
England and Ireland

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ENGLAND AND IRELAND.

Now that the impossibility of longer continuing to treat Ireland as a conquered province is becoming apparent, the true nature of the Irish question is beginning to make itself clear. The difficulty British statesmen find in agreeing to any measure of self-government that would satisfy the demands of the Irish people is as to what would become of the Irish landlords.

Americans generally have regarded the difficulty between Ireland and England as essentially political, for that is the phase of which they have heard most. But the truth is, that, beneath the political question, lies the social question. The long and cruel misgovernment of Ireland has not been wanton in the sense of having been without motive. From the landing of Strongbow to the suspension of jury trial, English outrage and oppression in Ireland have been prompted by the desire of greedy adventurers to obtain possession of Irish soil, or of their descendants and successors to keep possession. This has been the motive of massacres and proscriptions, of religious persecutions and penal laws, of castle government and coercion acts. It is for this that the Royal Irish Constabulary is maintained and that Ireland is garrisoned by English troops.

It is true that the miserable vanity that so often passes for patriotism, and race prejudice and religious bigotry have been utilized to the utmost in securing British support of this class government of Ireland, just as such feelings were utilized in popularizing wars undertaken to maintain the right divine of kings. The magic of the possessive pronoun, which enables paupers and serfs to glory in the greatness of "*our* country," has made down-trodden Englishmen ready to tread down Irishmen just as, a century ago, they were ready to war against the liberties of their kinsmen in America, to put down a revolt in "*our* colonies." The English laborer, driven by the deprivation of his birthright to deem employment at starvation wages a boon, has

learned to dread and hate the Irish laborers forced by the same cause into competition with him, just as laborers in California have learned to dread and hate the Chinese, and laborers in Pennsylvania, the Poles and Hungarians. And in the same way that vain pride of opinion—always strongest among those who have had least to do in providing themselves with opinions—which manifests itself in religious bigotry, has been powerful in closing the eyes of Englishmen to the wrongs of Ireland, and disposing them to lend their power in crushing Irish aspirations.

Yet these are but the means of which the Irish landlord interest has availed itself, not the motives of the oppression of Ireland. The purpose of that oppression has been to enable the landlord to extort his rents, and to shield the “exterminator” from that wild justice which, whether called by the name of “Captain Moonlight” or “Judge Lynch,” always springs up when legal justice is denied.

Irish landlordism is not merely a British interest in the sense that its spoils are largely drawn to Great Britain by Irish landlords residing there, or to pay interest on mortgages held by British capitalists—but it is part and parcel of the system which enables the dominant class in Great Britain to live in idleness on the labor of their own countrymen, and they have the same direct concern in maintaining Irish landlordism as the slave-holders of South Carolina would have had in preventing a successful insurrection of slaves in North Carolina.

That Irish landlordism, to maintain itself, has had to rely upon British power, and to resort to measures of repression that British landlords have not found necessary, is due, not to any difference in its nature, but partly to differences in historical development, and partly to differences in industrial development. Ireland was never conquered by the Romans; it attained under the Celtic institutions a comparatively high degree of civilization; instead of succumbing to Norman invaders, they were so assimilated that they became “more Irish than the Irish themselves,” nor did final subjugation take place until the Reformation had brought about a distinction of religion between conquerors and conquered. This, being seized upon by the spoliators as the most convenient and certain designation under which the despoiled could be prevented from regaining power, had the effect of keeping the Irish priest close to the peasant and of preventing religion from being used, as it has

elsewhere been used, to destroy the idea of natural rights. Thus the spirit and traditions of the people have been better preserved, and the Irish peasant, hard as may have been his lot, has never been so completely crushed as the corresponding class in Great Britain. Ireland is not only at an earlier point of historical development than England, since for English parallels of struggles which are in Ireland matters of yesterday and to-day, we must go back to the times of Robin Hood, to those popular risings as to which tradition is silent and history gives us only imperfect glimpses, and to the clearances and hangings that went on under the Tudors—but it is also at an earlier point of industrial development. Being in the main an agricultural country, and the organization of agriculture being yet in large part so simple that the laborer is the direct tenant of the landlord, the relations that must always exist between land and labor are not obscured in the popular mind by the capitalistic intermediary.

