

By enlarging on the wickedness of the aristocratic landowner the plutocrats hope to kill two birds with one stone. They think they will injure the landowner, and curry favour with the masses.

The masses don't much like the merely rich man at any time, but they prefer the rich landowner to the rich manufacturer, because the former is usually a sportsman—and the crowd adores the sportsman.—LAND UNION JOURNAL, October.

Proposals Not Novelties.

The promoters of the Conference may be assured that any moderate measures thought out with due consideration of the difficulties in the many problems summed up in the land question will be attentively considered. Few, if any, persons maintain that our agricultural system is perfect. In regard to it there is much room for the exercise of constructive statesmanship. The rapid growth of our industrial system, the decrease of the purely agricultural population, the attractions, now widely made known, of countries beyond the seas call for a consideration of the situation. In a striking speech last July Lord Lansdowne indicated some of the directions in which the State might intervene with advantage and without risk. The proposals were not novelties; they have often been put forward by Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Balfour. Some of them once figured in every Liberal programme. Before any decisive legislation is adopted inquiries of various kinds may be necessary. Though the main facts are accessible to any one who goes to well-known documents, some points are still obscure. Let us have an investigation—a patient and careful examination such as Mr. Asquith indicated on Saturday. Let it deal with the taxation of land values in all its aspects. Let us learn from farmers at first hand what grievances, if any, they have. Let us examine the alleged effects of monopoly and the withdrawal of land from the market. But let the inquiries be open and above board. The information obtained by means of questionnaires prepared with an eye to desired results, with leading questions virtually securing one class of answers and neglect of certain important matters, is worthless. So, too, are answers which have not been subjected to cross-examination revealing the substratum of facts upon which opinions rest. Methods of inquiry which would be scouted as unfair if applied to a private Bill affecting the fortunes of some small community do not recommend themselves because they are applied to measures affecting the basis of society.—TIMES (Tory), October 7th.

According to the MORNING POST of October 23rd, it has been the custom of the Ascot Racecourse authorities to close all paths across the Royal Heath once a year to maintain the rights they claim, but this, it is said, does not affect two public rights of way. The annual closing was fixed for 22nd October, and some feeling was aroused in the neighbourhood owing to one path into the course being closed which, it is alleged, has never been closed before. A crowd of several hundreds, led by two members of the Parish Council, went last evening to the spot where the barricade was guarded by a police inspector and constables. One of the Parish Councillors said he was acting on behalf of the parishioners, who were not going to have more of their rights on Ascot Heath taken away. He said he had passed through there for thirty-eight years, and was going through then. Inspector Jannaway advised the men to lay their protests before the Grand Stand Trustees in a quiet, orderly way, but the men shouted, "That will be too late." The names of householders present were taken by the police, and the crowd then smashed down the obstructions and passed through to the course amid loud cheering.

IRISH LAND PURCHASE FINANCE.

LAND PURCHASE DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16TH, 1912.

