

The Single Tax, August, 1901

NEW IRELAND

THE Irish Land Question promises soon again to become one of the burning questions of the day. For centuries Ireland has been the victim of the worst form of Landlordism ; but to-day North and South are uniting for a final struggle to emancipate their country from its poisonous, deadly grip. The London Daily News has recently had a series of most suggestive articles on what it significantly terms New Ireland, in which the present condition of the country is depicted in a masterly and impartial manner.

In the first of these articles, after dwelling on what the writer well terms "an historic grievance, the permanent intimidation of civil Ireland by a body of fully armed soldiers disguised as policemen, to the number of 13,000, costing the impoverished country within a few pounds of one and a half million pounds per annum," he continues :—

"For whose behoof is this costly and provoking system kept up? For one class, and one only—the landlords. Settle the land question, and the day after you may cut down the 13,000 police to 3,000 But the irony of it is that the landlords themselves are going. Cromwell drove the Irish race, or thought he drove them, beyond the Shannon. The race remains, but the landlords are dispersed, or are dispersing, to the ends of the earth. How many hundreds have gone down the primrose path to ruinous or ignoble retreat, in workhouses, in shabby Continental resorts, in London or Dublin slums? In two adjacent Mayo parishes I visited, with many properties, there were two small resident landlords. In Ulster I should say that less than a fourth are resident. Drive for hours, and ask as you go the history of each great deserted house and overgrown demesne, and you will get in return a tale of its late owner's mad levity or sombre decline. There are plenty of landlords in Ireland who fish and shoot for their dinner, or who poison the land (and their neighbours' dog) to preserve their only source of livelihood, the game. There are

landlords' sons growing up in rude ignorance, for the broken estate—on which perhaps there are jointures to be paid in full out of the reduced rental—leaves no margin for education. The landlord class provides few students, even for Trinity, where the fees and the cost of living are singularly moderate. Pity a fallen class, not invariably suffering for its own fault. But England should know that its garrison is melting away, while a new army of nationality, recruited afresh from the vigorous and prudent North, is arising to wring from her a settlement which she should not have the will, or may not have the power, to refuse."

Yes, indeed, settle the Land Question, and many other questions, besides that of the police, will settle themselves. But we would earnestly ask the leaders of the Irish people to be worthy of the coming opportunity and of the trust reposed in them. Let them be on their guard, and warn their followers against any settlement that does not safeguard the inalienable rights of the whole people. Let them not forget that to get rid of one big Irish landlord, and to create a thousand small Irish landlords, will not be to settle the Irish Land Question, but simply to make its equitable and ultimate settlement a thousand times more difficult. Let them not forget that much evil is wrought by want of thought, by want of knowledge, as well as by want of heart, by want of sympathy. In their haste to do something, let them not do the wrong thing. "The new army of nationality, recruited from the vigorous and prudent North," will be able to look after its own interests; it is the sacred duty of the trusted Irish leaders to see that the rights of the whole people are not sacrificed to their demands. In the approaching struggle with the English Landocracy—the barrier in the way of progress in Ireland as in England—let them, indeed, constantly bear in mind and boldly inscribe on their standard the sacred warning of Henry George, that

"The Land of Ireland [as the land of England and of every other country in the world] does not belong to one individual more than to another individual; to one class more than to another class; to one generation more than to the generations that come

after. It belongs to the whole people who at the time exist upon it."

If they do this, then, whatever compromises they may be compelled to accept, they will have done more for the cause of the people of Great Britain than any other body of politicians now within the political arena ; if they fail to do so, as we fear they will, they will but sacrifice the future to the present, re-establish Landlordism in a new guise, and leave the real question to confront the generations that are to come.

What do the}' propose to do with their country after they have emancipated it from the poisonous, deadly grip of the big Landlords? This is the question they are called upon to solve, and on their solution of which the future of their country depends. To secure to the Irish tenants the unrestricted possession and enjoyment of all their improvements in and on the land, and the uncontrolled use of the land at its lowest economic rental value, are the necessities of the immediate present ; but in their haste to secure this, let them not sacrifice the inalienable rights of the whole people to the demands of an influential section, or the}' may create even worse ills than those they are attempting to remedy, and make New Ireland a home of a worse form of Landlordism than that they are now endeavouring to extirpate.