended in payment of bailiffs, rent-warners, sub-sheriffs, attorneys, and agents, or which is lost in the irrecoverable arrears of rent due by defaulting tenants, could be diverted from its present channel into the pockets of the tenant-farmers, and this large accession of wealth would add considerably to their comforts as well as to their contentment. A single clerk could then discharge the fiscal business of any property. The tenant-farmers, therefore, seeing themselves in the enjoyment of freedom and independence, of comparative prosperity and comfort on the one hand, and on the other feeling themselves painfully weary of an unnatural excitement, which had seriously interfered with their business, would naturally yearn for peace and repose. The gradual decline of the land agitation, at least for a considerable period, would follow as a matter of course. The whole strength and vitality, the irresistible energy and activity of the Land League organization, were all derived from the enormous injustice and cruelty of the land system which had created it, and which it assailed. But Mr. Gladstone's Bill, supplemented by Mr. Parnell's administration of it, would have stamped out and destroyed substantially all that was cruel and unjust in that system, and the result of their combined action would be to take the backbone out of the land agitation that sprang from it. A great enthusiastic movement, in which a whole people combines, is an impossibility where some great social grievance does not lie at the root of it.

But the Government would not allow Mr. Parnell to use Mr. Gladstone's Bill as a great remedial measure, which in a very short time indeed would have infallibly pacified and tranquillized the country. In their impatience and irritation they had recourse to *force*, which is no remedy at all for stifling the discontent which springs from injustice. Anyone can see, in the lawlessness and disorder that now prevail

and which every good man reprobates and deploras, the folly as well as the failure of that remedy. And yet the magistrates of the various Irish counties (from Dublin to Westmeath) now loudly applaud this suicidal policy of the Government, and audaciously call on it for fresh and still more repressive coercion. But as nearly all of these magistrates are landlords, their promises of sympathy and support carry with them no moral weight. They really amount to no more than a *last* effort to sustain their own expiring influence and power. The class prejudices and passions that characterized these magisterial meetings, may be estimated from the fact that a man like Lord Monck has been so blinded and infatuated by them as to make statements against Mr. Parnell and the Land League that were so scandalously untrue, that one feels a difficulty in comprehending how they were not (as I am sure they were not) wilful and deliberate. But if it was safe for Lord Monck, it was very ungenerous of him to attack a man who could not, as he was aware, reply in his defence.

The moderation, and, indeed, I might add, the magnanimity of the magistrates of Westmeath in not calling for, in accordance with a time-honoured custom, a Coercion Act *exclusively* for themselves, are edifying in the highest degree. But the excessive severity of the Coercion Act now existing, especially in its administration, counterbalances its non-exclusiveness, and so these hereditary coercionists are satisfied to let things stand as they are. Several Catholic magistrates refused—to their honour—to sign the Westmeath Manifesto approving of the coercion policy of the Government.

But the incident that surprises one most is Mr. Gladstone's incapacity to comprehend the line of action which Mr. Parnell had taken from the very beginning towards the Bill. I do not pretend to be in Mr. Parnell's confidence, and, except in his public life, I know little or nothing at all about him. I did not meet him more than five or six times in my life, and then only in a *quasi* official capacity, on the occasions of his seeking or resigning the representation of the County of Meath, in this diocese. Nevertheless, I can state as a fact that Mr. Parnell was, from the very beginning, sincerely anxious for the passing of the Bill. It is quite true he was well aware it did not give him all that he required, or that the tenant-farmers were entitled to, but he knew also that it made large and substantial concessions,

which it would be criminal folly not to accept as an instalment of their rights. Nevertheless, the intense hatred felt for him by the whole Tory party, and by a large section of the Whig party, too, forced him to assume an attitude of indifference, and even of apparent hostility to the Bill. The slightest indication of *his* approval, or that he felt any interest whatever in it, would be fatal to the measure. The fact of walking out at the head of the Irish party on the second reading, did more for the real progress of the Bill, by disarming opposition, than if he and twice as many more had recorded their votes in its favour. But when the Bill came into real peril, as it did on Mr. Henneage's motion, everyone remembers the readiness and promptitude with which he came to its rescue. Everyone recollects, too, the indecent glee with which the Lords gloated over the strangulation of two or three clauses in the Bill, which, though they had the full sanction and approval of the Government, had nevertheless the misfortune of having originated with Mr. Parnell.