The national feeling that has done so much to keep alive the spirit of the Irish people is of course political in its primary aims. But the present Irish movement is far more than a movement having for its object the restoration to the Irish people of such rights of self-government as are enjoyed by the American people. And it is from this fact that it derives its strength.

The Home Rule movement of Isaac Butt was a political movement from what may be called the aristocratic side. The Fenian movement was a political movement from the democratic side. But neither the one, nor yet even the other, aroused the strength which the Land League movement has shown. The reason is that this movement is essentially a social movement. It not only appeals as directly to the humblest of the disinherited as did the agitation of O'Connell for the repeal of religious disabilities, but even more powerfully, for it appeals to what the English press calls the "cupidity" of the Irish peasant—that is to say to his indisposition to be robbed of his hard earnings, to be despoiled of the food without which wife and children must starve or go to the poorhouse. It not only promises to give him political rights, but a right far more important—the right to live.

The two currents which unite in the Irish revolt are well represented in its two foremost leaders. Charles Stewart Parnell is a landlord of the "English Pale," educated in one of the great educational centers of the British aristocracy, belonging by birth to

that privileged circle in which it was, until recent years, alone possible to look forward to a political career, and with the personal tastes and feelings of the dominant class. His character and powers are those of the typical Englishman rather than the typical Irishman. He is an astute politician,* and in disciplining and handling his forces, and in mastering difficult situations has shown qualities of the highest order. But, though raised to power on the crest of the Land League movement, he represents its political, not its social aim. Though he has been led at times into radical utterances on the land question, and was induced to sign the no-rent manifesto, his own policy is evidently the conservation rather than the destruction of landlordism; and his ideas of agrarian reform go no further than reductions of rents and the purchase by tenants of their holdings. While he might go upon social questions as far as the most radical, it would be as forced by the current, not as leading and urging it on.

Michael Davitt, on the other hand, is by birth a Mayo peasant who learned to lisp in Gallic, a typical representative of the race who, swept from their lands "to Connaught or to hell," have preserved among the bogs and rocks of the west the traditions of a freer life. Carried to England by an evicted mother, who begged her way from door to door rather than suffer the degradation of the poor-house, his school was an English factory where, while yet a child, his right arm was torn from his shoulder, and his university the English penal prison to which his love for his country and his desire to win her political independence consigned him. With all the warm and generous qualities of the typical Irishman he has also the impulsiveness that is associated with them. With great "magnetism" and capacity as a popular organizer, he is a born leader of men, but his leadership is rather that of the Irish chief who headed the wild charge than that of the cautious tactician who moves his forces with the coolness of a chess player. With the self-abnegation that has led him to refuse all testimonials and pecuniary rewards, he has suffered those who were fighting its Parliamentary battle to assume the management and direction of the movement which he began. But he has the strength of the man who stands for a great principle, who, as Emerson phrased it, has "hitched his wagon to a star." What he represents is more than the desire for mere political freedom. It is the aspira-

* I use the word of course in its original sense.

tion for that full freedom that can only be secured where every human creature has an equal right to the land on which and from which all must live.

And this is the core of the Irish movement. The political struggle that goes on in the British Parliament is but a part of the social struggle which is going on all over Ireland—that passive war that has for its inevitable end the restoration to the Irish people of their natural rights in their native soil.

It is a mistake to suppose that the idea that land should be treated as the common property of the whole people involves anything new or strange to the Irish mind. Four years ago, when I first visited in Ireland, I received a request from one of the most venerable and best loved of the Irish bishops that I should visit him, as he wished to have a long talk with me. I went, and he put to me, one after another, all the arguments that are usually made for private property in land, and all the objections that are usually urged to its treatment as the property of the community. I answered his questions, and met his objections, till finally, his face lighting up, he exclaimed: “God bless you, my son! I have been questioning you, because I wanted to see if you could defend your faith. You have been expressing my firm convictions. And though it may not seem so yet, no human power can stop the movement that has begun in Ireland short of what you contend for. Nor in what you say to me, is there anything new. It is the same doctrine, that, when a little boy sitting in the evening by the turf fire, I have heard from the lips of old men who could not speak an English word. Our people have bowed to might, but they have never forgotten their national rights. Where the Irish tongue is spoken you will find what you are saying understood.”

