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THE LAND QUESTION

AND

COMPULSORY SALE:

THE PROBLEM STATED.

SPEECH

BY

T. W. RUSSELL, M.P.,

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Houses of the Oireachtas

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Mr. Russell, who was received with enthusiastic applause, said—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, if I remember aright, it is some four years ago since I addressed the electors of this district. A good many things have happened, inside and outside, the constituency since that time, and if I have abstained from addressing meetings in South Tyrone it was because I had been informed that dissension on a certain issue in public affairs might arise—dissension that could serve no useful purpose and do no conceivable good. But the time has at last arrived when nothing can stand between me and the electors. A general election is close at hand. The day of bluff and of intrigue is past and gone. And now, face to face with the people, I have to state my views on public questions, and by these views I must, of course, stand or fall. In the impending campaign I shall, as may be expected, have a good deal to say upon public questions. Abroad the sky is overcast. Lowering clouds are all around, and storms break suddenly from the most unexpected quarters. With an empire such as ours the foreign relations of the country must always be of supreme importance. A false step in any part of the wide world may land us in a desolating war. We have few friends amongst the European Powers, and war may not alone strain our resources—it may endanger our very existence as a nation. I shall have something to say elsewhere on the momentous issues engaging the attention of our statesmen abroad. But to-day, and here, I propose to deal with one single issue—the ever-present and dominant issue of the

IRISH LAND QUESTION.

I select this subject not alone because of its importance, but because public feeling in Ulster is strained in regard to it as I hardly ever remember it to have been. Now—and it is well you should know it—there are large numbers of people in Great Britain who are rather sick of hearing about Irish land. The generation which passed the Land Acts of 1870 and 1881 has either passed or is rapidly passing away. Their successors know little or nothing of the circumstances which compelled a reluctant Legislature to enact these great and beneficial measures. They only know that much was done for the Irish tenant, and that Englishmen and Scotchmen generally, taking Mr. Gladstone's word for the facts, sank many prejudices to secure what they deemed a righteous settlement. And even since these two great measures were placed upon the Statute-book much has been done. Three great Land Purchase Acts, involving the advance of £40,000,000 sterling, have been passed. The Land Acts of 1887 and 1896 have also been secured. And, whatever Irishmen may think, there is no man calmly taking stock of the past thirty years who will refuse to admit that the Parliament of the United Kingdom has striven hard to right what was wrong and to do justice. The unwillingness, therefore, of the average British elector to look at the question is easily understood. Why, then, it may be asked, should I propose to-day to reopen it? Why not "rest and be thankful?" The question is entirely reasonable, and I propose to answer it. The land problem has to be faced afresh mainly because of three things. First, the leaders of the Irish landlord party, by persistent agitation and by bitter attacks in the House of Lords and in the Press upon the Land Acts, will not permit the issue to be closed; second, because a handful of land agents, maintaining the evil traditions of a class which has been responsible for much of our troubles, appear to spend their lives in harrying the tenantry of the country, forcing expensive lawsuits upon men who are utterly unable to afford these costly luxuries; and, third, because the administration of the Acts, which forced in 1894 a Parliamentary inquiry, goes apparently from bad to worse, and, according to every second man one meets, is no longer even tolerable. These, briefly, are the reasons why I propose to-day to examine this whole question afresh, and to invite this constituency, with a general election in the offing, to say aye or no to the substance of proposals which I propose to make. I take this step unwillingly. It might have been avoided if

the leaders of the landlord party had been wise; if they had controlled some of their representatives in Ireland; and, above all, had the Land Commission pursued its work in a broad and tolerant spirit, with the great policy of the Land Acts constantly before its mind. But, although knowledge comes, wisdom lingers, and whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad. I propose therefore to-day, and with the fullest sense of responsibility, to prove that it is perfectly hopeless to continue the present system of fixing rents as a permanent plan, and to show that it is not impossible to revert to that system of single ownership which has always been the ultimate goal of statesmen, and by which alone peace and contentment can be secured. I shall have to make a serious demand upon your time and patience. But, as we are lighting a fire in Ulster to-day which will not be easily put out, the time we spend here will not be lost. Now, I am going to prove first of all that it is

THE LANDLORDS, AND NOT THE TENANTS,

who are responsible for the reopening of the land question. After the Morley Committee and the passing of the Land Act of 1896, with both of which I had something to do, I at least was prepared to await what I knew would be the irresistible pressure of land purchase. I knew that the result of the first statutory period was a reduction of 20 per cent. in the Irish rental. I knew that the second period would not result in less—it has actually resulted so far in an average reduction of 22 per cent. And I felt assured that this pressure, which was just and could not be got rid of, would force sale and purchase upon a large scale. Nor have I been disappointed. Purchase is proceeding apace. Then, it may be said, why not let things proceed after this fashion? I could easily show that the very success of the Purchase Acts has made delay difficult; but, apart from this reason, the Irish landlords have settled the matter. The ink was scarcely dry upon the Act of 1896 before the landlords demanded, and the Government granted, a Viceregal Commission to inquire into the administration of the Land Acts. This, be it remembered, was only two years after the Parliamentary inquiry by the Morley Committee. There was not a single representative of the Irish tenant-farmers upon this Commission. It was presided over by a distinguished Englishman, who had filled a great judicial position, Sir Edward Fry. And it issued a report, to which, if I may say it without disrespect, nobody save the landlords paid much attention. But in a debate last Session on the estimate for the Irish Land Commission a remarkable statement was made by Colonel Saunderson—himself an Irish landlord of the very best type. The whole tenour of that debate, I think I may say, was one of utter hopelessness in regard to the Irish Land Commission. It was assailed by the landlords with great bitterness. It was attacked by the Nationalists with equal fury; and it was defended by Mr. Gerald Balfour with official fairness. Compulsory sale was over and over again pressed upon the attention of the Government. Colonel Saunderson, with perfect candour and frankness, refused to believe such a measure possible, and was bluntly asked across the floor of the House by Mr. Healy "What is your alternative?" The question was crucial. Here was a great department of the State dealing with the property of two classes of the community attacked by both the parties subject to its jurisdiction. The representatives of both classes, speaking from their places in Parliament, denounced and condemned it. It had the confidence of neither—the violent hostility of both. Could a court so assailed go on for ever? That was Mr. Healy's question. "What is your alternative?" he repeated. And Colonel Saunderson, cornered in this way, gave the fateful reply,

"LET US TRY THE FRY COMMISSION."

The incident made a profound impression upon my mind. For the first time, and in the clearest manner, the Irish landlords showed their hand. I then and there made up my mind that compulsory sale must come, and more, that it would not wait. Gentlemen, there are many recommendations of the Fry Commission that are excellent, and some, if not most, of these have been, by administrative action, adopted. There are others essentially ridiculous and even stupid—only possible of adoption by a Commission upon which there were only two men who really knew anything about Ireland or Irish land. But there is one recommendation fatal to the whole report. That recommendation, for all practical purposes, is the whole report. The landlords know this. And it is this recommendation which is in reality Colonel Saunderson's alternative to compulsory sale. Let us see what it means. Under the Land Acts when the Commission fixes a fair rent they are required to take into account the circumstances of the holding and district. That is to say, they have to value the land as it stands, and they have then to take into account the circumstances of the holding and district as affecting that value. This is right and proper. But the Fry Commission recommended another consideration which in their opinion ought to be taken into account—viz., the circumstances of the tenant. What does this mean? It means that if a farmer has other means of living wholly unconnected with the land—if he has, for example, road contracts; if he has a flax-mill not on the holding; if he, by hard work, has money invested and receives dividends thereon; ay, if he receives gifts from boys and girls in New York or Melbourne—all or any of these things ought, in the opinion of the Fry Commission, to be taken into account in fixing a fair rent. This, gentlemen, is the essence of the Fry Commission. This is the real outcome of Sir Edward Fry's labours. This is Colonel Saunderson's alternative to compulsory sale.

