

THE IRISH PEOPLE AND THE LAND QUESTION.

AN ELOQUENT ADDRESS.

BY JOHN CAMERON (COATBRIDGE, LANARKSHIRE).

At a recent meeting of the United Irish League (Coatbridge Branch) Mr. John Cameron, of the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values, delivered the following eloquent and convincing address on the Irish land question:—

Although I have the misfortune to be only a Scotsman, I have always taken a deep interest in the devoted and warm-hearted Irish race, and in their magnificent if sometimes misguided struggles for liberty. The Irish people have never calmly submitted to their chains; they have shown an example to freedom-loving races all the world over. And we in Scotland are fast taking the lesson to heart. Twenty-five years ago we did not take kindly to Home Rule for Ireland; to-day we do believe in it—yes, and in Home Rule for Scotland too. For many long years the Irish people have fought—ay, and many of them died for the belief that God made the land of Ireland for the use of the people of Ireland and not for a band of aristocratic idlers who look upon the earth as a mere rent-yielding machine and who have fulfilled no mission in Ireland but to bring it to poverty and decay. Years ago you declared that Irish landlordism must go, to-day the British people, through the land-values taxes and their onslaught on the House of Landlords, are declaring that British landlordism must go. So strongly do I feel that this question of land and people is the most important that the working classes of any country can lay their minds to that when the secretary invited me to speak on the subject I consented with the greatest pleasure. Your enemies, including the ill-informed and lying writers of books and newspapers, have advanced every reason but the right one when trying to explain the causes of Irish distress.

The Cause of Present Evils.

They have attributed it to your religion, forgetting that the same poverty and discontent existed in the Highlands of Presbyterian Scotland as prevailed in Catholic Connemara. They tell us that the Irish peasant is naturally indolent, thriftless, and dissipated, but you can point to what the same race is doing in other lands under better conditions. In the United States of America, for instance, you simply can't keep Irishmen from rising to the top; they manage a great number of the largest cities. Regarding the accusation that Pat is inclined to take things too easy, even although it were true, is it any wonder, I ask, that a man should get discouraged and give up trying when he sees the fruits of his work regularly and systematically filched from him in the shape of increased ground rent? Or can we wonder that under those circumstances he should occasionally indulge in a glass of the potheen? But these traits are not peculiar to Ireland: they are to be seen daily in Scotland and England. We see people driven off the land and crowded into our towns and cities, there to compete with their fellows for a job at starvation wages. By and bye even that poor job fails them. Denied of any right to employ themselves on what is sometimes called their native land, they know not where to turn. Is it anyway surprising that men who are wearing their lives away in monotonous labour at scarce a living wage should grow discontented and sullen when they see what a poor chance there is of rising out of the rut? They see the world's wealth increasing with no proportionate betterment in their condition. Bad times come and hands are turned adrift. It is no wonder that men, seeing the uselessness of the struggle, give it up and first become tramps or paupers, then drunkards or criminals, or perhaps end it all by seeking a suicide's grave. This charge of taking things easy, if it is true, is a feature I rather like in the Irish peasant. The earth is exceedingly fruitful; the Creator has been lavish in His bounty, and Ireland is one of his choicest gardens. Under a state of things where equal rights to the soil were acknowledged and where consequently land could be easily and cheaply got, men would no more need to worry over getting a livelihood than they need bother over getting air to breathe.

The Key to Independence.

Some of you may very likely have heard of the Kaffir's reply to the South African magnate. For a long time the mineowners couldn't get the natives to work in the mines: no hard labour for them at a mere pittance! They had their little patch of ground and their kraal to retire to. They were independent;