And so I found it. “What is he saying?” I have asked on wind-swept hillsides of the Hebrides, as the crowd of crofters and fishermen swayed with answering emotion to the burst of Gallic oratory. “He is saying what you say,” would come the reply. “He is saying that all men have the same right to land, and that this is what our fathers have always said; and he is repeating from the old poetry and from the Bible, that God made the land for all His children, and that He is no respecter of persons.”

It was among Irishmen, who have preserved the old traditions, that the Land League movement had its inception. Patrick Ford, to whom more than any other Irish-American, it owes the support

that enabled it to gather strength, has from the first proclaimed the truth that the rights of men to land are equal, and scouted the idea of any truce or compromise with landlordism. Michael Davitt, who founded the Land League, raised at the first the standard of "the Land for the People," and has never faltered.

Nor does the truth that human rights to the use of land are equal and unalienable lack in the Irish mind the force of a religious truth. These are the words of Dr. Nulty, Bishop of Meath, in a pastoral letter to the clergy and laity of his diocese five years ago :

"The land, therefore, of every country, is the *common property* of the people of that country ; because its real Owner—the Creator who made it—has transferred it as a voluntary gift to them. 'The earth He hath given to the children of men.' Now, as every individual in every country is a creature and a child of God, and as all His creatures are equal in His sight, any settlement of the land of this or any other country that would exclude the humblest man in this or that country from his share of the common inheritance would not only be an injustice and a wrong to that man, but would, moreover, be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator."

At nothing short of the acknowledgment of this equal right can the Irish movement stop.

The political element in the Irish movement is, of course, the largest, since it includes all who desire more than political rights, as well as those who desire only political rights ; but the social element is the more intense, and it must come to the front just in proportion as political demands are satisfied. This is the dilemma in which the governing class of Great Britain find themselves. Something must be granted to the Irish determination to secure self-government ; but the more that is conceded, the more will the agitation of the land question increase, and the less will be the power of resisting it.

If "Grattan's Parliament," as it really was, could satisfy Irish demands to-day, there is no question that the dominant class in Great Britain will be willing enough to see it instituted. But Grattan's Parliament—a corrupt conclave of the ruling oligarchy, in which the masses of the people had no representation—could no more be resuscitated in Ireland to-day than slavery could be re-established in America. An Irish Parliament now must mean a parliament in which the landless, not the landlords, shall rule—a parliament which would at once address itself to the task of

abolishing landlordism. And while nothing less than the full management of their own affairs can satisfy the Irish demand, any concession which falls short of that can only increase the power of demanding more.

The real pinch in the Irish question is seen in the frantic declarations of even such Liberal papers as the "Pall Mall Gazette" that "if the Irish will not pay their landlords twenty shillings in the pound on the fair value of their property, they must not only dispense with any hope of Home Rule, but with any semblance of government by consent," and by the assertions of English politicians who concede the justice of self-government, that it must be accompanied by some guarantee that the "property" of the landlords shall not be "confiscated." This is asking for the moon as the condition of agreeing to the inevitable. The Irish masses are past the point of paying anything in the pound any longer than they can help it, and there is no power that can give any such guarantee. Mr. Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party could not give it if they would. They may move forward with the tide, but they cannot sweep it back.

The proposition attributed to Mr. Giffen, statistician of the Board of Trade, for the buying out of the Irish landlords and the appropriation of their rents to the support of the Irish Government, is the most statesmanlike proposition which the Irish problem has yet called forth from any Englishman of influence, inasmuch as it recognizes the fact that the land question is the fundamental difficulty. It is, in brief, that the British Government shall buy out the Irish agricultural landlords, or rather, such of them as have been affected by the last Land Act, by giving them three per cent. consols at the rate of twenty years' purchase of the judicial rents, which would amount to about £160,000,000, or \$800,000,000; the land so ransomed to be made over to the present tenants, on condition that they pay to the local Government of Ireland one-half or one-third of the judicial rents.