Will any Government ever arise mad enough to attempt to put that recommendation into an Act of Parliament? I don't know. But one thing I do know. To that Government, and to that proposal, I shall, in or out of Parliament, offer the most strenuous opposition. Meanwhile, Sir Edward Fry's political economy and Colonel Saunderson's Parliamentary frankness enabled me to make up my mind on the greatest issue in social politics. Now, on the report of this Commission and upon a

SILLY AND FUTILE DEMAND FOR COMPENSATION

the Irish landlords have rung the changes for three or four years. Annually they submit resolutions setting forth their losses under the Land Acts for the acceptance of the Government in the House of Lords. I should have imagined that a claim for compensation on account of any Act of the Legislature would have been properly submitted to the House of Commons. The House of Lords has its own function in the State, but it is solemnly debarred from touching finance. The members of that House cannot impose taxation. They cannot alter even the incidence of rating. If they touched the Budget they would produce a revolution. What is the sense therefore in these annual motions in such a place? Each year the same speeches are made. Each year there is a great whip up of Irish peers. Men who are rarely seen at Westminister obey the summons, vote against the Government on a matter affecting solely the interests of their own class, and depart, not to be seen there again until the call is renewed, and there is another muster for the same purpose. I cannot help repeating that this annual appeal—because the Irish landlords' motion has become one of the hardy annual class—would be more fitly addressed to the House of Commons. If there is any case for compensation the claim ought to be urged in that branch of the Legislature which alone can deal with it. If wrong is being done to the Irish landlords by the administration of the Land Acts the charges ought to be preferred in that Chamber where the responsible members of the Irish Government sit, and where the tenants are represented. But, the claim for compensation having been formally made, although in the wrong place, it must be met and considered. I agree that if Parliament has robbed the Irish landlords Parliament ought to make good the loss. Now, whether the Irish landlords were robbed in 1881 is not to be proved by extracts from speeches made by Mr. Gladstone or by anybody else, in which the probable results of the Land Act were outlined. The question is one of fact, and ought to be dealt with as such. Nor is it to be dealt with, as it too often is, by an appeal to the law of land tenure in England. If the Irish landlords were in the position of many of their English brethren they would be worse off than even the Land Acts have left them. I was speaking one evening lately to a great landowner in the South of England. We were talking of the Irish and English land systems. And what was his contention? He gave his own case. "My rents," he said, "have fallen 40, 50, and even in some cases 60 per cent. I get my reduced rents with regularity. But I pay away every farthing I get on the estate, and sometimes even more than I get. At the best, all that I receive is a very small rate of interest on the money I have laid out on the property. Your Irish landlord, on the other hand, gets his rent, and what he gets he keeps. He spends not a farthing on what is called his property. He would be a fool were he to do so. He may have charges to meet as I have. But the difference between us is that what I get as rent I spend on the estate. What he gets he keeps, and he does not spend a farthing upon what he persists in calling his property." Could the case be put better or more plainly? Yes, says the Irish landlord; but this state of affairs has been brought about by unjust legislation. I answer not at all. It has always been so, or, in the main, it has been so. And the real fact is that before the Acts of 1870 and 1881 the tenant built the house, drained and fenced the land, and paid rent upon his own expenditure. What the Act of 1881 was intended to do was to discriminate between the property of the landlord and the property of the tenant—to allow rent upon the former, and to disallow it on the latter. There has been no robbery. The robbery took place before the Acts were passed—flagrant, shameful, although legal, robbery. And, although a generation has arisen that knows little about what took place in the pre-1870 days, let not Irish landlordism imagine that these dark days of confiscation and wrongdoing have been forgotten. The system is written into the memories of the people. Its memories live in the slums of New York and amid the factories of New England. They are rehearsed on the sheepwalks of Australia and on the South African veldt—wherever the descendants of the evicted Irish tenant live. The wrongs endured have nerved the assassin's arm. They have more than once produced armed rebellion. They have threatened more than once the whole framework of civil society. They have made enemies to England in every quarter of the globe. No. What Parliament had to deal with in 1870 and in 1881 was undoubtedly a complex and a dangerous question. And what it tried to do was simple in the extreme. It attempted, as I have said, to discriminate between the property of the two classes who were on the soil. I know what has been said, and I remember well the effect produced upon my mind in a conversation with Mr. Lecky, upon this very point. I had been casually discussing with him his book on Democracy, and his reply to my case was that when the Irish land legislation began the tenant had no legal property either in or upon the soil.

Exactly. This is the landlords' contention in a nutshell. No legal property! Well, Parliament found that this was so, and it simply covered the circumstances by law. It appointed a court to find out what belonged to the tenant in fact, and it made, or it intended to make, this property his in law. And for this the Irish landlords claim compensation. Was there ever such a claim put forward in the history of the world? No Parliament on earth will ever listen to it. My fault with the legislation is that it came so late in the day. And if I am told that the claim is based on other grounds, that the rights of the landlord have been interfered with, that free sale has given the fee-simple practically to the tenant, my answer is that here in Ulster at all events free sale has always been the custom, and that there has been no loss of property rights at all. Elsewhere the landlord has the right of pre-emption, and on paying the tenant what is his can resume possession. And so the agitation against the Land Acts and against their administration goes on in the House of Lords and in the landlord Press, nobody caring to reply. But the unrest is kept up, and yet this is far from being the worst. It prevents things from settling down, and it influences, and is intended to influence, the fair-rent commissioners. But what has been worse than this is the action of certain land agents throughout the country, and notably in Ulster. These men appear to spend their lives in planning mischief, in devising methods by which the tenantry on some of the best Irish estates can be harried and tortured. I shall have occasion to deal with this system later on. But let me say here that by a costly and all but universal system of appeals on value, the results of which are not worth the expenditure, by a concerted and planned attack upon the Ulster custom, by the determined effort to get behind the law on improvements, by the serving of notices for rent, and writs costing 50s in a week if the rent is unpaid—by these and other irritating and needless measures these men are making the lives of the tenantry on the estates subject to them simply unendurable. But I shall have more to say upon this point again. I therefore proceed to the