they had no need for money, and were well off according to their requirements. One day a Randlord said to a Kaffir leisurely working on his patch—"Why don't you come and work in the mines?" "What for?" asked the Kaffir. "You could earn money and get rich," replied the mineowner. "And what then?" asked the Kaffir. "Oh, then you could lie around and have a good time." "Dear me!" exclaimed the Kaffir, "and isn't that what I'm having now?" I am inclined to agree with the barbarian's (?) philosophy to a great extent. Surely we were meant for something better and nobler than to spend our whole lives in the constant struggle for a living, and if the producers were left in possession of what they produced no man would need to worry over to-morrow. Free access to land was the Kaffir's, as it is the Irishman's, key to independence. You have been told that what is wanted is emigration, that the land of Ireland cannot support its people. Don't believe it! The population of Ireland at present is something over four millions; sixty years ago the land of Ireland supported eight millions of people. Ireland has a generous soil; it can and always could provide a good living for any population that ever lived on it and worked it. Even at the time of the so-called famine there was no real scarcity of food, but the people had no means to buy it. Along roads lined with starving people food was carted daily for exportation to Britain—for the rent must be paid somehow! The land of Ireland can yield a good livelihood for those who till it; but it cannot, in addition, maintain in luxury a horde of people calling themselves landowners, who lend no hand in production but only rob the Irish people of the fruits of their toil; nor can it support an army of soldiers and policemen to hold the people down while they are being robbed. But even although Ireland were a veritable Garden of Eden—although the population were only one million—labour can never receive its full earnings until you abolish private property in land. I am not forgetting that the many Land Bills which you have wrung at the sword's point from reluctant Governments have considerably alleviated the condition of the Irish peasant; he is now assured of some fixity of tenure, the evils of rack-renting are diminished, and some compensation is allowed for improvements. But I wish you to demand more. These Land Acts have benefited only one class of the population, viz., the small farmers, and that only in a slight degree. They have done nothing for the farm labourers, the fishermen, or the working and trading classes of the towns.

A World-wide Question.

Ireland is now ready for a movement which, by asserting the equal rights of all Irish people to all Irish land, will raise the condition of every Irishman in town and country. Such a movement lies ready to our hand in the Taxation of Land Values. And don't confine the agitation to Ireland; let it have a British—a world-wide—significance. Let us be democrats first and Nationalists afterwards. The way to win Ireland's freedom is to bring forward measures which will enlist the enthusiasm of the working classes of Scotland and England; enthusiasm which can never be invoked by Irish Land Purchase Acts or Land Bills peculiarly adapted for Ireland. Away with all narrow national feelings and distrust of the British democracy! Michael Davitt, John Ferguson, Henry George recognised that Ireland's cause could be won only through the support of the British towns, and that measures must be proposed which would make the British people realise that in helping the cause of Ireland they were at the same time doing something for themselves. This brings us to the Taxation of Land Values, and in the short time at our disposal I will endeavour to show how it would operate in Ireland and elsewhere. What are the foundations of our belief? Our first principle is that the poorest child born in Ireland to-day has the same right to be in Ireland as the richest duke; the same right to breathe its air, to enjoy the light and heat of the sun, and to tread its soil as the proudest landowner. If it is denied these natural rights, through any cause whatever, it is robbed, it is disinherited from the moment of its birth.

The Injustice of Landlordism.

That principle conceded, it follows that the Irish race have a common and indestructible right to Irish land, because the air

cannot be breathed, the light or heat of the sun enjoyed, subsistence cannot be got, even the harvest of the sea cannot be gathered without access to land. Therefore when the Irish people have to yield up a large proportion of their earnings to another class for permission to tread the surface of the earth and draw their living from it, a fundamental injustice is perpetrated. The rights of genuine property are interfered with; those who produce have to go in poverty and rags because they must hand over the produce to those who toil not. It must always be kept in mind that the landowner is not necessary to production. He may be a statesman or scientist; he may enter into trade and become a useful citizen, but as landowner he plays exactly the same part in production and trade as a private toll-gatherer, a pirate, or highwayman. Factory owners provide us with tools and machinery; implement makers provide us with ploughs and reaping machines; railway directors supply means of locomotion; the builder gives us houses, the tailor supplies clothes; and all these being necessary and useful people in the scheme of production, they have a right to be paid from the produce. But the owner of land supplies nothing; his immense income arises through graciously giving us his permission to use the land, the surface of God's earth! No man supplied the land; it is here when we arrive on the planet. It is provided by the Father of all as a resting-place for His children and as the source from which they shall draw their subsistence, and there is a common right to it, notwithstanding all laws and customs to the contrary. Most people admit this, and some say: "If we had only to deal with the original robbers of the soil we would make short work of their claims, but we have permitted the thing to continue so long; we have allowed land to change hands, and men have given honestly earned money in exchange for it; therefore, we cannot make land common property without giving the present holders some compensation." Let us examine this argument. We have seen that the landowner takes the lion's share but supplies nothing, does nothing. He lives off the earnings of those who do work. Therefore what the landowner buys when he invests in land is the power to take yesterday, to-day, and for all time to come the property of other people without giving them anything in return. Isn't it monstrous when you consider it this way? What injustice is done when we resolve that this toll shall now cease; that every one shall keep his own just earnings, and that "he who works not neither shall he eat"?

