

---

The Irish Land Question

Author(s): Charles Stewart Parnell

Source: *The North American Review*, Apr., 1880, Vol. 130, No. 281 (Apr., 1880), pp. 388-406

Published by: University of Northern Iowa

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25100849>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The North American Review*

JSTOR

## THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.

---

So much light has been already thrown on the land question in Ireland, by the combined exertions of the New York daily press and the Irish landlords, that this brief article might seem almost superfluous. It sometimes happens, however, that the light thrown on a subject is *colored* to suit the chromatic tastes of the illuminator. I propose, in writing this article, to bring the plain daylight of fact to bear on the question under consideration.

A gentleman of great intelligence told me, a short time ago, that if he were an Irishman he would not consent for one day to live under British misrule, and that he thought the only remedy for Ireland was to transport the whole Irish nation bodily over here.

Naturally, I appreciated the compliment this gentleman paid us, in wishing to have the whole "scot and lot" of us brought over to America. I could not, however, agree with him, either as to the practicability or the advisability of his suggestion. If I thought there was no hope of accomplishing the reforms we desire, then I should say: Yes, let them come over here. They are not able to make themselves a nation, and they would best be merged into another race which *has* known how to win its nationality.

Fortunately, I have as yet seen no reason to believe that the Irish are incapable of gaining eventually all the reforms they desire, even the last and noblest one of all, the restoration of their national autonomy.

Let us first look at emigration in its practical and then in its sentimental bearings. It is, of course, quite impossible to transport five millions of people in a body to America. But what are the practical effects of emigration as exemplified in Ireland after the famine of '47?

The first effect is the throwing out of cultivation of vast areas of land. The landlords turn the farms into pastures, and raise cattle and sheep for export to England; the money they receive they

spend for the most part outside the country. You roam over miles and miles of fertile land, or land that might be made fertile, without seeing a house or a human being. Now, facts have shown that the system of turning all the fertile lands of Ireland into grazing-fields has failed in the very object for which it was instituted. The amount of cattle and sheep raised in Ireland has, of late years, been steadily decreasing, as well as the amount of cereal crops. The reason lies close at hand: Ireland is a damp country, and, in many parts, the soil holds rain like a cup. When kept properly drained, there is no land in the world more fertile than the great uninhabited grazing-plains of Ireland; but, left as they are year after year, undrained and unfertilized, unsown with new grass-seed, quite neglected, in fact, every farmer in America will understand that they must gradually become unfit for grazing. The consequence is, that recently less cattle have been raised every year, and that the proportion of waste land increases instead of diminishing.

The second effect of the emigration of 1848 has been, strange to say, to increase the competition for land. The landlords took advantage of the emigration to effect immense clearances of land, which have never since been put under cultivation. Those of the peasantry who did not emigrate were driven to the bogs and the barren hillsides. In course of time the population naturally increased; with this increase came greater competition for land; but the fertile lands of the country were no longer open to competitors. The area of ground left to agriculturists was greatly lessened, and the competition, of course, became fiercer than ever, though the chances of the peasant to better his condition by renting land were also fewer than ever, owing to the inferior quality of the land.

The effect of emigration on wages and the prices of produce, as compared with rents, has been peculiar. When I was a child, twenty-five years ago, the day-laborer's wages averaged from six to nine shillings a week. Now they average from seven to ten. The prices of produce have risen in a slightly larger proportion, but rents of land have risen a hundred, two hundred, and in some cases five hundred per cent. This is an unnatural condition of things, and is owing, I believe, to general under-population of the country, taken as a whole, with over-population in spots. The industries of the country have been rendered stagnant by the constant drain of able-bodied labor to the United States and elsewhere, and so wages have risen but little. The supply of labor is very small in Ireland, but the demand is very small also, and so labor is cheap, though scarce.

Here is an artificial state which must obviously have been brought about by some artificial cause. We consider that forced emigration is this cause.

The practical worthlessness of emigration as a permanent remedy has been thoroughly proved by the history of Ireland from '48 to '80. A certain amount of the population was removed by emigration, and a steady flow of emigration, on a smaller scale, has been going on ever since. Still, here we are, in pretty much the same position as we were in '46. It needs only one more bad harvest to produce a famine like that of '47. What good, then, I ask, has all our emigration done us? Supposing there should be a bad harvest next autumn, and that the result should be the death or emigration of three millions of people. Would it benefit the two millions left behind? Would it raise the wages of labor, with no industries to give employment to labor? Would it lower the rents of the tenants, with still larger quantities of land turned into sheep-walks? Or, again, even supposing that the peasantry were temporarily benefited by the departure of so many competitors, what is to prevent the two millions increasing in the course of nature till another famine came along to scatter them again to the winds? From all this it is plain that emigration, unaccompanied by other remedies, only causes a ceaseless repetition of the same vicious circle of events in Ireland.