COURT OF LAND COMMISSON, AND

I can express nothing but the deepest regret that I am forced here to take the line I feel coerced to take. Nothing but an overwhelming sense of duty could compel me to say what I am about to say regarding this great department of the State. I have lived through stormy times in Ireland. It has been my duty—and I have performed it—to defend the tribunals of the country when they were everywhere assailed. And I know how serious is the responsibility assumed by any man who does anything to lessen the respect and the confidence which the people ought to have for and in the courts of the country. By those who brought the Land Commission into existence it was intended to be a temporary tribunal, to pave the way for land purchase. It has lived for well nigh twenty years. It had at first the sympathetic heart and the clear intellect of John O'Hagan to guide its procedure. He was followed by Mr. Justice Litton, once your own representative in the Imperial Parliament. Mr. Litton was followed by Sir Edmund Bewley, whose sense of fairness and judicial temperament impressed everybody. Mr. Justice Meredith is now supreme at Upper Merrion Street. And what I have to say is simply this—that, whilst the Irish landlords charge the Commission with every form of maladministration, and declare that their property is being daily confiscated, I find that no tenant in Ulster crosses the portals of the Chief Commission Court without feeling that he is going before a hostile tribunal. This is the net position. No one with a knowledge of the facts can deny it. I voice the universal feeling in Ulster in saying this. Is there anything to be gained by an attempted concealment of the facts? I blame nobody. Perhaps the task imposed on these gentlemen passed the ability of man to perform. I cannot say. But I do say that this state of things cannot go on for ever. Think of what this Court means to Ireland. The ordinary tribunals of the country deal with matters comparatively unimportant. The amount due upon a bill of exchange, the testamentary capacity of a man devising his estate, the question of a right of way—all these doubtless are important considerations. And they occupy our ordinary tribunals. But the Court of Land Commission deals with what is practically the property of the whole country. How can you go on if the two parties concerned agree to impeach the tribunal? It is impossible. Now, let me try to show what has tended to produce this feeling on the part of the tenantry in Ulster, who, be it remembered, are law-abiding citizens. Take first

THE QUESTION OF APPEALS ON VALUE.

The procedure in fixing a fair rent is simple. A sub-commission court is duly constituted, consisting of an assistant legal commissioner and two lay land experts. The cases are first heard in court, after which the two experts proceed to value the land. A fair rent is agreed upon, and is announced in due course. Now, be it observed that here the cases have first been heard in open court, and then the land has been inspected and valued by two experts. The landlord, however, appeals to the Chief Commission. In due course two court valuers of precisely the same standing as the assistant commissioners are sent to value the land over again. They have before them the valuation of the court below. By a curious coincidence, the one court valuer is frequently what is known on the Commission as a man who believes in "a good stiff rent;" the other belongs to the class who feel that it is not easy making a stiff rent out of Irish tillage land. They go through the ordinary routine of valuation. Their business is

simply to value the land. They are not troubled with law points, the ownership of improvements, or questions of that kind. These have been dealt with by the legal commissioner. When these two gentlemen come to compare notes, it is found that the man who believes in a stiff rent has fixed a rent 20 per cent. above that fixed by the court below, whilst the second valuer's rent is on or about the same as that of the assistant commissioners. What is to be done? There is a clear disagreement. Do the valuers each make a separate report? Occasionally, yes. Usually, no. And for this reason—were they to go on doing so their occupation would be gone. They therefore, as a matter of fact, split the difference, and the sub-commission rent is raised, say, by 10 per cent. The case is then reheard before the Chief Commission. And Mr. Justice Meredith and his colleagues (Mr. O'Brien being of course a standing dissenter) act upon the report of their valuers, and raise the rent fixed by the court below. Thus the verdict of three experts is overruled by one, and people wonder why the Irish tenant is not happy. Now, I say that this system prevails, not perhaps over the whole country, but in considerable parts of it. And see the effect of the action of the Commission. The assistant commissioners are quick to realise the drift and trend of things. The majority are temporary men. They wish of course to stand well with the "Chiefs." There will be vacancies on the permanent staff some day, and they inevitably take their cue from the Bench. What are called not "fair" but "moderate" rents are fixed, and even by this vicious system these may be screwed up on appeal. Now that the system is unveiled, who can feel confidence in it? Who would desire it to go on for ever? I think, so far as the Chief Commission is concerned, it is a hopeless and a costly failure. I don't challenge the rents fixed. I challenge and protest against the whole system. Let me take another illustration—the practice of sending

MUNSTER AND LEINSTER MEN TO FIX RENTS IN ULSTER.

This constituency of South Tyrone has suffered severely from this practice. What does it mean? The farming of Antrim, Down, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Armagh differs enormously from that of Limerick, Wexford, or Tipperary. Men who are good judges of the value of land in Ulster are absolute ignoramuses in the Southern counties, and vice versa. And, in addition, when a man values land for the purpose of fixing a fair rent in Ulster he is brought into contact with the Ulster custom. What does a Tipperary valuer know of the custom, which is one of the most precious possessions of Ulster? The chances are he never heard of it. But this is the regular method of procedure. Men of great experience in Ulster spend their lives in Wexford, Clare, or Limerick, and others entirely ignorant of Ulster farming are employed in Antrim, Down, and other Ulster counties. The Land Commission has been frequently remonstrated with on this point. In and out of Parliament they have been appealed to. Even the Fry Commission could not stand it, and they made a special recommendation that Mr. Commissioner Fitzgerald should cease to control the rota, and should share that duty with others of his colleagues. But every appeal has been to deaf ears. Mr. Fitzgerald, in spite of the Fry Commission, still says to one man "Go," and he goeth, to another "Come," and he cometh, and, his salary being on the Consolidated Fund, Parliament has lost all effective control. This is precisely one of the matters which has sickened the Ulster tenants. Not very long ago I received a letter from a constituent of mine telling me of the procedure on the farm of a friend and neighbour of his. A gentleman from some Southern county, to whom the Ulster dialect was no doubt a barbarity, appeared one morning on the holding. The agent of the property accompanied him. What was the first question asked? Not as to the soil or crops, or anything of that kind. Not at all. The first question was, "Well, my man, why haven't you settled like the rest of the tenants?" His business was to fix a fair rent, not to ask impertinent questions. After such a beginning, what confidence could the tenant have in such a commissioner? This was in South Tyrone, and if this is possible in the green tree, what may not be done in the dry? Now let us come to

THE LAW OF THE COMMISSION.

The sole reason for the inquiry into the administration of the Land Acts by the Morley Committee was due to the fact that the law courts in Ireland had very nearly knocked the bottom out of the Act of 1881. I moved for the Committee solely because I believed this. It was on this ground that the then Government granted the Committee. I am of opinion that the Land Commission is to-day engaged in the same work as far as the Act of 1896 is concerned. I will give four illustrations—and they are only illustrations—of what I mean. Adams and Dunseath is a case known far and wide. It arose out of a trifle of forty shillings. It dealt a deadly blow at the tenants' property all over Ireland. I can explain its kernel in a sentence. Parliament enacted in 1881 that no rent was to be placed upon improvements created by the tenant or by his predecessor in title. Are not these words plain? Is it possible to mistake what Parliament meant or intended? What did the Irish Court of Appeal say? Did they look at the policy of the Land Act? Did they say, "This is a great healing measure intended to undo great wrongs. We shall construe it as far as possible in accordance with that policy." Not at all. With the instinct of trained lawyers they proceeded to ask what Parliament meant by "improvements." What Parliament meant by improvements was plain enough. Lord Chancellor Law, who helped to draw and carry the Act, and who was one of the Court, told them what was intended. But, instead of taking the large and plain

view intended by Parliament, these learned judges proceeded to suggest and devise limitations upon the word. And in the end they decided by a majority that the improvements which Parliament said were not to be rented were only those referred to in the Act of 1870. The compensation which Parliament enacted was to be given to a man quitting his holding under the Act of 1870 was to be applied under the Act of 1881 to the tenant who was not quitting but remaining on his holding. And so one short year after the passing of the Act of 1881 the Court of Appeal drove a coach-and-four through the heart of the measure. It was all a case of "property, property, property." And of course, as Mr. Lecky put it, the idea of a tenant having legal property in and upon the soil was a thing hard for Irish judges as well as landlords to understand. Now let us see how the