An Illustration.

Let me take an obviously exaggerated illustration which I have used before. Suppose a modern Dick Turpin and Claude Duval powerful and unscrupulous enough to erect a gate across the main street and compel payment of a shilling a head from every person and vehicle passing through that thoroughfare. Suppose this flourishing industry goes on for years. Messrs. Turpin and Duval grow enormously wealthy, and have come to look upon their "profession" as quite proper and respectable. By and bye the people of Coatbridge begin to grumble; they protest against these exactions, and call upon the authorities to end this iniquity. I think we shall all agree that we would have no hesitation in ordering these brigands to pull down their gate at once without any compensation whatever. But now comes in the point which troubles our timorous sympathisers. Suppose that a year ago our two highwaymen, feeling perhaps that their toll-gathering business was not so secure as it used to be, resolved to retire, and sold their business to Messrs. Jones and Robinson for £10,000. Is the public demand any the less reasonable because of the change in ownership? Not a bit. We are still being robbed of our shillings daily, and are entitled to stop paying the toll when we choose. If the new owners want compensation let them hunt up those they bought the so-called "property" from. This illustration fits the land monopoly exactly. There is no need to go into the history of landownership in Ireland in olden times. It would be very interesting to trace how common rights to the soil were acknowledged among the ancient tribes or septa and how the invaders came in and usurped the land, but single-taxmen take a more modern view of the question. The charge against the Irish landowners is not that, away back in the year 1100, their ancestors robbed the Irish race of the land; no, the charge is that here, to-day, and to-morrow, in the year 1911, the landlords are robbing the Irish people of the fruits of their labour.

Equal Rights.

Is there anything unjust in demanding that henceforth this plunder shall cease, and that instead of handing over ground rent to private individuals it shall be handed over to the State for

the upkeep of Government and that this shall be the one and only tax, all other taxes being abolished? This is the basis of the single tax movement, and it is the only way to assert equal rights to the earth.

It is not necessary to divide up land to set up a single tax system: it is only necessary to collect land values for the common good. We propose to make a beginning in the way provided for in the Budget, by getting a valuation of the land, separately from any other form of property which may be on it, and then a tax small or large (the larger the better, of course) imposed on the true value of the land, whether it is fully used, partially used, or kept lying vacant from ulterior motives.

Effect of Land Values Taxation.

How would our tax affect the Irish peasant? You want more land rents which will leave a margin for a decent livelihood. This is the way to get it. There is no scarcity of good land in Ireland, but it is not all accessible. You all know that round every squire's mansion-house there are miles of the best land withheld from the people, being reserved for parks, game preserves, and hunting fields. The people want that land, and are becoming exiles from their native country because they cannot get it. They are willing to pay £4 an acre per year for the use of it, so £4 is evidently the true annual value. We wish to say to the landowner: "Since you persist in keeping up that land for cruel sporting purposes, we are going to tax you on its real value, beginning at the rate of 2s. in the pound, with every prospect of the tax being increased." Now, to the landholder with a thousand acres of such land, a tax like that would be a very serious thing, amounting to £400 a year. How many landowners could stand that drain on them for any length of time? They would be at once compelled to set about getting some revenue from their estates. They must work the land themselves or lease or sell it at low terms to those who would put it to the best use. Rents would fall, because the tax, operating all over the country, would make the landlords compete with each other for tenants ensuring better conditions for the landusers. This is the way to stem Irish emigration. This is the thing to bring peace to a disturbed country. Then take those great areas entirely given over to sheep and cattle-raising, over which you may walk for miles and never see a cabin or a human being, recalling the desolation and decay so touchingly described in Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." Very much of that land is fit for higher purposes than the feeding of cattle, a great deal of it consisting of the very best arable land. We will suppose that the big sheep farmer is paying all over the land, good and bad, an average rent of £1 an acre per year. Along comes the valuator or assessor under the taxation of land values. He sees at once that there are great parts of the sheep run suited for cultivation, and rates the arable land and purely grazing land at their different values. As I have said, cultivators are willing and anxious to pay £4 an acre rent for the arable parts. The result of the tax would be that the best land would fall into the hands of those who would put it to the best use, and the sheep farmer would be obliged to remove his fences up the hill a bit to what is really meant for grazing ground.