To prove that Ireland is as a whole immensely under-populated, I will give some comparisons between its acreage and population and those of other countries where a peasant proprietary prevails, and where the peasants are, as a rule, comfortable and contented.

Ireland has an area of 20,819,829 statute acres, or 31,874 square miles. She has a population of 5,411,416. Guernsey (including adjacent islands), which is entirely divided up into small agricultural holdings, and which is quite as damp and rainy as Ireland, has an area of 19,605 statute acres, and a population of 33,969. Ireland has thus, in rough numbers, a population of one person to every four acres, while Guernsey has a population of nearly two persons to every acre. Yet Guernsey is prosperous, and Ireland is miserable. Guernsey's peasants are proprietors; Ireland's peasants are tenants-at-will. If Ireland had a population in proportion to that of Guernsey, she would have 45,000,000 inhabitants.

Germany has an area in English square miles of 212,091; a population of 41,058,641, giving a density of population per square mile of 193, while that of Ireland is only 169.

France has an area of 201,900 English square miles, and a population of 36,102,921, or an average of about 178 to the square mile. The land is more subdivided in France than in any other country. The cultivated part of it consists of about 90,000,000 acres. This is divided into 5,550,000 properties. Of these, the properties averaging 600 acres number 50,000; those averaging 60 acres 500,000; while there are 5,000,000 holdings under six acres. The peasants are well off, conservative, and contented, though a hundred years ago they were just the reverse; and nobody has ever thought of saying that France is over-populated.

Belgium has an area of 11,267 English square miles, and a population of 5,087,105, or 451 persons to the square mile.

Italy has an area of 112,677 English square miles, and a population of 26,796,253, being 237 inhabitants to the square mile. The great mass of the people of Italy are agriculturists.

The Netherlands have an area of 20,527 square miles, and a population of 3,674,402, or 179 to the square mile.

Switzerland has an area of 15,233 English square miles, and a population of 2,669,147, giving a density of 175 per square mile. The soil of Switzerland is very equally divided among the people, only about half a million of the total population owning no land.

We see that in every instance these countries are more densely populated than Ireland, yet there is no cry of over-population, and the emigration from them, except in the case of Germany, is slight. In Germany it is not the land system that causes emigration, but the conscription and the attractions afforded by the free institutions of America.

Writing in 1836, Mr. N. W. Senior, in order to show that the tendency of population, in all countries, where the opposite is not produced by unnatural laws, is to increase with *less* rapidity than the means of subsistence—a thesis altogether opposed to the false idea of Malthus—speaks thus: “It is obvious that, if the present state of the world, compared with its state at our earliest records, be one of relative poverty, the tendency of population to increase more rapidly than subsistence must be admitted. . . . If its means of subsistence have increased much, more than the number of its inhabitants, it is clear not only that the proposition is false, but that the contrary proposition is true, and that the means of subsistence have a natural tendency to increase faster than population. Now, what is the picture presented by the earliest records of those nations which are now civilized, or, which is the same, what is now the state of savage nations? A state of habitual poverty and occa-

sional famine. *A scanty population, but still scantier means of subsistence.* . . . But, if a single country can now be found, in which there is now less poverty than is universal in a savage state, it must be true that, under the circumstances in which that country has been placed, the means of subsistence have a greater tendency to increase than the population. Now, this is the case in every civilized country. In our own early history, famines, and pestilences, the consequences of famine, constantly occur. At present, though our numbers are trebled or quadrupled, they are unheard of."

Mr. Senior adds, farther on: "It may be generally stated that all that degrades the character or diminishes the productive power of a people tends to diminish the proportion of subsistence to population, and *vice versa*; and, consequently, that a population increasing more rapidly than the means of subsistence is, generally speaking, a symptom of *misgovernment*, indicative of deeper-seated evils, of which it is only one of the results." \*

It will be remarked here how well Mr. Senior's description of a "savage country" applies to Ireland: "A state of habitual poverty and occasional famine"—a "scanty population, and still scantier means of subsistence." What a glory it is to England that the country she has ruled for five hundred years, and that has been united to her in the closest bonds for eighty years, should be in this condition!

Sir Robert Kane, in his "Industrial Resources of Ireland," shows that, even taking Ireland in her present condition, without manufactures or industries, she could support from thirty to thirty-five millions of inhabitants, provided the cultivators of the soil had sufficient inducement held out to them to adopt the best methods of farming—that is, provided they were assured that the fruits of their increased labor would not be only increased rents.