LAND COMMISSION PROCEEDED TO INTERPRET

this great decision. In every case of reclamation which took place between 1882 and 1894 the Land Commission simply allowed the tenant who reclaimed the land 5 or 6 per cent. on his outlay, and they gave the whole of the increased letting value arising from the work to the landlord, who had spent and done nothing. But the Morley Committee came alongside of this piece of simple iniquity. Once unearthed, the truth was wrung from witness after witness, and the Committee forced Lord Justice Fitzgibbon to declare that if such was the action of the Land Commission it was illegal, and was not founded upon a proper conception of Adams and Dunseath. There had therefore been twelve years of wrongdoing upon the part of the Land Commission—twelve years during which in every case of reclamation the money belonging to the tenant had illegally gone into the pocket of the landlord. Bad enough, you will say. But worse remains to be told. The law was established clearly by Lord Justice Fitzgibbon before the Morley Committee. It was understood by that Committee. The House of Commons, after debate, accepted it, and declined after a discussion to amend what Lord Justice Fitzgibbon declared to be the law. Mark what followed. A Sub-Commission dealt with a case of reclamation near Ballymena—by the way, it was the veritable David Adams and the veritable Mrs. Dunseath—on the very farm upon which the original case arose. Mr. Adams had reclaimed land. The Sub-Commission acted upon what Lord Justice Fitzgibbon stated to be the law before the Parliamentary Committee. It gave David Adams 5 or 6 per cent. on his expenditure. And it divided the increased letting value between landlord and tenant—allowing one-half for the inherent properties of the soil, the other half to the tenant for his exertions in developing those properties. What happened? There was the usual appeal. Mr. Justice Meredith heard it, and promptly decided against Lord Justice Fitzgibbon's view, and the Sub-Commission was reversed. Fancy David Adams toiling to reclaim an Antrim bog, and, having done so, only to find that he had raised the letting value from perhaps 3s to 14s an acre! The case created a profound sensation in Ulster. The decision shook all faith in the Chief Land Commissioner, and gave rise to the fatal distrust in regard to Mr. Justice Meredith's Court which now exists. The tenants could not understand how, when the law had been stated to a Committee of Parliament by a member of the Court of Appeal, and one who had heard the original case of Adams and Dunseath—how, after Parliament had accepted his view and declined to amend the law, the Judge of the Land Court should refuse to accept it. Gentlemen, it is my duty to tell you that he was not bound to do so. The law is only effective when stated from the bench. But an appeal was taken. I strongly advised and urged that appeal. Mr. Justice Meredith was reversed, and an agitation which would have convulsed Ireland was thus staved and prevented. Let us take another step and see how things have conspired to make this Commission impossible. If there is one thing valued in Ulster more than another it is the

RIGHTS OF THE TENANT UNDER THE ULSTER CUSTOM.

What has been the attitude of Parliament in regard to these rights? I remember speaking to Mr. Chamberlain upon this point during the troubles that arose in regard to the Land Act of 1896. I was impressing upon him the danger of doing anything that would interfere with the custom. My right hon. friend took clear ground. He said—"I am not familiar as you are with the custom. I do not in the least know what it covers. But I do know that the policy of the Legislature has been to leave it absolutely untouched. The Act of 1870 legalised it as it existed. The Act of 1881 protected and conserved it." This also, I am aware, was Mr. Gladstone's view. Very few people outside Ulster know what the custom means. When it is explained they are often greatly puzzled and surprised. But they need not be. If you carry out a great plantation scheme for national purposes, if you invite men to come across the sea to possess and civilise a country—we are about to do this on a small scale in South Africa—you must pay the price. Men will not undertake dangerous and difficult work from mere patriotism or to serve you. They will do it on sufficient inducement being offered. It is in the end self-interest which prevails and governs in such a case. Now, when the settlers originally came from Scotland and England they came on conditions and with rights and privileges. If the ancestors of Lord Dufferin, the Marquis of Downshire, the Duke of Abercorn, and other great Ulster landlords had had to build houses for the settlers and drain and fence their lands, there would have been no Ulster settlers at all. No set of land-

lords could have done it. The settlers did all this for themselves. And they did it on the express condition that it was to be their own property, and that what was their own they could sell and otherwise dispose of. Thus the custom was created and grew up. It took many forms. Previous to any remedial land legislation the Ulster tenant had always the right to sell his tenancy more or less free. On some estates he enjoyed the right of absolute free and unfettered sale—that is, he could sell to the highest bidder—and unless the landlord could show cause as to character or solvency the purchaser became the registered tenant. On other estates the office rule or usage—I am not sure that it was not a curtailment of the custom—was that the tenant could only sell at a fixed price—say ten, twelve, or fifteen years' purchase of the rent. It was this fact which induced Earl Cairns when the Act of 1870 was being passed through the House of Lords to make an important change in that measure. That Act simply proposed to legalise the usage under the Ulster custom. Lord Cairns, with an accurate knowledge of Ulster, explained that there were various usages under the custom, and the word "usages" was thereupon substituted for "usage." The amendment was not a mere drafting amendment. It was an amendment of substance, and I venture to say it will tell in favour of the tenants when the Court of Appeal is forced, as it must be, to deal with Mr. Justice Meredith's law upon this point. What the Act of 1870 did then was to legalise the various "usages" under the customs. It did not state what these usages were. It intentionally avoided this. What had been by custom was to be by law. This and nothing else is the law under the Act of 1870. But what has happened? You have heard of