The Industrial Aspect.

The benefits will not be confined to those who work directly on the land, for this is equally a town dweller's question. This opening up of the land is the solution of the unemployed and low wages problems in town and country, not only in Ireland but all over the world. Man working on the land in some shape or form is the first and most important of all industries; all other trades and professions come after it and are built upon it. When the men on the land are fully employed and making good wages, then every other trade in town and country is doing well. If through any cause the workers on the land are thrown out of employment then everybody suffers. Take a strike or lock-out among the miners, such as we saw in South Wales recently. The miner is the man on the land, or rather in the land, in this case, but of course our tax applies to mineral land also. Well, the miner's pick is laid aside and the ill-effects are at once seen everywhere. Clerks and bookkeepers are suspended or dismissed; railway wagons lie idle and empty; ironworkers are on short time; shopkeepers and professional men are driven to bankruptcy. So whenever you hear of cotton mills going on half time, of engineering shops paying off men, or see those periodical depressions of trade which we are so accustomed to, you may be certain that at the bottom of it all somewhere (it may be in the same country, it may be on another continent) land is being "held up"—it may be building land, agricultural land, or mining land. We must make it unprofitable for the speculators to keep the land from the people

and that can be done by taxing them on the land's true value, whether it is let or not. Don't tax the products of the land; tax its annual value. We mean to get for the community a slice of the swollen ground rents which city owners are at present drawing from land fully built upon, and we also mean to tax them on the values which they might be receiving from the held-up acres did they choose to let same. This will soon make them let go their unholy clutch of the land. Consider what a vista this opens up for the working classes! Labour would be in great demand, and the workers would be in a position to ask higher wages and better conditions. Their purchasing power would be very much greater, bringing about prosperity which every one would share in.

Real Freedom.

This would be the real dawn of freedom in Ireland and elsewhere. No one denies that it is the land monopoly that has been and is the ruin of Ireland. Why should we hesitate to destroy the evil thing? It has reduced the population by one half, sending your people as exiles into the four quarters of the globe. Do you think you have escaped the evils of landlordism then? Not in the least. The landlord is ubiquitous; you can't avoid the landowner though you lived in an airship or a canoe. It is private property in land that, by denying men the right to employ themselves crowds them into our Scottish towns, there to struggle with each other for work at starvation wages. This is why there are always ten men waiting for every job; this is why house rents are so high in towns. Land has become so dear in our centres that we are forced to live above each other in tenements six to eight stories high. Then we have the grievous burden of local rates. The reason why they fall so heavily on the industrial classes is because a certain class escape local taxation altogether. It is scarcely credible, but it is true that the receivers of the enormous feu-duties and ground annuals of our towns are not called upon to pay one penny towards police, school or poor rates; yet it is by the expenditure of the rates that these land values are created and maintained. But a new era is coming soon. The Government, led on by those resolute men, David Lloyd George and Alexander Ure, are going to make those who benefit by the expenditure of the rates contribute to the rates. We will extend our operations to those belts of land round our towns kept lying vacant till they increase in value. We will tax the owner on the fictitious value that he himself puts on them. This will force them into the market, putting new life into the building trade. We will then have plenty of good and cheap houses and lower rates, for we shall have scheduled new areas for local taxation. These inflated land values form the just and proper fund wherewith to defray the upkeep of Government and its many undertakings. The people produce these values; let us take them for the common good. Consider what we might do for Ireland with this great common fund. We could construct roads and railways, thus opening up the resources of the furthest South and West; we could erect harbours and piers and provide boats for fishermen, extending the good work of the Congested Districts Board and the Fisheries Board. There are a thousand other things we could do towards making a new Ireland. This is also the fund to provide for payment of members of Parliament, so that we can put men drawn from our own ranks into Parliament and maintain them there. Here is the wherewithal to supply something like decent old-age pensions—not a paltry allowance of 5s. a week at the age of 60 or 70.

The Battle-Cry of the Downtrodden and Oppressed.