Father Thébaud, alluding to this statement of Sir Robert Kane's, says, in his admirable work on "The Irish Race," written in 1873: "It is clear, therefore, that the pretended surplus population of Ireland is, as Sir Robert Kane says, a piece of pure imagination, perfectly ideal, and that it is its unequal and not its aggregate amount which is to be deplored."

After quoting freely from M. Gustave de Beaumont's work on Ireland in support of this opinion, Father Thébaud goes on to say: "The celebrated French writer had certainly pointed out what were the real causes of the distress in Ireland. He had shown how false were the pretended causes then assigned for it by Englishmen; he

\* "Political Economy," p. 148.

touched the key-note—the land-tenure ; and, as a well-wisher to Ireland, deprecating any new calamities, he was firmly opposed to those various fancy projects” of emigration *en masse*, suggested by numerous British writers, many of whom, such as the editors of the London “Times,” were induced to promulgate them by their deep hatred for the old race, which led them to represent, under a modern garb, the old Norman and Puritan philanthropic desires of rooting out and sweeping off the Irish from the land.

“The projects of emigration, therefore,” he says, “*were most eagerly advanced by the enemies of the Irish*, their real friends being, on the whole, opposed to the movement at the time. But the true causes of Irish misery being either unseen or unappreciated, or, if known, studiously fostered, with a view to bringing about the one aim which ran all through the English policy, of emptying the island and destroying the race, eventually it did actually become a dire necessity for the people to fly.”

These remarks, made in reference to the famine of '48, are just as applicable now. The true friends of Ireland will be always opposed to forced emigration, and will therefore devote their efforts to removing the causes of this emigration, rather than to making a desert of their country by promoting it. Why, too, should Ireland be the only struggling nationality in the world to which this preposterous suggestion of an emigration *en masse* should have been made ?

It is, in fact, not an emigration from Ireland to America, but an emigration from the barren hills of Connaught to the fertile lands of Leinster and Munster that we want. The old cry in Cromwellian days, “To hell or Connaught !” has been virtually the cry ever since in Ireland. The landlords have been occupied, without ceasing, in driving the peasantry from the best parts to the worst parts of the country. One of our principal aims is to cause a return movement, and this can only be produced by causing large quantities of grazing-land, in the eastern and middle counties, to be thrown upon the market, and by facilitating the purchase of it by the western peasantry.

One of the natural effects of the depopulating of fertile parts, and the overcrowding of barren parts, which prevail in Ireland, is a fictitious value for agricultural land. The increased fierceness of competition, already alluded to as arising from this unnatural arrangement, is the cause. But the fierce competition is made still fiercer by the abnormal state of the trades and manufactures of Ireland. The condition of the agricultural classes and the condi-

tion of the manufacturing ones react mutually on each other. It may, I think, be laid down as an axiom that the manufacturing industries of a country can not be flourishing when agriculture is depressed. In the same way stagnation of the manufacturing interests injures the agricultural classes. Most of the prohibitions on Irish industries have been removed, and laudable attempts are being made by well-meaning persons to revive some of them. It is, however, useless to attempt to revive manufactures in Ireland, unless one of two conditions be fulfilled. Either the agricultural system must be in a free, wholesome, and natural condition, or immense sums of money must be spent by the Imperial Government in fostering Irish industries of all kinds. As regards agriculture, a tenant-at-will system, with rents paid in cash, and the loss through bad harvests, etc., falling on the tenant alone, is the least free and the least wholesome of all systems. We can not, therefore, look for any permanent improvement in Irish industries until the soil of the country has been made free, or until England has restored to Ireland all the money of which she has robbed her in suppressing her trade. On the other hand, as long as manufactures are drooping, we can not expect any diminution in the tremendous competition for land.

Here, therefore, we find two causes coöperating to impoverish Ireland. It is undoubtedly the duty of the English Government to foster, by liberal pecuniary aid, the industries it so long suppressed. The English Government has never done this, and is not likely to do it. On the contrary, for every six million pounds sterling that it takes out of Ireland in revenue, it returns but four million and a half. If the Government did its duty, and extended to Ireland the financial help in her industries which it owes her as a mere debt of honesty, the effect on agricultural interests would show itself at once. The immense number of cottier tenants in the west who cultivate one or two acres of sterile ground, and pay their rents by going over to England to work in the spring and autumn, leaving their women to attend to their own little patches, would be drawn off this land, which in England would rent at about one shilling the acre, but which in Ireland rents all the way from five shillings to ten shillings the acre, and their labor would be directed into channels profitable to Ireland. The artificially high rents of these barren mountain holdings would then fall to their proper level.

