

IRISH LAND BOOM

A WRITER, Gwyn Lewis, contributed an article to the London *Sunday Express* on "The Great Trek to Ireland." It is reprinted in the American journal *The Argonaut*, of August 16, 1946. It is stated that every boat and plane from Britain has for months been bringing over what the Irish call the "new English settlers" and Irish estate agents estimate that since the war British people have spent £5,000,000 buying property in Ireland. A number of members of the British aristocracy are named as purchasers or who have estates in Ireland already and are moving into their "Irish seats." Examples given are £12,500 paid for Fort William, Lismore; £14,500 for Bruree House, Co. Limerick; £18,000 for a 25-room house at Ballmacaul, Co. Dublin; £20,000 for Castle Bernard, Birr; £11,000 for Castle Creagh, Co. Cork; £11,000 for Attyflynn Mansion, Patrick's Wells, Co. Limerick. Many other examples are cited and the article speaks of one estate agent who had 40 British applicants on his books for houses for which they were prepared to pay from £2,500 to £10,000.

The property market, according to the *Irish Press*, September 21, "got into its stride again after the holidays and in Dublin many houses were sold at prices ranging from £1,000 up to £7,800; there is still no easement in values; the demand continues and if anything, increases."

The two-column review reports many transactions not only in Dublin but in the rest of the country. It is instructive to compare the prices realised with the annual rateable value at which the properties are assessed for the levy of rates and taxes.

Top price £7,800 was paid for Stradbroke House, Blackrock, with eight acres. Its annual rateable value ("poor law valuation" or P.L.V.) is £88 10s.

No. 71, Merrion Square (South), Dublin, made £6,550; its P.L.V. is £123; No. 5, Merrion Square, a similar type of house was withdrawn at £8,050 last June.

Kilnamona, Shankhill, made £6,500; P.L.V. is £45. Extraordinary competition for 28, Rosemeem Gardens, built about 1932, for £1,250, brought £3,500, P.L.V. is £32 10s.; and so on.

Taking together 14 other premises (houses and some shops) where particulars were given, the total sale price was £20,345, whereas altogether they have a net annual rateable value (P.L.V.) of only £305. Two of these cases expose anomalies of the tax system in sharper light. No. 71, Lower Mount Street, Dublin, sold for £1,200, consists of fifteen apartments let to tenants and producing £152 10s. per annum; the P.L.V. assessment is £24. The shop and house at 16, Charlemont Street, Dublin, was sold for £1,400; rent being paid for only part of the premises (the rest standing vacant at time of sale) is £71 10s., whereas the P.L.V. of the whole is £25.

The Irish land market is booming. Increased land values make fortunes for a few. The Irish antiquated and inequitable tax system (assessments raised when houses or other buildings are put up and no general revaluation since the year 1866) protects and endows the land monopoly. They got rid of English government over there, but English law and custom remain to bolster a landlord state. The Irish Land Purchase Acts made of Irish tenant farmers a privileged class, but landless still are the bulk of labourers in country and town alike.

MUST THIS POVERTY PERSIST?

The contrasts in social conditions are startling and sickening. What a picture of Dublin slum life was presented in the appeal of Archbishop Dr. McQuaid on behalf of the Catholic Social Service, read in all the churches of the diocese and published in the *Irish Press* of September 23—that such charity is *necessary*! Unhesitatingly we pay tribute to the sisters and the priests who have given themselves with selfless devotion, as Dr. McQuaid says, to the succour of the poor. But what has man made of God's creation in Dublin that we

read of the 2,706,613 meals cooked and served at the 25 food centres where "every needy person" can have a wholesome meal; of the daily average attendance of 712 "poor mothers" at the 17 maternity welfare centres where 186,295 meals were prepared and 184,675 pints of milk were served; of the £8,034 that had to be spent on the purchase of material for new clothing? These are terrible revelations but even more disquieting is the acceptance of them as a spur only to more and more of this pauperising charity. Protest against the social injustices responsible for poverty is lacking. From this high seat, guidance upon the remedy fails, if in these words it is not actually renounced: "It may not lightly be thought that the near future will see the solution of the many problems that distress the poor in their efforts to be self-supporting. It is our privilege and our duty to attempt as best we can to alleviate their sufferings." Whoever agrees in that sentiment and acts upon it, happy only in pity and lamentation, will find his gifts turn to ashes. The Archbishop invokes religion to put benevolence on a pedestal. We will not enter with him in that field, but we would speak with him in parable. It is given in *My Story*, the autobiography of Tom L. Johnson, of Cleveland, he having had it from our predecessor, John Paul: "There was a certain river and many human beings were in it struggling to get to the shore. Some succeeded, some were pulled ashore by kind-hearted people on the banks. But many were carried down the stream. It is no doubt a wise thing, it is noble that under these conditions people devote themselves to helping victims out of the water. Better it would be if some of those kindly people would go up stream and find out who was pushing the people into it. I could not help but follow that thought. . . . It is in this way that I would answer those who ask us to help the poor. Let us help them, that they may at last fight the battle of Privilege with more strength and courage; but let us never lose sight of our mission up the river to see who is pushing the people in." The place of the pastoral staff is at the head of that procession.

THE PROPER SOURCE OF PUBLIC REVENUES, the Paper presented by Mr. A. W. Madsen at the September Conference of the Association of Irish Municipalities, and including the discussion that followed, has been published in pamphlet form (12 pages) at the price of sixpence per copy. Readers who can undertake a distribution may have supplies at the rate of 3s. per dozen, post free.

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