Let Ireland cease to ask for mere charity or sympathy; let her demand her full rights. Let her take her stand on the firm basis that the land of Ireland belongs to her people and take steps to secure these rights. Tenant right, fair rent courts, and land purchase don't lead to land restoration: they lead away from it. These measures all admit the landowner's right, and your demands therefore look like an attack on property. If you confuse property in land with property in things produced by labour, your cause is lost in advance, for if you admit that the landowner has the same right to his land as the shopkeeper has to the goods in his window, then you have no more right to get up an agitation to make his lordship reduce his rents than you have to compel M. M. Henderson to sell a £3 watch for 30s. Your interference with the landowner under these circumstances savours of communism and lawlessness, and no wonder you have roused the wrath of the Catholic Church and all supporters of law and order. But if you proclaim that the land belongs to the whole people and that all other forms of property on it belong exclusively to those who have produced them, then your position

is clear and defensible; and the moment you propose to assert the rights of labour by the taxation of land values, leading on to the single tax, then the Irish land question enters on a new and grander phase. If ceases to be a mere Irish question; it becomes the fight of the nations—it becomes the battle-cry of the downtrodden and oppressed in every clime. I am an ardent Home Ruler, but mere Nationalism does not satisfy me; it is too narrow and local. I want to know what our Home Rule Parliament is going to do for the emancipation of the people. See to it, then, that on your banner alongside the harp and shamrock, beside the golden sunburst on the field of green, in addition to your motto, "Ireland a Nation!" let there be graven the true motto of liberty, "Irish Land for the Irish People!" The single tax will do it!

HERE AND THERE.

The extension of the Old Age Pension Act has caused a big demand for cheap cottages in rural Mid-Warwickshire.—MORNING LEADER, 17th March.

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A correspondent writing to the TIMES on 17th March, says:—The official figures show a great increase in the emigration from Wales to Canada. In a single fortnight 1 per cent. of the population of Carnarvon left this country for Canada. In 1909 the Dominion attracted 1,500 Welsh emigrants. In 1910 the number was 3,000. This year even this remarkable figure will be surpassed, as during the past two months 800 Welshmen have left for Canada. The majority of these emigrants are the pick of the Welsh working-class population.

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The £4 an acre which a number are paying represents to the small holder no sort of an investment. It is sheer rent. If he succeed in paying it for 20 years he is no better off in capital than when he started; and the chance of reduced rent is not great. As the cost of fencing has to be paid off in 15 years, it may be found possible, if the fencing has lasted well, to make a slight reduction on this head; but the item is small and the reduction doubtful. For further reduction he must wait 50 and 80 years.—TIMES Correspondent in Small Holdings Act, March 20th.

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Glasgow and Govan friends of Mr. Harry S. Murray, who contested the Govan division in 1906, will be interested to learn that Mr. Murray has been busy speaking in the Nuneaton division, where he has important business interests. Mr. Murray was present, as the chief speaker, at a complimentary dinner given last month to Mr. W. Johnson, M.P., and he rendered one of his unique performances on the 'cello. We quote from the NUNEATON OBSERVER, Friday, March 3rd:—

Colonel Murray is a master of the instrument, and the applause which his performance created proves that the people of this district appreciate good music. In proposing the toast of the evening the Colonel was brim-full of humour and pathos, and besides being an excellent musician is a writer of no mean order; his connection with Nuneaton's industry, politics and art is to be prized. Our only regret is that, unlike many more Scots, he has not seen his way to settle in our midst.

The Scottish League and the United Committee have also some regrets about Mr. Murray's absence from the scene of their activities; business interests will bring Mr. Murray to Nuneaton again, but who is to bring him back to his place in the movement for the Taxation of Land Values?

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In connection with the North-east Lanark bye-election, referred to in the Scottish Notes, which Mr. J. Duncan Millar won in a three-cornered contest, Mr. Robert C. Orr of the United Committee helped in the fight. Mr. Millar, in writing to thank the United Committee, says:—"We were greatly helped by your Mr. Orr, and by the literature distribution by your Committee. Mr. Orr did splendid work in canvassing, speaking, and in the distributing of leaflets."

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We always sympathise with farmers when some of their best land is taken for small holdings. This is an injustice which should be made impossible. But there is another kind of opposition to small holdings with which we have no sympathy. That is a churlish, dog-in-the-manger dislike of seeing small men get a chance of land they know well how to cultivate, even