THE CASE OF LINDSAY AND CORRY

decided a few weeks ago by Mr. Justice Meredith. It was a capital case upon which to fight. Mr. Lindsay was a model tenant in every way. He bought the tenant-right of a farm in County Antrim, and paid close upon £2,000 for it. The outgoing tenant, having secured the money, took Mr. Lindsay to the rent office and departed. The agent, however, declined to accept Mr. Lindsay as tenant. There was no question of character or of solvency or anything else. The tenant was refused solely because the landlord had not been notified of the sale. Mr. Lindsay took the only course open to him. His purchase-money was gone, and he could not retrace his steps. He therefore served an originating notice, and sought to have a fair rent fixed. The case was heard in due course by a sub-commission. The assistant legal commissioner took evidence as to the existence of the custom and as to the character of the usage which prevailed. The evidence was overwhelming. Tenant after tenant proved sales in the past which were absolutely free, where the landlord was never consulted, and where no objection was ever raised. In such a case it is merely a question of fact. There is no law about it. And the Sub-Commission, convinced by the evidence, fixed a fair rent, and declared Mr. Lindsay a tenant under the Act. The landlord appealed, and the case was heard before Mr. Justice Meredith and his colleagues. The whole procedure was gone through again, and, apparently because the Lord Chief Baron had decided in a civil bill appeal that the landlord should have notice in another case where probably the usage was different, Mr. Justice Meredith reversed the Sub-Commission, and Mr. Lindsay walked out of court minus his £2,000, and without any status as a tenant. And yet the Ulster tenants are not content! They have had so much done for them by Parliament! They are in fact the spoiled children of the nation! Yes, but the nation does not quite understand the judicial niceties of the Irish Land Commission. And I have not told the whole story even yet. Let us see where the decision of Mr. Justice Meredith lands us. In the Act of 1881 there are two provisions for the sale of a tenancy. In any part of Ireland if a tenant desires to sell under the Act of 1881 he must serve notice on the landlord. The landlord has then two options. He may exercise his right of pre-emption under the Act. Having done this, he may afterwards buy at the "true value" fixed by the Land Commission, which is usually a third less than the open market price. And next day he may sell at this open market price. The second option is that he may accept the tenant purchaser and register his tenancy. This is the procedure as regards sale under the Act of 1881. But the Act which provides this elaborate procedure also enacts that the tenant in Ulster may still elect to sell under the custom. What does this option mean? If the two processes are the same, why this apparent surplusage? Gentlemen, these words are not surplusage. They are part of the fixed policy of Parliament not to interfere with the Ulster custom. Parliament knew that the Ulster tenant had always the right of sale under the custom, and, whilst it provided for sale in other parts of the country where it had not existed before, it restated and conserved the rights of the Ulster tenant under the custom. Now, in the case of Lindsay and Corry the facts of free and practically unfettered sale were proved to the hilt. The estate was formally admitted to be under the custom, and this was proved to be the usage upon it. The sale to Lindsay took place under the custom, not under the Act of 1881, and Parliament had confirmed this right. On what grounds, I ask, did the Land Commission import into the custom on this estate a notice never heard of on the estate before? There is no law about it. If it were a case of law I should hesitate to speak so strongly. But I can read the Act of 1870. I know what it did, and I know that the clear intention of Parliament has been set aside by Mr. Justice Meredith, with the result that there is a set determination on many of the Ulster estates, from

which I am hearing every day, to destroy the right of sale under the custom, for, if notice has to be given under the custom as under the Act of 1881, the landlord's right of preemption follows. This right never existed on the custom estates, and what this decision does is simply to transfer the property of the Ulster tenant—i.e., the difference between the sale at "true value" and the open market price—to the pocket of the Ulster landlord. I have

TWO ADDITIONAL INSTANCES OF HARDSHIP,

and then I proceed to the real remedy for all this miscalled law and justice, for it is neither one nor the other. When the Morley Committee sat in 1894 there were two cases that produced entire unanimity—landlord and tenant agreeing absolutely. The first was as regards mill holdings; the second had relation to what the peasantry of the West called "co-tenancies." In the first it was proved that milling was in Ireland an almost extinct industry—that farms with a mill, often idle and in ruins, were outside the Land Act, and that grave injustice arose because of this. As I have said, everybody agreed that these holdings should be dealt with, and when the Act of 1896 was passed I fondly hoped it had been done. But Parliament had not counted with the Land Commission. The first case was heard at Eglish, in my own constituency. A widow (Mrs. Holmes) was paying £65 a year for a farm of 30 acres, with a disused flour mill upon it. To my mind, and in the opinion of many lawyers, the case was quite clear. But the Land Commission declined to fix a fair rent. The widow, unable to pay the rent, was evicted, and it may be interesting to the Land Commission to know that the landlord, who would give no abatement on £65 a year, has sold the fee-simple to another tenant for £700, or ten years' purchase of the rent. But the Act was riddled. The clause in the Act of 1896 has been made a dead letter, and the intention of Parliament has been completely thwarted. Still the Ulster farmers are loyal. Take the other case. A landlord in the West—or probably it was his agent—conceived a brilliant notion by which a lot of poor cottiers could be kept out of the Land Court. He arranged that six or seven of the number should hold "in co," and that the rates for the whole should be paid by one. Of course the plan succeeded. These Irish "fellaheen," not being in bona-fide occupation of the holding, were kept out of court. Mr. Healy in the Act of 1896 thought he had relieved them. But even Mr. Healy, although he knows a lot, does not quite know his Land Commission. And these miserable cottiers, notwithstanding the intention of Parliament, are still standing outside the gate. Gentlemen, I don't know what it is, but there is a curious perversity in many Irish institutions. In Great Britain men fight against, but loyally accept, the law when it is enacted and the courts carry it out judicially. The Workmen's Compensation Act is a fine illustration of this fact. Here the Land Commission appear to act as if the land code spelt robbery to the landlords, and the great question apparently is not how to carry out the intention of Parliament, but how to avoid and get behind it with the semblance of legal authority. This is my judgment after patiently watching the procedure of the Land Commission for twenty years. It has been tried and found wanting. Without public confidence it cannot usefully proceed with its work. I greatly regret to say so. I should have preferred the fixing of fair rents to go on and land purchase to proceed alongside. In other words, I should have preferred the change to be gradual and not sudden; but that

THE LAND MUST PASS, AND SPEEDILY,

I am convinced. And the only duty remaining for me to-day is to try to show how this great revolution can be safely consummated. In dealing with this complicated issue I ought to point out that, whilst I have been a strenuous supporter of land purchase in the past, I have never taken kindly to compulsion. I have even voted against it. I definitely pronounce in its favour to-day. I am fully aware of all that can be urged against it. I accept it because I cannot help myself. The present position is simply impossible. It is said to be ruining the landlords. It will soon make the Ulster tenant into a rebel. Peace cannot possibly prevail under such circumstances, and it is consequently the duty of every public man to face the problem and do his best to solve it. Apart from all I have said in regard to the Land Commission, there is one reason which in my opinion will force compulsory sale. By the various Land Purchase Acts we have already created some 35,000 occupying owners. It has been a great achievement, and the result has been admirable. The State has advanced the whole of the purchase-money. It has lost nothing. The instalments have been regularly repaid, and those estates which have been sold are models of peace and contentment. Many of these properties are in Tyrone. Some are close by, and the purchasers are listening to me now. And what is the position? These occupying owners on one estate pay as a terminable annuity 25 or 30 per cent. less than the judicial tenant on a neighbouring estate pays as a fixed and permanent rent, and the greater the success of the Purchase Acts the more glaring will this anomaly become. Men here are constantly pressing me on this point. "Why," they ask, "should tenants on an estate where the landlord has sold be better off by 30 per cent. per annum than we are, our landlord being unwilling to sell?" "What have they done," it is asked, "to merit this preferment. Why should the State prefer them to us?" It is not easy to answer such questions, and you will remember that this very argument secured the benefits of the Land Acts for the leaseholders. They were excluded from the Act of 1881. But it was found impossible to have a judicial tenant on one side of a hedge and a leaseholder on the other, the one with,

the other without, a fair rent, and in 1887 the leaseholders were brought under the Act. I believe the argument which opened the land courts to the leaseholders will ultimately secure universal purchase. The State cannot continue to confer large preferential rights upon a favoured set of tenants, and the larger the class the more glaring the anomaly. But, whilst this is so, it is not enough for men in a public position to pronounce in favour of compulsion. They are bound to assist in removing the difficulties which stand in the way, and to deal with the objections which, undealt with, are fatal. Now, first of all,