Again, when the Bill came before the great National Convention, held at Dublin in September last, it encountered an amount of hostility and opposition that would certainly secure its rejection, and it required all Mr. Parnell's influence, advocacy, and adroitness to lead the meeting to the conclusion at which it at last arrived, of giving the Bill a fair trial. These considerations furnish abundant, positive proof that Mr. Parnell never *did*, and never intended to prevent the Irish tenant-farmers from availing themselves of the benefits of the Bill.

But if we pass from the system we have just now considered to that under which the Land Act is actually administered, the relative merits of both will become distinctly visible. There are some lands so exceedingly good, and other lands so excessively bad, that to ascertain the productiveness and real value of either, will be a matter of little difficulty to any experienced valuator. But between these two extremes there is an infinite variety of soils, varying in character, quality, and fertility. To ascertain and fix the true value of each of these varieties of soil, is the great object aimed at by a general land valuation. It appears to me that the practical common sense of the country has formed a much higher estimate of Griffith's valuation than some of the Commissioners seem inclined to accept. No doubt, it had very grave and serious defects,

but I think that was mainly owing to the fact that it did not pay sufficient attention to a great practical principle, which must not be overlooked in the matter. To explain this principle as clearly and as accurately as I can, I must observe that agriculture, like every other technical pursuit, is based almost exclusively on empiric experience. The quality and character of a soil, its capacity for the production of cereal or green crops, the agricultural product that will suit it best, the style of farming, and the character of the manures that will extract from it the largest and most abundant returns, are all facts which can, at least as a rule, only be determined by actual trial and experiment. Fortunately, these trials and experiments are made every day (whether intended or not) in carrying out the ordinary operations of husbandry. Even in a state of society which is by no means advanced, the results of these experiments are watched with the keenest interest, noticed with the nicest care, and recorded with the greatest fidelity, and they are transmitted as valuable and important information from one generation to another. A certain cereal or green crop is observed to grow and flourish luxuriantly, and yields a splendid return in one field, whilst the return it yields in another field, not very far distant, is very poor indeed, and it might puzzle even an experienced farmer to assign a satisfactory reason for the difference. Again, a certain class or breed of cattle or sheep will be observed to improve and thrive satisfactorily on one farm, whilst it will hardly improve at all on a farm not very far away. The principle of self-interest will then make it impossible that the results of these experiments should be either overlooked or forgotten. The aggregate sum of these results will gradually become a body of clear, practical and useful knowledge, by which the agricultural operations of the district will be guided and directed. I remember to have read in a standard work on Scotch farming, that the splendid success of Scotch agriculture was mainly owing to a series of judicious and costly experiments made on the soil of Scotland, almost since the commencement of the present century, and the author added that Scotch farming was still guided by that knowledge. Now, except the Commissioners get hold of this local knowledge and appropriate it, and are guided by it to a much larger extent than at present, I cannot see how they can form a satisfactory estimate of the

just value of any holding, or how they can fix a truly fair rent for it.

Two familiar instances occur to me, which I think throw a considerable amount of light on this statement. Some years ago a large number of Scotch stewards and farmers were imported into this country, and everybody remembers that they proved, as a rule, a complete and an expensive failure. And yet they were all shrewd, intelligent experienced men, who had moreover, whether as stewards or as farmers, abundant pecuniary resources at their disposal to give their system of farming a fair trial, and a favourable chance of success. But they came prejudiced with a feeling of undisguised contempt for the Irish system of husbandry, even where the intelligence and the capital of the Irish farmer enabled him to give that system a fair trial. They further forgot the important fact, that although the Scotch system of farming had been shown by experience to have been admirably suited for the soil and climate of Scotland, it did not follow that it would be equally suitable for other countries. They fancied that what had succeeded so well in Scotland could not possibly fail anywhere, but, as the result proved, they were grievously mistaken. Now as these Scotchmen settled down and became permanent fixtures in this country, for some years at least, they had abundant time and leisure to study the capability and productiveness of the farms they undertook to cultivate, to estimate the value of the agricultural products they would yield, and to calculate the amount of rent that might fairly be expected from them. They had infinitely better opportunities of ascertaining the productiveness and just value of these farms than the Commissioners who, having on to-day taken a hurried and superficial look at lands they never saw before, pronounce on tomorrow authoritative judgments on their just value, and the amount of rent that can be fairly demanded for them. If the Commissioners, as well as the Scotchmen, allowed themselves to be enlightened by the knowledge derived from the experience of ages, they would be wiser men, and less liable to make mistakes in matters of so much importance.