Again, a change in the land laws, such as an act compelling the sale on reasonable terms of lands held by absentees, or by corpora-



tions, would soon react most favorably on Irish manufactures, by increasing the buying power of the agricultural classes, who form nearly two thirds of the population. In either case, however, England would have to supply the money. She would have to put her hands in her own pockets and retransfer to Ireland the money she has stolen from her. Here is England's dilemma. She must give money to help Irish industries, or she must give money to reform Ireland's land-tenure. It is very plain that she will do neither, if she can help it. As time goes by, however, it may be possible to bring such gentle extraneous pressure to bear upon her as may materially alter her present intentions.

I said above that the expropriation of absentees and of corporations would have a most beneficial effect on Irish trade. I believe no system of land reform will be of much use to Ireland which does not include the expropriation of both these classes of owners.

There is no use in any scheme that has been proposed, unless such colossal bloodsuckers as these absentee landlords and corporations be summarily abolished. Here is a drain of £6,000,000 going on every year which, if it existed in America in the same proportion to the population, would amount to the sum of £54,000,000, or, in round numbers, \$270,000,000. It would be impossible for the Irish Land-Leaguers to entertain the idea of any programme that did not at any rate disestablish the absentee landlord and the absentee corporation. We therefore demand first the expropriation of the absentees. Resident corporations and non-improving resident landlords might follow in due order. By that time the rest of the landlords might have become willing to sell, and no further compulsion might be needed.

Having thus touched generally upon two or three of the principal points connected with the land-tenure, I should like to go a little into the details of the agitation commenced over a year ago by the Land League. The objects of the League, as announced at the public meeting at which it was first formed, are: 1. To promote organization among the tenant farmers; 2. To defend those threatened with eviction for refusing to pay extortionate rents; 3. To facilitate the working of the Bright clauses of the Land Act; 4. To obtain such a reform of the laws relating to land as will enable every tenant to become the owner of his holding, by paying a fair rent for a limited number of years. "It only remains, then," says O'Connor Power, in his article on the "Land Agitation," in the "Nineteenth Century," for December, 1879, "to push forward with

the utmost energy those minor reforms framed to mitigate the evils of the existing system, such as the abolition of all artificial restrictions on the sale and transfer of land, the abolition of the laws of primogeniture and entail, the more efficient working of the Bright clauses of the Land Act, and the reclamation and distribution of the waste lands, while keeping steadily in view the main object of emancipating the entire agricultural population from the power of landlordism."

This "main object," with which O'Connor Power winds up, the Land-Leaguers contemplate bringing about in much the same manner as the emancipation of the Prussian peasantry was brought about by Hardenberg. Hardenberg had to abolish feudalism and landlordism both at one blow. This he did by the famous edict of 1811, entitled "An Edict for the Regulation of the Relations between Landlord and Tenant." In the preamble to this edict the King of Prussia uses the following remarkable words :

"We, Frederick William, by the grace of God King of Prussia, having convinced ourselves both by personal experience in our own domains and by that of many lords of manors of the great advantages which have accrued both to the lord and to the peasant by the transformation of peasant-holdings into property, and the commutation of the rents on the basis of a fair indemnity, and having consulted in regard to this weighty matter experienced farmers, ordain and decree as follows :

"That all tenants of hereditary holdings, whatever the size of the holdings, shall by the present edict become the proprietors of their holdings after paying to the landlord the indemnity fixed by this edict."

The peasant was made absolute proprietor of two thirds of his holding, and the other third was given over to the landlord as indemnity for all the dues, services, etc., which under the feudal system the lord was entitled to. For the other two thirds of the land, the Government compensated the lord by issuing to him bonds bearing four per cent. interest ; the tenants repaid the state the principal and interest of these bonds by annual installments of five per cent., extending over forty-one years, after which all payments ceased.

Mr. Kay, in his "Social Condition of England and Europe," writes : "Before the Prussian Government was induced to try the great experiment of enabling the peasants to obtain land, and of creating a great class of peasant proprietors, it endeavored to improve the condition of agriculture throughout the kingdom, by advancing great sums of money to the great landed proprietors"—

similarly to what the English Government is doing now in making large loans to the Irish land-owners, to improve their estates and carry on works with—"with the view of enabling them to introduce better systems of farming upon their lands. Reichsperger says: 'Frederick II. gave away very considerable sums of money for the encouragement of agriculture. According to the Minister, Von Stertzberg, between the years of 1763 and 1786, the sums advanced in this manner amounted to 24,399,838 thalers.' 'And yet,' says Thaer, 'these sums of money have in reality done no good, but have often, indeed, been most injurious in their effects.'"

"It was by introducing the system of small properties," says Mr. Kay, on page 91 of vol. i. of the same work, "that the great ministers of Prussia, Stein and Hardenberg, raised the social condition of the peasants of Prussia and Prussian Poland, from a state previously analogous to that of the Irish peasantry in the present day, to their present happy and flourishing condition.