THE FINANCIAL OPERATION IS A LARGE ONE,

and requires to be faced. My view is that every acre of agricultural land in Ireland not in the occupation of the landlord ought to be sold to the tenant. This of course excludes all demesne lands and land farmed by the landlord. But, apart from these two exceptions, I should like to see the whole land of Ireland pass from owner to occupier. The rental of the land upon which a fair rent has been fixed amounts to close upon £7,000,000. To this must be added for my purposes all land held under future tenancies and under agreements not subject to the Land Acts. It is not easy to form an estimate of the amount of money that would be required for such a huge transaction, but solely for the purposes of discussion I shall put it at £120,000,000 sterling. Of course much of the land upon which a fair rent has been fixed has already been sold, and is therefore outside the scheme. Then there is practically £30,000,000 already authorised under the Land Purchase Act of 1891. I am aware of all these points, and I fix my sum at £120,000,000 entirely for purposes of discussion. Time was when I stood aghast at the bare idea of such a transaction. But we live and learn. And my official experience at the Local Government Board has taught me much. The plain truth is that within the past thirty years in England and Wales the State has lent to the various municipalities for public purposes three times this amount. There is no difficulty about it. Many of the great municipalities are allowed to issue their own stock. Others borrow from the Public Loan Commissioners. The security consists in the works created and in the rates of the municipality or district. I see no difficulty in applying the same principle to this question. We have happily now a recognised public authority in each county—the county council. I don't think these bodies ought to be burdened with the duty of carrying out a land purchase scheme. But, as Ireland is to all intents and purposes an agricultural country, and as the great mass of the people live by the land, I see no reason why the county council should not guarantee the advance required for each county. The position would then be on all fours with that of England and Wales. The State would advance the money, as it does in the case of English municipalities. Let us suppose the sum involved amounted to £120,000,000. The State would have the security of the land, which has been ample so far as we have gone. It would have, in addition, the security of the county rates. This arrangement would also have the advantage of giving every ratepayer an interest in the punctual payment of the instalments, seeing that if they were not paid by the tenant purchaser an imperative presentment might be made and the amount levied on the general ratepayer. At all events, the security for the advance would be absolute, and neither the State nor the county need, or would, suffer any loss. It will be seen therefore, gentlemen, that the difficulty of raising the money is not insuperable. It can be done. We have spent outright well up to £80,000,000, and have raised it easily, in order that justice should prevail and peace ensue in South Africa. The peace of Ireland is even more important. But to secure it England has not to spend. She has only to lend the State credit, with the absolute certainty that the taxpayer runs no risks. I come now to a vastly more difficult problem—viz.,

THE VALUE OF THE LAND AND THE PRICE TO BE PAID FOR IT.

And I confess that here it is exceedingly difficult to find one's way. One thing is, however, certain. Mr. Gladstone's proposal to give twenty years' purchase of the existing rents all round is impossible. Nobody would now consent to this. And all proposals based upon the same principle are futile, and are put forward simply to evade the difficulty. The land in Ireland, as elsewhere, varies in quality and in value, and you cannot apply an all-round price. But, on the other hand, if you proposed a valuation of each estate by the Land Commission on the present lines the centuries would roll by before the work was accomplished. It is necessary therefore to find some reasonably fair, but rough-and-ready, method of valuation by districts, electoral, baronial, or otherwise. I have thought much upon this point, and I have consulted with others who have experience. And, although it is not perfect, I venture to submit for consideration and discussion a rough scheme of valuation. Generally speaking, the estates sold under the Purchase Acts have averaged sixteen years' purchase of the rent. On some estates in Ulster twenty years' purchase has been gladly given, and on few of these good estates has the price gone below eighteen years, whilst in the West of Ireland land has passed at fourteen and even at twelve years' purchase. Now, I should propose to divide the land of Ireland into four classes—first, second, third, and fourth. And I would authorise the Land Commission to value the land upon this basis. Their duty in that case would be rather to classify than to value in the strict sense. In the first category I would place all those estates mainly, but not wholly, in Ulster upon which if the landlords sold tomorrow twenty years' purchase would be

gladly paid. In the second class, which would probably be the largest, I should place all land now selling at seventeen years. In the third I would place all those properties selling at sixteen, and in the fourth those selling at from twelve to fifteen years' purchase of the rent. In some such way as this I think we might get at the price which the farmer could afford to pay. But when we have got this length we have only cleared one of the many difficulties in the way. Because in innumerable cases that which the tenant can afford to pay is precisely the sum which

THE LANDLORD CANNOT ACCEPT WITHOUT LOSS OR RUIN.

When you propose to take a man's property from him by force of law, and it is plain and palpable that ruin may follow, you may depend upon it that Parliament will take care of that man's case. It cannot be done. Now, just look at what takes place upon a sale under the Purchase Acts. Let us assume that a price is fixed and agreed upon, that the title is clear, and all is plain sailing. The landlord gets, you say, a lump sum. But before this is secure see what has to be done? There may be a head rent on the property. This has to be redeemed and paid off at twenty-five years' purchase. Then there are Government charges in the shape of Crown and quit rent, tithe rent-charge, &c., &c. Finally, there are ordinary charges, such as mortgages on account of borrowed money. The landlord therefore does not get the lump sum. Before the tenant can be installed as purchaser all these charges on the land must be cleared. And the real question therefore is as to the amount of the various charges which have to be met. The landlord cannot consider merely the value of the land. He has to consider what fifteen or eighteen years' purchase will leave him after the charges on the property are cleared. The position therefore is this—"Given a landlord willing to sell and a tenant anxious to buy. The one proposes a price, which we will assume is the real value of the land, and is all that he ought to pay. The other cannot accept it for the simple reason that it spells ruin to him. After paying the charges he would have little or nothing left." How is the gulf between the two parties to be bridged over? This is the problem which has to be solved before you can touch compulsion, for unless we can get a scheme that will secure the support and the reasonable safety of a majority of Irish landlords success in the immediate future is impossible. I do not think such a scheme impossible. In the past we have had many discussions as to the best way to relieve Irish landlords. That many of the small landowners are worse off than many of their tenants I have no reason to doubt. And they are in the main, I am willing to believe, perfectly innocent sufferers. It has been proposed, for example, that the State should lend them money at a low rate of interest to pay off their mortgages. It would certainly be a novel enterprise for the State to lend money for the purpose of paying the debts of a class. And it might have unexpected developments. Then it has been argued that charges ought to be reduced as well as rents, that the interest on mortgages ought to be lessened pro rata, and that family settlements even should be overhauled. It is a sufficient answer to all this to say that the cure would be worse than the disease, and that the shock such a system would give to the public credit of Ireland would be fatal to all business enterprise. There is no "way out," I am persuaded, in this direction. But I think relief of some kind necessary, just, and expedient. Why, for example, when an estate is sold at eighteen years' purchase, should a head rent upon it be redeemed at twenty-five years? Such a proceeding is antiquated nonsense. The head landlord should suffer proportionately. Similarly with Crown charges—why should they be redeemed at a fancy price? Why should the immediate owner suffer alone? Having brought you to this point, I am going to make a proposal which

BRINGS IN THE BRITISH TAXPAYER.

