

THE LAND TROUBLES IN IRELAND.

From the days of Strongbow the condition of Ireland has always been one of the greatest difficulties of the British Government. Whatever is done, or whatever is left undone, there is always an amount of latent discontent and disaffection. This discontent only needs the pressure of a bad harvest, or the stimulus of reckless agitators, to break forth into open sedition. It is difficult at this distance to fully understand the rights and wrongs of the present agitation. Even to one on the spot it is difficult to form a just judgment. Our own feeling, as we beheld the wretched rain-sodden harvest of last season rotting in the drowned-out fields, the black flooded peat bogs, the toiling and moiling peasantry, the miserable cabins, and the poverty-pinched appearance of the country, was one of deep commiseration. In this broad free land, where every man who will may win a plot of ground to call his own, we can scarcely understand the hopeless land-longing of the Irish tenant-at-will. We do not wonder at his discontent as he sees the hard-won earnings of the land drained off by absentee landlords to be spent in luxury in London or Paris.

At the same time this is no justification of the anti-rent agitation. That is subversive of all social order, and would lead to the wildest anarchy and confusion. The agrarian outrages, the shooting of bailiffs and burning of ricks, can only retard and complicate the removal of abuses, and embitter the strife between class and class. The bane of Ireland has been that selfish agitators fan the inflammable nature of their compatriots into a flame of sedition for their own aggrandisement and glory. The Government, unless it would abdicate its functions of governing altogether, had no alternative but to proceed to the arrest and trial of these agitators, even though the latter do thereby become elevated in the eyes of their countrymen to the status of martyrs for liberty.

If some feasible solution could be found for the land tenure, making

small freeholds available for the peasants, we would have better hopes for the future of Ireland. But there, as in Great Britain, the tendency seems to be to throw the land into larger and larger farms, to employ large capital, steam ploughing, and other machine cultivation. In Belgium, on the contrary, the country is largely occupied by small peasant holdings of six or seven acres. These are cultivated by hoe and spade like a garden, and an appearance of humble thrift everywhere meets the eye. The same is largely the case, also, in France and Germany. The former system may get the largest crops of grain. The latter seems to produce what is the noblest crop of all—a contented peasantry.

The Home Rule agitation is an utter farce. Great Britain will never consent to a disintegration of the Empire. As we walked through the old Parliament House in College Green, Dublin, we asked one of the custodians if the Irish people would like to have their own Parliament in those ancient halls again. "Belike some would," was his reply, "but not I; 'twould make no differ at all." And he was right. The cure of Ireland's ills lies not in that direction. The Government purchase of land from the landlords, and its lease or sale on easy terms to the peasants and small farmers; a wise system of assisted emigration, to relieve the pressure of population on the means of subsistence; and popular education, promise the best ultimate results. In the meantime, the generous relief of present suffering, and a wise firmness in the maintenance of public order, will conciliate or restrain the disaffected; and with better days a better mind may come to the Irish people.

With previous Irish agitations the question of religion has had much to do. The allegiance to Rome was felt to be stronger than the allegiance to Great Britain. There may be much of the same feeling in the present outbreak. But, in justice it must be said that the Romish priests have, for the most part, taken the side of law and order. With the