Some years ago, too, what was called "scientific farming" was held in the highest repute, and became immensely popular with agents and landlords, because they saw that under the system then existing the increase it promised to make in the productiveness of the soil would be so much

gain to themselves. It was owing principally to the interest and influence of these men, that scientific farming was incorporated as a distinct department in the system of Irish National Education. As soon as this step had been taken, model farms were purchased in various parts of the kingdom; dwelling-houses, out-houses, offices, and sheds were erected on them, and they were furnished with the machinery, the appliances, and the whole plant required for this scientific farming; popular treatises and tracts on scientific farming were published and circulated, at the expense of the Board, throughout the kingdom; learned professors were employed and paid high fees to teach this science in the great industrial centres, such as Dublin, Cork, and Belfast; and lecturers were sent to enlighten the rural population on it at all the important points of the island. The light of this great practical science was spread, utterly regardless of expense; it promised to double, perhaps treble, the agricultural returns of the kingdom, and the landlords were in ecstasies at the prospect of an enormous addition being made to their rentals.

Now, what was the result of this great national and most expensive experiment? Why, humiliating failure. The expenses all but swallowed up the price of the whole produce of the farms, leaving only a margin which was hardly sufficient to pay the rents due to the landlords.

Now, if the whole scientific staff of the National Board, like the Scotch stewards before them, were so enormously deceived in the productiveness and value of these model farms, that the lands from which they expected to draw fortunes hardly yielded the rent, what guarantee have we that the Commissioners are not liable to mistakes that might prove proportionately disastrous? And how is it that the illiterate, unscientific farmer, by following the old system of husbandry, is able to draw from his farm what is sufficient to keep himself and his family *alive at any rate*, and at the same time pay a rackrent to the landlord? I could easily pursue this subject much further, but I have said enough to prove how uncertain and how unreliable is the knowledge on which the Land Court is now obliged to act, and how undignified is such blind and uninformed action in a tribunal that is vested with *quasi* legislative authority, and from whose decisions there is no appeal. And if Mr. Parnell refused to accept a system under which the Commissioners are thus forced to act, on

information which is but too uncertain and too doubtful, and which can hardly work at all except supplemented by his own principle of the classification of cases—was that a sufficient reason why he should be punished with arrest and imprisonment?

We have, I think, in these considerations a satisfactory explanation of the deep feeling of discontent with which the judicial rents fixed by the Commissioners have been received in many parts of the country. For instance, the improvements made by the tenant-farmers of Ulster have grown into a property of enormous value. Griffith, in fixing his rental, valued the tenant's improvements as well as the landlord's property in a holding. Again, owing to the exceptional success in Ulster of some agricultural products—flax, for example—Griffith's rental was fixed at a considerably higher level there than in the other provinces. These exceptional successes exist no longer. How is it, then, that the judicial rent fixed by the Commissioners, which excludes the value of the tenant's improvements, and only includes the value of the landlord's property, should, in all cases, be higher than Griffith's rental, which allows for the value of both? How is it that whether there are improvements on the holding or not, that the judicial rent always keeps hovering over the line of Griffith's rental, and seldom, if ever, descends to it? Anomalies such as these, coupled on the one hand with the unsatisfactory character of the information on which the Commissioners seem to act, and on the other with their intolerable slowness in their despatch of business, will inevitably create a feeling of strong, reasonable, and widespread discontent, which will resuscitate the Land League organization, and infuse into it such fresh vitality and strength as—when the coercion shall have expired—will make it simply irresistible.

But Mr. Gladstone says that the Land Question has been finally settled, and that he will listen to no further argument or discussion on it. But he said the same before; still the Land League agitation compelled him to take the question up, and pass his Bill. But the truth is, that *finality* in legislation on any question is an absurdity; and with the widespread and unprecedented privations and sufferings of the agricultural classes in England and Scotland, on the one hand, and American and Australian competition on the other, *finality* in legislating on land is the most glaring of all absurdities. Why? Legislation on the Land

Question is only at its commencement, and in another year or two it will be in full swing in England and Scotland as well as here.