"There can be no doubt," he continues, "that five acres, the property of an intelligent peasant, who farms it himself, in a country where the peasants have learned to farm, will always produce much more per acre than an equal number of acres will do when farmed by a mere leasehold tenant."

Mr. Kay, after enumerating the benefits resulting from the establishment of a peasant proprietorship, makes the following just and weighty observations on the Irish problem: "Until we can find," says he, "an Irish Stein or an Irish Hardenberg, who will grant the Irish people free trade in land, by preventing its being tied up by settlements, and who will interest the peasants and farmers of Ireland in preserving the public tranquillity and in improving the agriculture of the country, we shall have done *nothing, positively nothing*, for Ireland." I commend this last statement to the special attention of Mr. Gladstone.

I have said thus much to show the direction of the objects and ideas of the Land-Leaguers. I must now add that the cause which most immediately gave birth to the Land League, as it at present stands, was the refusal of the majority of Irish landlords to reduce their rents, spite of the rapidly approaching famine.

The English landlords, always less grasping than Irish landlords, had quietly reduced their rents in England all round, months before, thus avoiding any complications with their tenants. Not so the Irish landlords. They saw, of course, as well as the English ones did, that the harvest would be a failure, but, having always

been accustomed to take the last pound of flesh, they thought they could do it again. This time, however, thanks to the manly attitude taken by the tenants, they have been disappointed.

It was well known in Ireland, last July, that a famine was inevitable. Members of Parliament dinned it into the ears of the Government. Professors of political economy declared it could not fail to come. As time went on, the pitiless rains destroyed the last faint hopes of saving at least something. Then it was that we asked the landlords what they intended to do. The answer was not a tardy one. They intended to collect their rents as usual, and, if the people could not pay, to evict.

Undoubtedly, if they had been left to work their own sweet will, if the tenant-farmers had not been organized for the purpose of self-preservation, their programme—their foolish, short-sighted programme, looking at it merely from the point of view of their own interests—would have been carried out. On the part of the people, there would have been a resort to assassination; some landlords, agents, and bailiffs would probably have been shot; the Irish would have been overwhelmed with torrents of denunciation, and an immense tide of emigration would have already set in, sweeping away all the best and most vigorous of our people; while the scenes of starvation in Ireland itself, bad as they are, would have been intensified a hundred-fold.

If these disasters have been in a great measure averted, we think we can claim that it has been owing, directly and indirectly, to the Land League. This body has, from the beginning, taken up the position that, with the certain prospect of famine before him, the duty of the tenant was first to preserve the lives of himself and his family. It was, therefore, necessary for him to keep as much money as would support him and his family till the next harvest, and only to pay to the landlord, as rent, what he had left after doing so.

After teaching the tenant that he must save his own life and the lives of his children, the next object of the Land League was to show him how to do this. Its advice to the farmer, "Keep a firm grip on your homestead," has become proverbial. How did it propose that the farmer should obey?

The League calculated on the landlords at last perceiving that their best chances lay in keeping their tenants, even at half rents, rather than in evicting them, and going into the unprofitable business of grazing; for, not being able to get any tenants to fill the places of those evicted, that was the only resource left them.

The action of such a large majority of landlords, in reducing their rents, *after* the League had been formed, and the system of passive resistance fairly established, shows that they did finally recognize the situation, and that they determined to make the best of it.

In fact, American competition has entirely altered the channel of landlord interests. It does not pay the Irish landlord any longer to fill the places of his tenants with cattle ; and, as American competition increases, and grazing-land in Ireland deteriorates from neglect, the cattle-raising business will soon scarcely pay expenses. It is, therefore, rather political motives than pecuniary ones that make a certain number of Irish landlords, who are also Tory politicians, anxious for the emigration of their tenantry. The next general election is imminent, and if the emigration of a sufficient number of electors of Nationalistic politics to insure a Tory victory could be brought about, the Irish Conservative landlord would willingly submit to temporary financial loss. Emigration, they know, would injure their pockets for the time being, but they think it would eventually be their salvation, by eliminating from the country all the young, fiery element which will not lie down quietly under misery. It will be observed that, in all the offers made by Irish landlords to send emigrants over here—if their passage-tickets be paid by benevolent Americans—they do not offer to send children or old people, but young men and women, the brain, blood, and sinew of the country, the very people who, under natural conditions, would be considered the greatest possible loss to any country.