Those of our readers who desire to get some insight into the workings, the perplexities, the cost, the dangers and the insufficiency of Land Purchase schemes as a means of solving the ever-urgent Land Question, could not do better than study the Hansard report of the discussion on the question which took place in the House of Commons on Wednesday, October 16th. In the Home Rule Bill, or Government of Ireland Bill, now before the House, Land Purchase is one of the matters relating to Ireland specially reserved to the Imperial Government—and that for the simple reason that it would be most unfair and most impolitic to impose upon the new Irish Government the enormous liability and cost this measure involves. Mr. William O'Brien moved an amendment to the effect that after three years this matter should revert to the Irish Parliament; his obvious purpose being to compel the Imperial Government to attempt the impossible task of completing the transfer of the rented Irish agricultural land from the landlord to the tenant within that period. In the course of his speech he pointed out that of the agricultural tenants of Ireland there are still 192,000, about half the entire body, who are still what are called "non-purchase tenants"—that is, tenants who may have had their rents judicially fixed under Gladstone's Act of 1881, but have not yet invoked the aid of the subsequent Land Purchase Acts. If the process of land-purchase were not completed by the Imperial Government, of these 192,000 there would be possibly "175,000 absolutely barred out from land purchase for the present generation, because the Irish Parliament could not touch the subject"; and, moreover, they would be paying in rent "at the least a sum of £1,500,000 a year which would remain in their pockets if they could purchase on the same terms as their neighbours." In addition there are, Mr. O'Brien contended, about 120,000 tenants who have already agreed to purchase their holdings, but "whose holdings are not yet vested because the State has failed to find the purchase money, and every one of the 120,000 men has now to go on paying an interest [query, a Rent?] of at least 3½ per cent., or perhaps even 4 per cent., instead of the 2½ per cent. interest which was guaranteed them under the Act of 1903." "In addition to all that," he continued, "there must be fully 50,000 agricultural labourers who are not yet provided with cottages, and at least half that number who have not yet been provided with their acre allotments." "If once the Home Rule Bill were passed," Mr. O'Brien argued, "there would no longer be any prospect of Imperial loans sufficient to meet the gigantic social reform which is involved in this question, and which I have no hesitation in saying is as vital an element to the pacification and happiness of Ireland as the abolition of the present system of government." And he concluded this part of his speech by pointing out that if things were left as they are, you would have "in round numbers 400,000 Irish farmers, every one with a distinct personal grievance and a legitimate ground of discontent."

Mr. O'Brien then revealed that what he was really most frightened of was the spread into Ireland of the principles held and of the doctrines preached by the active and growing group of Taxation and Rating Reformers in other parts of Great Britain, as well as in Canada, Australia and New Zealand—"preaching directly contrary to the

principles on which we [Mr. O'Brien and the Tory party] stake our hopes for the future of Ireland." He said:—

These are pretty conditions for the unfortunate Irish Parliament to begin the regeneration of Ireland for which the first element is beyond all doubt the agrarian peace of Ireland. The trouble does not end even there, for there is no use closing our eyes to the fact, however painful it may be to deal with it, that there is a section, and a powerful section of hon. Members opposite, who do not believe in land purchase, and who loath the very name of it. Of course, since the Prime Minister made a statement on the subject the atmosphere is a little clearer in that respect, but it is impossible for us to have read the speeches of the hon. and learned Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Hemmerde), the hon. Member for Hanley (Mr. Outhwaite), and the Lord Advocate, and of a still more eminent personage, without knowing that the land revolution they are preaching is directly contrary to the principles on which we stake our hopes for the future of Ireland. I do not desire to dwell in the way of criticism on what they said. Of course, there are many good friends of Ireland who say that the Land Taxes are not intended for exportation to Ireland. Gambetta once said that anti-clericalism in France was not intended for exportation. If we could suppose the triumph of Land Taxers in this country at the time when under this Bill you will still have left half of the agrarian problem in Ireland in a state of angry inflammation and unsettlement, do you really suppose that the Imperial Treasury would find the money to complete land purchase? Do you suppose that the couple of hundred thousand landlords, most of the agricultural labourers, and the labourers in towns and cities, will not apply your doctrines to the new owners, who will be denounced as new landlords, and in that way you might wholly upset the one happy arrangement in Ireland which English rule ever accomplished?

Well, we fear that nothing that Mr. O'Brien can say or do can possibly prevent the landless masses of Ireland, and even the labourers on their one-acre allotments, regarding and denouncing "the new owners as new landlords"—for that is what they are or will be. Nor can we see that the position would be materially altered even if the process of land-purchase were completed in three years. For this would not prevent the new owners being regarded as new landlords; nor cause the Irish people to regard the new state of things as anything but a very temporary and very insufficient solution of the real agrarian problem in Ireland. The old landlords would have escaped with their plunder; but their successors, those who have acquired their privileges, may well expect to find such privileges suspected and denounced by the disinherited majority of their fellow-countrymen.