But, sir, Mr. Gladstone further accuses Mr. Parnell of the crime of having openly asserted that a just and impartial administration of the Land Act would lower the rental of Irish landlords from seventeen millions to three millions sterling, whereas the Commissioners who now administer the Act, guided by the strict principles of justice and equity, will actually reduce it by very little, if by anything at all. Mr. Parnell has consequently raised hopes and expectations in the Irish tenantry which cannot be realized, and which must change of necessity into bitter and angry feelings of disappointment. Irritated, therefore, enraged and blinded by passion, they will reject the Land Bill *in toto*, and refuse to avail themselves of any of its advantages. Mr. Parnell is plainly responsible for this result, and therefore he has been justly and deservedly lodged in jail! Now, sir, as far as I can comprehend, this is Mr. Gladstone's argument, and he has repeated it over and over again as a triumphant justification of the action he has taken against Mr. Parnell. This argument is so manifestly illogical and inconclusive, that an educated man ought really feel ashamed to use it.

Mr. Parnell intended the statement here imputed to him for the information and enlightenment of the Land Commissioners, before whom he then virtually stood as the advocate of the Irish tenant-farmers. Now, sir, not to talk of *bona fide* miscalculation, the commonest of human infirmities to which advocates of every kind are liable, is a tendency to exaggerate the claims of their clients; to ask more for them than they expect to get, or than they are really entitled to, and yet no one ever blames them for this. But if Mr. Parnell was mistaken in fixing the amount of reduction at a figure that was too high, Mr. Gladstone was much more mistaken in fixing it at a figure that was decidedly too low. But, sir, the truth is, that Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Parnell were in these speculations guided solely by their respective feelings, and neither of them had sufficient data to form even an approximate estimate of what the amount of the reduction really would be. But though we cannot fix the inevitable amount of the reduction in the rental under the Land Act, we can point out and trace the operations of the causes that will produce it. In the first

place, the present rent-roll is the value of their lands as estimated by the landlords themselves, who are prejudiced and interested judges in their own cause, and who are, moreover, about the most covetous and the most heartlessly exacting body of men that ever existed.

The new rental will be the value of these same lands, as estimated by an impartial and independent tribunal, which is employed and paid to ascertain the truth. This tribunal has no earthly interest in estimating these lands at a pin's point either under or over their real value. The difference then between the two valuations must amount to something considerable. In the second place, Irish proprietors, in setting their lands, did not distinguish between the tenants' improvements and their own property, but let out both at the highest rent they would bring. Now, sir, even the Richmond Commission (landlord and Tory though it was) admitted that all, or nearly all, the improvements actually existing on the land of Ireland were made by the tenants' labour and capital, and hence the income drawn by landlords as the rent of this enormous property must have been something very considerable. That monstrous injustice has now been put an end to for ever. Thirdly, to such lengths had landlords carried their exactions, that, as Mr. Mills observes: "They took from their tenants, in the form of rent, the whole produce of the land, minus the potatoes, that were necessary to keep them from dying of hunger;" they left them in a state of destitution and indigence, in which they are described by the Devon Commission as the "worst housed, the worst fed, and the worst clad" tenantry in the world; and they lowered them to a degraded state of human existence which was an outrage on the dignity of human nature itself.

Let me ask, now, what is the amount required to raise the peasantry of a nation from a state so degraded to one of comparative comfort, prosperity, and enjoyment, in which they can not only "live but thrive" on the fruits of their honest toil and labour? Whatever that sum may amount to, every shilling of it must come out of the landlords' pockets. If we consider these results separately and then take their aggregate amount, it cannot fail to make a serious breach in the income of Irish landlords. At the lowest estimate that can fairly be made of it, it can hardly be set down at less than several millions annually. Whether, however, these statements will be fully and practically realized