The Land League saw through this design, and defeated it by their advice to the people to resist being compelled to emigrate. It told them to refuse to pay extortionate rents—that is, rents they could not pay and at the same time feed their families ; it told them to refuse to leave their homes unless forcibly ejected, so that winter might not find them without a shelter to their heads ; and it told them to refuse to rent farms from which other tenants had been evicted. By compliance with this advice twelve millions of dollars have been kept in the pockets of the tenantry, and the famine has been diminished by that amount. The simple piece of advice, "Keep a good grip on your homesteads," has thus done more in staving off the famine than all the relief funds put together. It has also saved the lives of landlords and agents ; it has roused the people to a true sense of the power they can wield by comparatively

peaceable means ; it has brought many landlords to their senses ; it will end, we believe, by bringing them all to their senses. Finally, it has brought the two greatest statesmen of England, Gladstone and John Bright, to a perception of how much yet remains to be done to Ireland. And not only these two, but innumerable minor thinkers now acknowledge that an immense deal must yet be done before Ireland can be satisfied.

It is useless to say that telling the tenants to pay no rents in a famine year, unless they get a sufficient reduction to enable them to live, is communistic and revolutionary. It is no more communistic than to compel the owner of a private hoard of provisions on board a wreck to share it with his starving companions. The preservation of property is secondary to the preservation of life. Where a whole community is in danger from the selfish action of a small minority, this axiom applies with full force.

An able letter that appeared a short time ago, in the "Boston Globe," on the subject of the compulsory expropriation of the landlords of Prince Edward's Island, with the full consent of her British Majesty, furnishes us here with an apt illustration, more recent than the action of Hardenberg. Prince Edward's Island is not a very large place, but it is the *principle* that weighs, not the size of the country.

"In 1875," says the writer, "the Legislature of Prince Edward's Island passed an act compelling the landlords of that province to sell their estates to their tenants, upon 'terms just and equitable to the tenants, as well as to the proprietors.' This act received the royal and formal assent of her Majesty, through her representative, the Governor-General of Canada, and under its provisions the value of the land was irrevocably settled, and the landlord was paid the price set upon it by the commission. . . . For a century the province of Prince Edward's Island was under the vicious system of landlordism. . . . The evil, as in the case of Ireland, originated with the Imperial Government ; and it, too, was responsible for the continuance of the evil. Nearly the whole island, we are told, was alienated in one day by the Crown, in very large grants, chiefly to absentees, just as millions of acres in Ireland were taken from the rightful owners and given to the followers of Cromwell and others. The people of the island never admitted the rights of the proprietors to hold the land, and they kept up the agitation of the land question from the day it was originally granted in 1767. No means were left untried to get rid of the incubus. Petition after petition

was laid at the foot of the throne. The people met in masses, and prayed for relief ; but the official ear was deaf, though always open to the complaints and representations of landholders and their satellites, who were ever sensitive to their imaginary rights, but totally oblivious of the groans of an oppressed people." So similar was their condition to that of the people of Ireland, that it was seriously proposed at one time to have the name of the island changed to that of "New Ireland." "Frequently, as in Ireland to-day, the people forcibly resisted the collection of rents ; and on one occasion troops were transported to the island to suppress the disturbance. Thus, for a century almost, did the struggling people protest against the wrongs under which they were suffering, . . . the landlords frustrated every attempt at redress. . . . But the end came"—the compulsory land-purchase act of 1875.

Leaving the subject of the temporary remedies which the agitation of the Land League has procured for Ireland's distress, we will now examine the permanent remedy which the League desires to apply.

This, in brief, is that the Government should lend money to the farmers at low interest, to be repaid by installments extending over a period of thirty-five years, to enable them to buy up their farms.

Mr. Bright's plan for creating a peasant proprietary is good, so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough to be of any use except to quite a small section of the Irish peasantry. He falls into the same mistakes as he made in the Land Act clauses. To prove this statement, the best thing I can do is to examine the results of these Bright clauses, and endeavor to point out how they have failed.

Parts second and third of the Land Act of 1870 deal with the sale of land to the occupying tenants, and contain the provisions commonly known as the Bright clauses. Part second contains provisions intended to meet the case of the sale of individual holdings to the occupiers by mutual agreement between landlord and tenant. These clauses empower a landlord, being only a tenant for life or other limited owner, to agree with any tenant for the sale of his holding, and then, with the assistance of the Landed Estates Court, to give the tenant an absolute conveyance in fee simple. Part third deals with the purchase by tenants of their holdings, where the entire estate has been ordered to be sold in the Landed Estates Court. Section 45 provides that, when an estate has been thus ordered to be sold, the Board of Works may advance, to any tenant desirous of purchasing his holding, a sum not exceeding two thirds of the purchase-money of the holding. The Board is to

take a charge for the money so advanced on this purchased land in the form of an annuity equal to five per cent. on the sum advanced, which annuity pays off principal and interest in thirty-five years. Then, by section 46 it is provided that, on the sale of entire estates by the Court, the Court shall, "as far as is consistent with the interests of the persons interested in the estates, or the purchase-money thereof, afford, by the formation of lots for sale or otherwise, all reasonable facilities to occupying tenants desirous of purchasing their holdings." The second part of the act, dealing with the sale of individual holdings in pursuance of agreement originating outside of the Court, has proved wholly inoperative. One of the chief reasons is, that the cost of investigating the title to and generally of selling one holding in the Landed Estates Court is practically the same as the cost of selling the entire estate. This cost, where the entire estate is sold, generally forms only a small percentage on the amount of the purchase-money; but, where a single small holding is sold by itself, the cost is simply ruinous. This renders it practically impossible for individual tenants of small farms to purchase their holdings under the provisions of part second.