This gentleman is often abused, but he is a patient, long-suffering citizen. He is on excellent terms, too, with his bank account, and at bottom he is just and reasonable. Ireland has given him in the past a good deal of trouble. But he has taken care, as Colonel Saunderson once wittily said, that the tears of Erin have always been wiped away with an Irish pocket-handkerchief. The government of Ireland has cost and costs him nothing. Well, this brings me to my plan of bridging the gulf of which I have spoken. And, in the first place, and dealing with first-class lands, and first-class estates only, I should simply leave all such to the classification of the Land Commission. If that body decides that the tenant can reasonably pay twenty years' purchase, then I think, as regards both landlord and tenant, the way is clear. The lands should be sold at that price. I now come to the second class of land—viz., that valued at seventeen years, and this, as I have said, would probably be the chief division. Now, it is a well-known fact that if the landowners owning land of this class had been able to sell at that price hundreds of estates would have passed under the Purchase Acts. But the price was prohibitory. What, then, is to be done? Here I have a word to the tenant-purchaser and a word to the State. To the tenant on all such properties purchase means everything that a man most values. It means an instant reduction on his judicial rent of probably 25 per cent., even should the period for redeeming the loan be fixed at forty-nine years. It means more should it be fixed at sixty years, which, by the way, is the term allowed for land purchase under the Public Health Acts. It means more than this, however, to him. It means all that is implied in the sense of ownership. It means freedom from the fixing, and mayhap the raising, of rent. It means the comfort and

satisfaction of feeling that what a man puts into the land is his own—that he is not working for another. Now, all this is worth much. And in dealing with compulsory sale let it be remembered that when the property of any man is taken from him compulsorily that fact is always taken into account in fixing the price. There is no statute law for it, but custom has made the practice of the arbitrator equal to law, and the universal practice under the Public Health, Housing of the Working Classes, Railway, and other Acts is to give 10 per cent. for compulsion. I make no such proposal here, but I do say that in a great transaction such as this—a transaction designed to make almost a new heaven and a new earth in Ireland—the tenant-purchaser ought to make some slight sacrifice. And his contribution to this end I should fix at an additional year's purchase. That is to say, where the land is valued at seventeen years' purchase I should ask the tenant to give eighteen. And I would then impose upon the State the duty of adding another year's purchase-money. I shall have something to say in defence of this proposal, so far as the State is concerned, later on. Meanwhile I only desire to get my scheme made clear. And so far we have disposed of two classes of land. There remain the third and the fourth classes, and these unfortunately are the most difficult to deal with. It is on these properties that most trouble has arisen. But I cannot see how it is possible to make any differentiation. I should therefore on land valued at sixteen years' purchase add two years in the same way, thus bringing the value of these estates up to eighteen years so far as the landlord is concerned. And the same rule would apply as regards all land valued from twelve to fifteen years. But this is not all. There are two classes of land outside the Land Acts. I have already said that demesne land must go with the mansions belonging to the landlords. There are still, however, the great grazing tracts and townparks. These are outside the Land Acts and are subject now to the operation of the law of contract. There is no earthly reason why the State should confer any favour upon the great graziers of the country, and nothing of the kind would be or ought to be listened to. In the case of all grazing farms over 100 acres they are outside the Land Acts, and I should sell them at a price fixed by the Land Commission on the actual value of the land for the purposes for which it is used. Probably the Western area would have to be dealt with by the Congested Districts Board, and might involve separate treatment, upon which I cannot enter here. The case of the

HOLDINGS KNOWN AS TOWNPARKS

is somewhat different. These holdings are also outside the Land Acts, and are subject to competition rents. Where they are genuine townparks—and I lay stress upon this point—held for the accommodation of the inhabitants of towns and villages, they are valuable to the general community, and I should treat them in a totally different way to ordinary agricultural land. I should value them for the purpose for which they are used and vest them in the district council, and this body should be charged with their letting and administration under stringent regulations. In both these cases the landlord would obtain an enhanced price for this class of land, and it is only fair that he should do so, seeing that it is not subject now to the fair rent provisions of the Acts. This scheme therefore involves—(a) the raising of an enormous sum of money; (b) a classification of Irish land for purposes of sale; (c) the fixing of a price for each class; (d) a contribution from the tenant-purchaser; and (e) a contribution from the State. So far as the State is concerned

THIS MAY SEEM A STARTLING PROPOSAL.

But is it so very startling after all? The Irish landlord, it ought never to be forgotten, is the creation of the English Government. It was the English Government which planted him here. It was the Government of England which fixed upon Irish soil the English system of land tenure. In dark and evil days the Irish landlord stood the racket for England. He has been overtaken in a political, social, and economic revolution. The storm winds are still whistling about him. His enemies openly rejoice. Ruin stares him in the face. There is no future before him *qua* landlord. The question I ask in face of all this is—has the English Government, has the English people, no duty in regard to his case? I think they have. They placed the Irish landlord here. They ought to help to face the music now. Of course the British Radical will squirm. But, so far from thinking the scheme impossible, I would not be the least afraid to lay it before any English audience—and I have had more experience of such audiences than most men—and to abide by the verdict. At all events, there is my scheme in the rough. It will go to the country for consideration and discussion. And I have only now to deal with one or two subsidiary questions. I shall be asked how I propose to get over

THE QUESTION OF SETTLING TITLE AND TURBARY.

Yes, this has always been a lion in the path. If not settled it will stop everything. Because if title has to be cleared by the lawyers the hairs of our children's children will go down in sorrow to the grave before the work is complete. But there is a clear way out here, although every lawyer will instinctively obstruct it. And it is a thorough way. Let the State give due notice of sale and purchase. Let it deal with the man in actual possession and to whom the rent is paid. Then give the new purchaser a Parliamentary title, as was done under the Encumbered Estates Court Act, and leave the musty and useless folios to grow still more musty in lawyers' safes. This is the only way of dealing with the question, and fortunately there is precedent for it. Then there is the important question of turbary. Where the turf is on the holding of course it will be bought as part of

the land. But there are great tracts of country where the turf is not on the holding but at a distance, and to which the tenants have no legal right. In all such cases I should vest the bog in the district council and leave to that body the sale of what is a prime necessity of Irish life. It would no doubt have to be jealously guarded. But in this way alone can the difficulty be met. Such a scheme as I propose would not have been possible before the creation of these public bodies. Now they fit in naturally, and will be useful and indispensable in carrying out the details of a scheme which must come and which in magnitude and importance will be unique. Now, gentlemen, this speech has run to unpardonable length, and I approach its conclusion. The first appeal I make is

TO IRISH LANDLORDS.