by the system under which the Commissioners are now acting may prove an interesting inquiry hereafter. Now, sir, Mr. Gladstone's argument assumes that we are all lunatics and fools, and so utterly incompetent to understand our own self-interests that, because we cannot get the fourteen millions Parnell promised us, we won't take even the large sum which the Court must necessarily offer us. But why should we not take it? Is it not the hard-earned fruit of our toil and labour: is it not the result of sacrifices we made in the great political struggle of the last two years? Two years ago the tenant-farmers of Ireland had only the haziest ideas of their constitutional rights to assemble together, to look each other in the face, and to talk freely and frankly with each other over their common grievances. They had hardly any practical knowledge at all of the right of freedom of speech—of their right to assemble in public meetings, openly to discuss and to complain of their wrongs, and to petition for their redress. But now they are practically, as well as theoretically, convinced that by coming to a common, clear understanding of their grievances, by united and harmonious action, and by combining all their energies and efforts into one great common movement, they can become a power that is almost irresistible. And they have actually come to that common understanding; they have legally and constitutionally united and combined, and created about the greatest, the most powerful, and most thoroughly disciplined organization that has ever yet arisen in any country. The justice and legality of the organization itself, and the reasonableness of the reforms at which it aimed, were acknowledged and recognised in Parliament, and out of it, by the highest legal authorities in the land. The Government itself, though it always hated and feared, yet never ventured till quite recently to question it, and even then only on a few points, which are mere accidental changes in the organization, and which can be easily eliminated. Now, sir, I confess I find it hard to have patience with some educated men whom you will hear, from time to time, awarding to Mr. Gladstone the whole merit of having passed the Land Act. Why, sir, you yourself have made it as clear as light that Mr. Gladstone, in taking up the Land Question, only yielded to an inevitable necessity which he resisted as long as he was able, and which would have shattered his Government to atoms if he continued to resist it much longer. It was the Land League organization

that dagged the tenants' grievances and wrongs into light ; that held them up to the gaze of the empire in a blaze of oratory and eloquence ; that made every honest man indignant and ashamed of them, and thus created a strong, outspoken public opinion, which made it a necessity for Mr. Gladstone to pass his Land Bill. This Bill being thus the hard-earned fruit of our own labour and toil, why should we not appropriate the gain as well as the glory of having passed it ?

Now, sir, these are, as far as I know, all the reasons with which Mr. Gladstone has favoured us in justification of his policy. If Mr. Gladstone, for reasons like these, differed from and found fault with Mr. Parnell, and condemned his policy, I could understand him, and I would not complain of him. But that he should punish and degrade an honourable and a distinguished rival on grounds such as these ; that he should consign him, without judge or jury, to imprisonment and to chains ; that he should extort from him, in the indignation which such injustice naturally provoked, an excuse and a pretext for suppressing an organization whose justice and legality he never questioned before, appear to me an arbitrary exercise of power which Liberal and Radical statesmen are bound by their own principles to disown.

The effete, and I suppose I may add the now expiring system of Irish landlordism, was the great central social evil of our country for ages past. A single class, and numerically not a large one, kept a whole nation steeped in indescribable misery by exacting rents for their lands enormously in excess of their real value. In instances without number, these rents nearly equalled the value of the whole produce of the land, and consequently it was all but impossible to meet them. Under this unjust system, then, the people of a whole nation were kept continually on the very verge of starvation, and hence, the smallest unfavourable change in the seasons, the slightest failure of any of their crops, particularly of the potato crop, slaughtered them wholesale, and sent them in thousands to premature graves. The landlords were further armed with the arbitrary and irresponsible power of evicting their tenantry on any scale they thought proper, and they did exercise that power on a gigantic scale in nearly every part of the kingdom. I was myself an eye-witness of some of these wholesale clearances ; I described their leading horrors as truthfully as I was able, and when I venture to look back at them, the

very memory of what I then saw makes me shudder even still. In one county in this diocese there are at this moment 369,000 acres of the finest land in the world laid down in grass and pasture. That immense tract of country was cleared substantially since the beginning of the present century. Of that vast, virtuous and industrious population that had been driven off these lands, those who had the courage and the means to take themselves away fled for refuge to foreign lands; and those who could not or did not go perished in the ditches or in the poor-houses at home.