Part third is not so open to this objection as to costs, since it only deals with cases where entire estates are sold. It has been taken advantage of in a few isolated cases; but, having regard to the great number of estates which have been sold in the Landed Estates Court since the passing of the Land Act, and to the very few instances in which the provisions of part third have been availed of, they also may be said to have proved a decided failure. The causes of this failure are mainly the following, viz.: 1. The construction put by the judges of the Landed Estates Court upon the clause directing them to afford facilities to tenants anxious to purchase, by dividing the property into lots, etc.; 2. The obstruction offered to the working of the clauses by landlord owners; and 3. The fact of the advance by the Board to tenants being limited to two thirds of the purchase-money.

1. In construing section 46 of the act, the judges of the Landed Estates Court held that they were bound to regard first the interest of the owner and his incumbrances, and they declined to divide the property into lots for the tenants when the doing so might in any wise prejudice the sale of the whole. For example, suppose that some of the tenants desired to buy their holdings, and the rest did not. In such cases, it was urged by the landlords that if the estate were divided into lots so as to suit the tenants who



wished to buy their farms, this would leave an irregular remnant to dispose of, with the possible result of the sale realizing less than if the entire estate were sold together. The Court held in favor of the landlords, with the result that section 46 was practically rendered inoperative, except in the very rare case where *all* the tenants were in a position to buy.

2. But, even where all the tenants were able and willing to buy, and bid the highest price, it sometimes happened that the landlord was still averse to allowing them to purchase. The Irish landowners are a privileged and exclusive class. The holding of large estates carries with it certain privileges and social advantages which have no parallel in America. The English land laws bear strong evidence of the anxiety of the land-owning aristocracy to prevent that breaking up of estates which would destroy their class ascendancy. It is, therefore, but natural that the Irish landlords should obstruct any provisions having for their object the substitution of a system of peasant proprietors for the present feudal system of land-tenure. The most remarkable instance of this obstruction occurred in the well-known Harene Estate case. When the estate was put up for sale in court, two gentlemen acting on behalf of the tenants offered £81,500 for the entire estate. A neighboring landlord offered £81,000. The owner preferred to sell to one of his own class, even at the sacrifice of £500. The Landed Estates Court Judge, however, held that, under the Bright clauses of the act, he had power to give the tenants a preference, provided the owner did not thereby sustain any pecuniary loss. The Judge, therefore, declared the trustees for the tenants to be the purchasers of the estate. The case was taken to the Appeal Court and there the decision of the Landed Estates Court Judge was reversed. The tenants tried to appeal to the House of Lords, but their appeal was dismissed upon a technical ground.

3. Owing, in the main, to the system of land laws under which they live, the small farmers of Ireland have not, as a rule, been able to put by money. It might often happen that a tenant would be anxious to purchase his holding, and both able and willing to pay off the purchase-money by annual installments extending over a sufficiently long period, and yet might not be able to pay down immediately as large a sum as one third of the purchase-money. In such cases, the Government, if satisfied of the respectability and industry of the tenant, would be safe in advancing three fourths, or four fifths, or the whole of the purchase-money, taking the repayment

by installments in the manner provided by the Bright clauses. The certainty of being undisturbed while the installments were paid, and the prospect of becoming absolute owner after a certain number of years, would stimulate the prospective proprietor to extraordinary efforts to pay the installments. He would have a fixed sum to pay, instead of a sum that could be raised any time at the caprice of his landlord, and he would feel that he was working for himself and not merely to make rent for his landlord. The success, too, of the act which made the tenants of the Irish Church lands proprietors of their farms, has been as remarkable as the failure of the Bright clauses. About four fifths of the entire number of holdings sold have been purchased by the occupiers, and interest and installments have been regularly paid during the hard times. This instance of the Church-land sales is valuable as showing that the sense of security and the prospect of ownership have the same effect upon the Irish peasant as they have been proved to exercise upon the peasantry of France and other European countries. Indeed, one should have thought that this might fairly have been assumed without proof, yet it has been vigorously denied by the Irish landlords. From the statements contained in the letters of Mr. Kavanagh, Lord Dunraven, and others, it would seem as though the Irish peasants were a very abnormal race. It would seem that the landlords would be quite willing to have a system of peasant proprietors in Ireland, if they thought it would do any good. But they are quite sure it would not do any good. The cause of the evil is the character of the people, the climate, the soil, the Gulf Stream, overpopulation, anything, in fact, except the land laws. According to these gentlemen, the Irish peasant must be of a very generous nature indeed. He is just as willing to work for his landlord as for himself. He alone is willing to work as hard when he knows that he is liable at any moment to be deprived of the fruits of his industry by an increase of rent as when he knows that he is certain to enjoy those fruits himself. There can, perhaps, be no stronger evidence of the weakness of the landlord case than the fact that the champions of landlordism have been obliged to have recourse to such arguments as these.