This scheme offers the Irish landlords full compensation for what they have been accustomed to consider their property; to the tenants a large reduction of rent, and to the Irish people a considerable permanent revenue. The parties who would be "out" on this transaction are the imperial tax-payers of the three kingdoms. Yet on Mr. Giffen's theory that such a plan would settle the Irish land question, they would not only be saved large expendi-

tures now necessary to make in Ireland, while the difficulty in the way of permitting the Irish people to manage their own home affairs would be removed. The presentation of such a scheme is gratifying evidence of the rapid progress of British thought toward the only basis on which the land question can be permanently settled, but even if it could be adopted it could not settle the Irish land question. It would only affect a portion of Irish land, and as to that, would not recognize the equality of rights, merely carving up, with some deduction, the estates of the landlords among the tenants, but leaving out the laborers and all other classes. It is, in short, a heroic plan of doing, at the expense of the imperial tax-payer, and with some concession to the principle of land nationalization, what it has been vainly attempted to do by loan of public funds—save the Irish landlords, and interest a much larger number of the people in the further maintenance of landlordism.

Five years ago, a proposal of this kind would have seemed to the English mind too radical to have been dreamed of. But in these five years the world, and especially the English-speaking world, has been moving much faster than many people realize. Not only has the Irish movement passed the point when any such compromise could satisfy it, but the same spirit is awake in England, in Scotland, and in Wales. This is what places British landlordism “between the devil and the deep sea,” making it dangerous for it to stand and dangerous for it to try to compromise.

Even the discussion of such a proposition for the settlement of the Irish land question would of itself suffice—if that were needed—to bring the British land question within the sphere of practical politics. If the Imperial tax-payer is to buy out the Irish landlords for the benefit of the Irish tenant, what about the Scottish crofters? What about the newly enfranchised British agricultural laborer, who already has his representatives in the House of Commons, so long sacred to his betters? What about the crowded slums of British cities and the thousands upon thousands of unemployed workingmen? Why not buy out the landlords of the three kingdoms?

Why not? The answer will be quick and certain. When it is proposed that the living people of a country shall buy their country from the heirs and assignees of certain dead men, the absurdity and injustice of private property in land must strike the

most obtuse. For it is, as Thomas Jefferson said, a self-evident truth that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living, and that no right of ownership in it can be derived from the dead. No matter how habit may blind men to it, it must appear self-evident, whenever they come to think of it, that the equal right to life involves the equal right to land.

From whatever cause, the policy of the Irish Parliamentarians up to this time has been such as to repel rather than to attract the co-operation of the British democracy. While in the recent election the Presbyterians of Argyllshire, despite the injunctions of their ministers, returned an Irish Catholic, solely because of his views on the land question, the Irish vote of Glasgow was, by Mr. Parnell's order, thrown against the candidates of the Scottish Land Restoration League, with the result, in one case, of electing an Irish landlord, most virulently opposed to the Irish movement.

But, sooner or later, common aims must unite the masses. The Irish question cannot be settled without the settlement of the land question on both sides of St. George's Channel. Nor can its influence be unfelt across a wider sea. In the right to do as he pleases with his own—in the right to say who shall or who shall not live upon and use his land the American land owner has all the legal rights that the most tyrannical Irish landlord ever exercised. If they do not yet give him the same power over men it is simply that our population is still sparse, and that the competition of the disinherited for the use of the natural element necessary to life and labor is not therefore so intense. But how these powers are being brought out may be seen from the steady rise in the value of land, which means simply that the American laborer must pay more to the American land owner for the privilege of living. And how much more intense is competition, unchecked by tradition or custom, likely to be here than in Ireland may be seen from the fact that while Buckle estimates Irish rents, when about at their highest, at one-fourth of the produce, one-half the crop is already a common rent in our new States.

HENRY GEORGE.