A sentence of eviction is equivalent to a sentence of death in a country where, if you are to live at all, you must live by your industry on the land. A mortal fear of such eviction, then, was the only motive that could have influenced the people of a nation to submit to excessive rack rents which robbed them of the fruits of their own improvements and kept them perpetually on the very border line of actual starvation. Mr. Gladstone's own Land Commission, although only in its infancy, is letting in a flood of light on the huge and ghastly proportions of the great social evil which for years past preyed on the vitals and drank up the life's blood of the nation. A system under which landlords exacted for their lands 20, 30, 40, and in some cases 100 per cent. in excess of their real value, cannot but be regarded as a system of legalized injustice on no ordinary scale. More than 50,000 tenants have therefore already tried to escape from it, and have fled to the Land Court for the very questionable protection it is now extending to them. But any escape from such an excessively unjust system must necessarily improve their condition. For it is a system which has challenged theoretically our right to live in the country in which we were born, and it has practically driven our people as exiles, in hundreds of thousands, into foreign lands. Irishmen would be more than human if they cherished for such a system anything less than the fiercest hatred. And yet this embodiment of injustice and cruelty has been fostered and protected with as much paternal tenderness and care as if it had been an essential requirement, not only for the good government, but for the very existence of the British Empire. The unjust and irrational partiality of British statesmen for Irish landlordism, coupled with the implacable severity with which they punished anyone who dared to interfere with

it, has been, beyond all reasonable doubt, the main cause of the unpopularity and practical failure of British rule at all times in Ireland. Were it not for the baleful effects of this one cause, Ireland, without merging its nationality for a moment, would be as peaceful, as orderly, and at least as devotedly loyal as Scotland. We offered successive Governments, a hundred times over, a generous and enthusiastic loyalty, a ready and cheerful submission to their laws, a cordial co-operation in everything calculated to advance the interests and glory of England as well as our own, if they would only remove the injustice of this great social grievance which threatened our very existence. But they would not accept our loyalty on these conditions. They regarded the estrangement, the discontent, and even the avowed hatred of a nation as mere petty evils, when compared to the irreparable disaster of putting Irish landlords into bad humour. And the same unjust and irrational partiality infatuates British statesmen still. When the tyrannical injustice of Irish landlordism had, quite lately, become intolerable, and when the unanimous voice of the country had called on Mr. Gladstone to grapple with it, and place some restraint on its excesses, why did he begin by placating it, by appeasing it, and by actually immolating to it the liberty and freedom of the nation he was directed to rescue from its cruelty and injustice? And was it because he had imposed some restraints on its rack-renting injustice and its exterminating cruelty, that he has since felt himself called on to make full and ample reparation and atonement, by punishing and imprisoning the men who were guilty of the crime of having compelled him to interfere with it at all. Thus, whilst he admittedly rendered us solid and substantial service with one hand, he injured and wounded us in our most sensitive feelings with the other. A policy, based on a principle like this, does not merit either gratitude or approval. As a matter of fact, the popularity of the whole Liberal party, and of Mr. Gladstone's Government in particular, can hardly be lower than it actually is with the Irish people abroad, as well as at home. If we, Irishmen at home, cordially detest the Irish system of land tenure, our countrymen abroad simply execrate and abhor it. The millions of Irishmen in England, Scotland, the United States, Canada, and Australia, look back on the land of their birth with a depth and tenderness of feeling, of interest, of attachment, and of love which an Englishman can hardly

comprehend. To the deep, keen, undying interest which these exiles feel in the welfare of the dear old land, and to the longing love with which they yearn and sigh to get one last look at it before they die, are associated a fierce execration and hatred of the system of land tenure which had cruelly and unjustly banished them away from it for ever. The strongest and deepest desire in the hearts of these Irish exiles would be to lend a hand and share their last shilling in any fair effort to extirpate and destroy the injustice of a system which they regarded as the responsible cause of their expatriation.

The intrepidity and courage, then, with which Mr. Parnell denounced this system before hostile majorities in the House of Commons ; the practical ability and skill with which he founded and developed to the highest pitch of efficiency and usefulness the Land League organization ; his splendid and successful efforts, in Parliament and out of it, to emancipate the land from the thralldom of landlordism, realized to the fullest all these exiles longed for and desired. He won at once, therefore, from them all the confidence, the gratitude, and the attachment to himself personally that generous Irish hearts and warm Irish feelings can bestow. Their generous sympathies soon assumed a practical and substantial form. Thousands of Land League organizations sprang up, as it were, by magic in every country in the world into which the Irish race had penetrated. There is not a city, town, village, or hamlet throughout the vast extent of the United States, of Canada, of Australia, as well as in England and Scotland, in which there are not found flourishing Land League branches, thoroughly organized and disciplined, all in communication with the great central (though now suppressed) organization at home, and contributing to it a moral and a pecuniary support that makes it a power that is almost irresistible. Streams of gold, therefore, still flow from these innumerable sources copiously and abundantly into its treasury. Mr. Parnell, then, on the day of his arrest was regarded as the greatest, the most trusted, and the most popular Irishman of this century, or perhaps of any other. The very day of his arrest Mr. Gladstone addressed a meeting, composed principally of aldermen, at the Guildhall in London, and his theme, of course, was the excited state of Ireland. Mr. Parnell had been arrested some hours before the meeting, and Mr. Gladstone was, of course, fully cognizant of the fact. At the very