I do so in all sincerity. There are politicians in Ireland who desire their ruin and who will openly rejoice in it. I am not of this class. I defended landlords in Land League and Campaign days from what I considered unjust and illegal attacks. And, if necessary, I would do it again. I have, however, insisted upon land reform because I believed in its justice and its absolute necessity. In going through with such a policy I was bound to meet with misrepresentation and ill-will. But I have still friends amongst the Irish landlords—friends even in this constituency, who will vote heartily for me and who have never quarrelled with my action on the land question. But in spite of all that has gone before I venture to make an earnest appeal to the landlords as a class. They tell us that the small owners are being ruined, and that even the strong are feeling the strain. I heard Lord Clonbrock give a harrowing description of their sufferings in the House of Lords—a description which touched the hearts of all who heard it. I have heard the Duke of Abercorn do the same thing in the same place. Well, have they tried to look into the future? There have been two fixings of fair rent in less than 20 years. The average reduction has been 42 per cent. Are they sure there will not be a third? And if so, what is the fate ahead of all who are subject to the process? It will be too late to sell then, for purchase will be on the reduced rental and would spell ruin. Ruin, absolute ruin, is inevitable. Does not wisdom point the way out now? By giving up a useless crusade for compensation, and by joining their tenants in a reasonable and fair scheme, they will go far to ensure its success, and so give their weaker brethren a chance. I know all that works against compulsory sale. Sentiment counts for much. And I can well understand an Irish landlord who has never been guilty of harsh or unreasonable treatment of his tenantry asking why he should give up the home of his ancestors, where he and his children were born and brought up, and around which cling the most sacred associations. I say I can understand it all. But there is the general good to be considered. And even such men cannot be quite blind to facts. It is not alone that an economic revolution has come and swept away much of their income. A social and political change has come as well. As a class the Irish landlords once controlled the representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament. It gave them great opportunities, which they sadly misused. But, be this as it may, the representation of Ireland has passed into other hands. They cannot return by the votes of the people a single member to that great assembly, which must ultimately decide their fate. Then, until quite recently they had the exclusive management of county affairs, and, let the truth be told, managed them, generally speaking, well and purely. That power has also slipped from their grasp, and where they sit on local boards it is mainly as co-opted, not as clerical members. Finally, they were supreme on the local Bench. This supremacy has also disappeared, and not always for the public good. Yes, the times are out of joint. As landlords they are impossible. As country gentlemen, free from the associations of land and tenants, they may well lead their neighbourhoods even now and secure the respect and the esteem of all good men. I ask the strong to think of the weak. There is a way of escape open. It will soon be too late. I have often heard it said by their friends that as a class the Irish landlords never knew their own interest. I trust this has been said for the last time, and that all parties in Ireland will unite to close this sad, sad chapter of Irish history. My next appeal is

TO THE TENANTS,

and to them at all events I have some claim to speak. In asking for the compulsory sale of Irish land—in asking that the fee simple of the Irish soil should be compulsorily taken from one class and given to another—you are asking for a thing so great, so tremendous, that history can provide but few precedents. It was done of course in France by a revolution. It was done again in parts of the German empire by a wise statesmanship, and it will be done here by the same means if the tenants are moderate and the landlords are wise. Self-interest ought to teach both classes the right way. It would have been very simple for me to have come here to-day and announced my conversion to compulsory sale—to have said let every farmer pay eighteen years' purchase of his rent—let the State add two years to this amount and the thing is done. Gentlemen, it would be a scandal to ask thousands of Irish tenants to pay eighteen years' purchase. They could not do so; and to ask two years' purchase from the State without any corresponding effort on the part of the best of the tenants would have been futile and useless. My scheme is more liberal to the tenants as a whole than such a proposal. It may have—it doubtless has—many imperfections. But it is not an impossible plan. It will provide to all but utterly bankrupt landlords a way of escape. It will give the land to every class of tenant on terms which will give them an im-

mediate reduction of 25 to 30 per cent. in their annual payments, and the land will be their own. There will be plenty of better bids than mine, but any man who really desires an honest settlement will do well to study the possibilities. I have done so long and patiently, with the single desire of a just settlement, and I appeal to the Ulster farmers to frankly express not alone their desire to secure the land, but to secure it under all the circumstances at a fair price. There is another class—viz.,

THE GENERAL CITIZEN—

to whom also a word may be fitly said. For some years, owing to causes which I do not enter upon here, there has been a period of unwonted repose in Ireland. Agrarian crime has disappeared, evictions have ceased, moonlighting has become a lost art, and men seriously interested in the progress of Ireland have watched the years pass by with intense interest and satisfaction, but those who know most about the country have the greatest cause to feel uneasy. A cloud—no bigger than a man's hand at first—gathers darkly about us. In the West—that fruitful birthplace of Irish tragedies—in that West which is itself a tragedy—trouble is again brewing. Boycotting is once more rampant. Meetings for the purposes of intimidation are regularly held; there are cries for repressive measures heard—cries which the Executive wisely, in my opinion, do not heed. The movement is day by day gathering strength. Soon it will rush over the country as a flood, and its root is in the land. Is it to be ever so? Is the history of Ireland to be bloodstained—is progress to be delayed—is ill-feeling to be kept up—all because of a single issue? I, for one, say no—a thousand times no. But will the British taxpayer stand it? This is the question of questions with some people. Stand what? It is quite impossible for any person to eliminate from the consideration of this question the financial relations of the two countries. I agree entirely with those who affirm that this poor country pays more than her fair share towards the Imperial quota. I differ entirely with those who propose cheap whisky, or differentiation in other forms of taxation, as the remedy for this mischief. But the British people may well, in considering this question, take into account the facts of the financial question as between the two countries. I could have proved to demonstration that the transfer of the Irish land to the Irish occupier would result in the all but immediate saving of a capitalised sum of £10,000,000 sterling in Irish expenditure. And I might have built my case upon this. The Land Commission would disappear—at least as a rent-fixing institution—the Land Judges' Court would follow suit, the Royal Irish Constabulary might be reduced by half, and so on. I have not done so. To apply these savings for this purpose would have been to wipe the tear away with the never-failing Irish handkerchief. No; these savings can in due course be applied for Irish purposes, and I think the Imperial purse ought to be used, because of the historic facts connected with the case. In any case the expenditure will amply repay itself. The real tap root of Irish discontent will be reached and torn up; everything else in the country will have a chance. I have only one word to say, and that word is

IN REGARD TO MY PERSONAL POSITION.

I noticed in a letter the other day written by an Irish land agent a statement that I was coming here to-day with the bribe of compulsory sale for the Irish tenants, and he implied that I would speak from this platform as representing the Government of which I am a member. Gentlemen, I wish it were so. The Government to which I am proud to belong has done many good things for Ireland. This would indeed be a crowning mercy. But I have no such authorisation. I speak here to-day from conviction, but for myself alone. I could not avoid doing so. Things are so intolerable that almost every man, even those supported by Irish landlords, has been driven to pronounce in favour of compulsory sale. Our neighbour and friend, Mr. Archdale, in Fermanagh; Mr. William Moore, in Antrim; Mr. Lonsdale, in Armagh; Sir Thos. Lea, in Derry; Mr. T. L. Corbett and Mr. Sharman Crawford, in Down, are all pledged. I am greatly mistaken if any Ulster Unionist seeking the suffrages of an agricultural constituency will escape without the most explicit assurances on the subject, and I am personally aware that many landlords see no other solution of the problem. But make no mistake. The British people, the British Parliament, the British Government have all to be convinced, and none of these forces will take kindly to compulsion. Our work, therefore, is all before us. I only wish to say now, and finally, that as an Irish representative I declare my conviction that the principle I have contended for to-day must be ultimately conceded. In a new Parliament there will be a real united Ireland upon this question. It will be the living issue of the next Parliament. At the polling booths the electors of South Tyrone will decide whether or not I am to form one of that fighting force. I could have gone elsewhere. I chose to stay, and I shall await your verdict with confidence, and, let me add, with perfect equanimity. If fifteen years of faithful service are to count for nothing—if an intimate knowledge of Irish politics is worth nothing in a representative, if services on hundreds of platforms when this province was in real danger—services which were wholly outside my strict duty—are to be forgotten, if knowledge of all the issues, social and political, that lie straight ahead is counted worthless, you will say so, and the sheriff will attest your verdict. Until that happens I shall count myself what I have proudly been for fifteen years—member for South Tyrone.