

sant proprietary in Ireland is, under existing circumstances, one of true wisdom. It is easy to point out the economic objections, to say that the State ought in no instance to undertake a land agency, even on a limited scale; to assert that subdivision would be the result, as, to some extent, it probably would; to maintain, as, I think, is partly true, that the Irishman has not the same eagerness as the Englishman for freehold ownership. Nevertheless, in my judgment, it should be an object of high Imperial policy to pledge a not inconsiderable number of the occupiers of the soil in Ireland to the cause of order, by giving them the status of owners of land, and thus to break the revolutionary wave which is menacing property, and that without doing injustice to any one and through a purely voluntary process. The measure would be also expedient in the North, as probably it would enable many farmers to acquire the freehold of estates in which the dominion of the proprietor had been seriously impaired by the custom of Ulster, especially when this should have been made law-worthy. It is unnecessary to say that the effects of a scheme which would open to the Irish tenant a prospect of possibly becoming an owner of land would extend far beyond those actually benefited.

I can only hint at the supplementary measures that ought, I think, to be kept in sight in a settlement of the Irish Land Question. The extreme wetness of the climate of Ireland and the singular configuration of the island—a low watershed and a coast line of hills, rendering the course of several large rivers sluggish, and making their valleys liable to floods—cause the soil to be charged with superfluous moisture, and a considerable area to be injured; and a good system of arterial drainage, to open outfalls for thorough draining, is one of the chief material wants of the country. This great work should be done under the superintendence and control of the State—indeed, it could not be done otherwise; but the Exchequer ought not to be at the charge, it should be distributed over the districts benefited. It would, moreover, be very advisable if, as we may assume, the State must interfere between Irish landlords and tenants, that the whole of Ireland should be revalued and a fair standard be set up, by which, approximately, to measure her rental. The present valuation is extremely imperfect; it is much too low for the fine grass lands, the mountain pastures, and the rich tracts generally, though tolerably fair for the light corn lands; and its inequalities have contributed to excite that cry for a

“fixed rent” which is heard so loudly in some counties. It might also be worth considering whether the State, taking proper precautions, might not lend generally to tenants as well as to landlords under the Acts for improving land property; the benefit of such advances would be great, and there need be no difficulty as to the security. I might stop here; but as the Land Question is a political and social question, I would finally glance at it from this point of view. We may reasonably expect that a just reform of the laws relating to land in Ireland will greatly diminish agrarian disorder; but we must not suppose that any Act of Parliament will, as if by magic, conjure away a spirit that has long exercised a baleful influence. We ought to endeavour to root agrarianism out, and I believe it will be generally admitted that the machinery for this purpose in Ireland is not of the most efficient kind. May not something be done in this matter to strengthen the hands of the executive Government; and is a military police the proper agent to cope with a stealthy combination? On the other hand, I may be allowed to express a hope that the time has passed away when the force of the Crown shall be employed to vindicate rights of property, when the agents of criminal justice in Ireland shall be made bailiffs, in the interest of landlords, for the execution of the civil process of the law. This illegitimate and unwise practice has done something to prolong the traditional dislike of the institutions and laws of the State that lingers in the hearts of the Irish peasantry.

For the rest, much may be done indirectly by a kindly, generous, yet firm policy; by fostering and promoting sound opinions, by recognising frankly the legitimate instincts and sentiments of the Irish race, to win the affections of the people of Ireland, to efface evil memories of the past, to blend Ireland indissolubly with the Empire. It is not for me, however, to dwell upon this; I conclude with one or two general remarks. It may be affirmed confidently that the coming Session will witness a thorough, yet equitable settlement of this most serious and momentous question. It is in the interest of England, for she cannot afford to have Ireland her reproach and her weakness; and they know nothing of Englishmen who imagine that when their minds have been awakened to the sense of a national grievance, they will not earnestly and quickly remove it. It is in the interest of the great class of the Irish tenantry, at present without rights they ought to have, kept in a state of unfair dependence, vexed, angry, irritated, and discontented, too commonly charged in one

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