height, however, of a fierce, impassioned, and scathing philippic, in which Mr. Gladstone has no rival, and by which he can drive an auditory into all but absolute frenzy, a telegram arrives. The messenger presents himself exactly at the proper moment, forces his way to the place from which Mr. Gladstone is speaking, and presents the telegram amid the breathless silence of the assembly. Mr. Gladstone opens and reads it, and, with the gravity and solemnity of an accomplished actor, announces that the first act of the drama is opened—Mr. Parnell is arrested, and is now safely lodged in Kilmainham jail.

The announcement brought the meeting, to a man, to their feet, and it was hailed with loud, ringing, and prolonged cheers, and with the most extravagant demonstration of exultation and delight. As far as I can remember, this is the account given of the meeting in the current newspaper literature of the day. Now, sir, in reading this, it would strike anyone that Mr. Gladstone might have remained satisfied with the victory he had fairly or unfairly won over his great rival, and that this wild, impassioned, and indecent ebullition of feeling over a fallen foe, looked very like striking him when he was down. I have no doubt that the enthusiastic applause that Mr. Gladstone had evoked, afforded him the highest delight and enjoyment ; but it did not excite the same feelings in the minds of millions of Irishmen, who read of it with the news of Mr. Parnell's arrest the next morning. The wild, enthusiastic outburst of triumph and joy which hailed the announcement of Mr. Parnell's imprisonment, caused them greater pain, irritated and exasperated them more, than a similar outburst of the fiercest hatred and contempt if levelled directly at themselves. But the most painful feature of this Guildhall meeting was that, as Mr. Gladstone fairly enough insinuated, it was representative in its character. The great Liberal and Radical parties spoke and acted through it, and emphatically expressed their opinions and feelings through its proceedings. The Radical party had to do violence to their convictions and principles in assisting Mr. Gladstone to pass the most comprehensive and oppressive Coercion Bill ever enacted for any country ; and yet, with his promises broken before their eyes, they never yet condemned or even complained of the use he made of the dangerous and unconstitutional powers which that Act gave him. But as we are now striving for our very lives, the time has come when they must speak out, and openly

take a side for or against us. If they do not compel Mr. Gladstone to reverse his policy, and set Mr. Parnell and the other suspects at liberty, on what reasonable grounds, may I ask, can they claim the loyalty, the allegiance, the political sympathy and support with which the Irish nation invariably favoured them? In that event it would become our duty, as well as our interest, to assume an attitude of antagonism, and even of avowed active and aggressive hostility towards them. Any escape at all from Mr. Gladstone's Government would not only be a relief but a positive improvement of our condition. The great distinctive features that had long distinguished and characterized Liberal and Tory administrations are now obliterated. They do not now differ even in *degree*, and where they do differ, the balance of evil is on the Liberal side. I would therefore respectfully submit to these great parties to pause and gauge exactly our influence and strength before they finally reject and discard us. The whole Irish race in Ireland, England, and Scotland, and, indeed, all the world over, is united as one man in heart, interest, and feeling, and with the sincerity and loyalty of brothers, in the great struggle in which we are now engaged. Although we are numerous enough to be counted by millions, yet we are thoroughly organized and disciplined: we are, moreover, sensitively attentive and obedient to the instructions issued for our guidance by the leaders whom we know and have confidence in. We can throw our united energy and strength into one great combined movement; we can direct that movement to any point we please, and act and vote *solid* there against the common enemy. Since our organization has become almost perfect, we had no opportunity of showing our strength. The next general election will prove what it really is. In the meantime, the Irish electors of Stafford, of Liverpool, and of the other great English towns, have the glory of having revealed to the world the tactics we mean to pursue, and they have entitled themselves to the eternal gratitude of their countrymen by showing how we can avenge the ingratitude of a party to whom we have been, unfortunately for ourselves, always only too loyal.

I have the honour to be,

Faithfully yours,

✠ T. NULTY.

Mullingar, December 8th, 1881.