Mr. Birrell's reply to Mr. O'Brien was characteristic of a man unable to face the real problem at issue, viz., whether the land-purchase scheme offered any permanent solution of the agrarian question, or of the Land Question, in Ireland. He first delivered to the House a definite message from the Prime Minister, absent through illness, that the Government was sincerely desirous to push on to completion "the great and most beneficent transaction" of Land Purchase.

He subsequently explained the real position as follows:—

I found land purchase under the Act of 1903 a broken bankrupt by the wayside; it was completely stopped from lack of money. The money which acted as a buffer between this bankruptcy, which was always impending in the finance of the measure—the Development Grant had been exhausted—had been reduced to a few thousand pounds. I was advised that the very next issue of money for land stock—and since then millions and millions of land stock has been issued—an issue of four or five millions would throw obligations—under the Act of Parliament which was passed by this House, received the assent of the Crown, and put on the Statute Book—on the ratepayers of Ireland. That was never intended to be enforced, it is said; but there it was, in an Act of Parliament, staring me in the face. When we look at the Statute we find that the Act of

Parliament had contemplated this particular case, and made provision to throw the obligation upon the ratepayers of Ireland.* They were to bear the cost owing to the fall of credit, which, by the way, was always falling under the Wyndham Act, and land stock was never issued except at a very heavy discount.

He subsequently further explained the matter as follows:—

The former Bill worked uncommonly well indeed, because of the excellent pecuniary conditions which then obtained. But the money obtained, *although advantageous to the landlord*, had to be obtained at a loss. We had to go to the British public and ask them to invest their money. Unfortunately the price at which the public gave the money in no way represented the obligations of the Treasury with regard to interest. If you only get £80 and give somebody an I.O.U. for £100 for it, and then have to pay in addition interest for sixty or eighty years, it cannot be suggested that that is a transaction of a satisfactory financial character. You had to face the loss and distribute it between various persons—the landlords, the tenants, and the Treasury. Still the work has to be done, and it will be done. It is being done in whatever leisure moments I have.

Here Mr. Birrell makes the financial position sufficiently clear—but we await with interest and curiosity some details as to how this loss is to be divided between "the landlords, the tenant and the Treasury," alias the British taxpayer.

The subsequent debate, though interesting, calls for no special comment from us. We will, therefore, close our notice with the following revealing passage from the speech of Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who said:—

I turn next to the question of the position of land purchase if we assume that this Bill becomes law. The Government are now pledged to find some means to facilitate Irish land purchase, whether this Bill passes or not. We, for our part, are pledged by our leader, with our hearty approval, to do our utmost to facilitate and hasten land purchase, provided the United Kingdom remains one entity. Undoubtedly one of the facts which has affected British credit has been the continuous issue of Irish land stock. Undoubtedly the recurring demand on the Money Market for money to finance this enormous scheme has affected our credit, and has restricted our resources for other purposes, and makes it more difficult for this Parliament, whichever Government may be in power, to deal with some English or Scottish questions that we would wish to deal with. But these are obligations which we have undertaken. They are sacrifices which we must make, while we remain one people and while our responsibility for Ireland continues. Will the English people make them when we are absolved from all responsibility? It is not we who are seeking divorce; it is being granted at the demand of the Nationalist party, and I repudiate their right any longer to come to us and, while they deny our right to have any voice in their affairs, claim that our credit shall be at their service when they choose.

So that, according to Mr. A. Chamberlain, the holders of Consols have also been amongst the unwilling victims of Irish Land Purchase Finance.

L. H. B.

An Exchange Telegraph's Co.'s message in the press of September 29th states that Lord Joicey has purchased nearly 24,800 acres of mixed farm and dairy farm land at Fort George, British Columbia, for which he paid approximately \$450,000 (£90,000).

* Under the amending Birrells' Act, 1909, the obligation has been transferred to the British Treasury—in other words, to the British taxpayer, instead of the Irish ratepayer.