Having given this brief sketch of the Bright clauses, and the reasons that have made them a failure, I would point out certain remedies that at least would make them workable, though these remedies would by no means be an adequate settlement of the Irish land question :

1. A Board of Commissioners should be established in Dublin, whose duty it would be to buy entire estates in the Landed Estates Court, and then take their own time to sell these estates in lots to the occupying tenants.

2. The Judge of the Landed Estates Court should be empowered to sell the estate to the Board, notwithstanding any objection by the owner, not only when they bid the highest price, but also when they bid as high a price as any other bidder.

3. Provision should be made for advancing to the tenants a sum not to exceed (say) five sixths of the purchase-money to be paid by them, such advance to be repaid by them in installments, in a manner similar to that provided by the Bright clauses.

It will be seen, by the foregoing examination of the Bright clauses, that the same errors which made them abortive have been incorporated by John Bright in his present scheme for establishing a peasant proprietary. He does not make it compulsory on any landlords except the English corporations to sell their lands to their tenants, and he makes no provision for advancing the whole of the purchase-money to those tenants who, from causes beyond their control, are unable to pay down in a lump the one fourth purchase-money which his scheme would oblige them to pay. He says in his very admirable speech at Manchester: "Well, then, remember that all these tenants, having all these traditions, are flocking about the country, that they are all tenants-at-will nearly, that they are subject to the fiercest competition for land, and that there is no other industry for them except in the north of Ireland, in the linen country. There is no other industry for them, or almost none, and therefore they struggle for the bit of land they hold as being their only chance of living." And yet he proposes that these poverty-stricken, famine-stricken people should be compelled to pay down in a lump one fourth of the entire purchase-money of their holdings! "If a farmer rents a holding worth £400," he says, "let the Government advance him £300, and let him pay down the remaining £100." But where, in the name of common sense, is the average Connaught or Munster farmer, crippled by season after season of hard times, high rents, and low prices for farm produce, to find this £100, unless he borrows it at usurious interest? No; Mr. Bright must go two steps further, before the Irish can accept his plan, excellent as the principle of it is. He must make it compulsory on certain classes of landlords, already specified, and including by far the greater portion of the landlords of the country, to sell to their

tenants; and he must make provision for advancing to the tenant, who has been unable to save enough to pay his one fourth of the purchase-money, the *whole* of the purchase-money, if need be.

While criticising Mr. Bright's clauses and his present scheme, we desire to pay all due honor to him for his great liberal-mindedness and impartiality toward Ireland, and his evident intense desire to do her justice. To the majority of the Radical party in England we would give the same praise. Their conduct and aims stand out in specially strong contrast to the villainous schemes of the Tory party as regards Ireland, especially the present scheme of the Tory Government to create a famine next year by withholding the relief of public works from the people until the time for the spring work comes, when the Government calculates on the farmers being compelled by necessity to neglect the plowing and seeding of their farms in order to earn enough to keep body and soul together by laboring on these public works.

It may seem strange to Americans that England should prefer to keep Ireland poor and miserable, rather than to make her prosperous. But Ireland prosperous would mean Ireland populous and strong; and Ireland populous and strong would mean a great nation by no means satisfied to remain a mere province of England, governed by an English Parliament. Therefore, though England would find such a splendid market for her goods in Ireland, if she were wealthy, and though her revenues from Ireland would be increased to an enormous extent, she prefers to lose this market and this chance of increased revenues, because she fears that Irish independence would be the first fruits of Irish prosperity. In that dreadful contingency, of course, England would not get any revenues at all from Ireland; so, perhaps, she understands her own business, and it is her best policy, as far as her pockets are concerned, to keep Ireland weak and poor. We fear that the Scripture saying would be fulfilled in the case of Ireland, if her internal resources were developed, and her agricultural system put on a natural basis: "Now, when Jeshurun waxed fat, *he kicked.*"

CHARLES STEWART PARNELL.