

1846 and 1849, are, I think, the years in which those two measures were passed; one fully twenty years after, the Emancipation Bill, and the other a few years earlier. These Acts, as I have said, were not of a late date, they were not the offspring of fresh institutions lately developed. They were the approach by the English Parliament, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, to dealing with old difficulties, and how again was it that they were brought about? How was it, that the public opinion of the British people and the opinion of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, was aroused to action, such action as was then taken in these two particulars? Sir, it was not the hand of the insurgent upon that occasion, it was not the hand of the agitator, so much as the hand of famine and of pestilence. It was not until the direst calamity which has beset the modern Christian world came upon us, and until a famine took place in which more human lives were lost than in all the wars with which England has reddened the soil of Europe or the world, it was not until that had happened, that the public opinion to which the House referred was sufficiently aroused to deal with this question. Such was the unhappy condition of Ireland, and the measure passed for the relief of the poor was a great boon to them. The Encumbered Estates Act, too, was greatly needed. It was hoped, however, that that Act would have had an indirect effect very beneficial to the tenants, but that hope failed. The condition of the tenants as a whole from the practical operation of the Act was not mitigated, because it happened that the sales of many of the lands that were sold under the Encumbered Estates Act were made to persons entirely new to the country, and who, in a great many instances, were wholly neglectful of and defiant of those customary—I cannot call them rights—but those customary favors which were granted by the former proprietors to the tenants, and the system of rack-renting and the other difficulties which might naturally be expected to grow from such an unnatural system as existed, were aggravated and intensified by the new proprietary; and so it happened that the demand for the tenant right became more—pressing as it was before—became still more pressing by reason of the practical operation of the Encumbered Estates Act. Well, Sir, about twenty years more elapsed before the next great remedial measure for Ireland was carried through the British Parliament. It was, I think, in 1868 the law for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Irish Church was passed, nearly fifty years after the Union took place. Now, who can pretend that that act of justice was not as much an act of justice at the time of the Union as it was at the date it became law. The principle on which the disestablishment was carried is immutable, eternal, and the question had been raised, as we all know, generations before. Public men in advance of public opinion of the United Kingdom and of Parliament—intelligent men, statesmen, had raised it, had pointed out that it was impossible that that establishment could be defended and maintained—had proposed that an act of justice should be performed, but it was utterly impossible to make progress in that direction. An old, old grievance, a grievance so old as to be almost out of date, a grievance of the most pressing character—how, I ask, was redress to that grievance obtained? Now, Sir, I shall give you an authentic account of how it came that Parliament and the people of the United Kingdom decided to remove that ancient grievance. I shall give you the account which the author of that great measure for Ireland himself gave in 1878 in the Midlothian campaign. These are the words Mr. Gladstone used in explaining how it came about that the Irish Church was in 1868 disestablished and disendowed:

“Down to the year 1865, and the dissolution of that year, the whole question of the Irish Church was dead. Nobody cared for it. Nobody paid any attention to it in England.

Mr. BLAKE.

“That is the nobody in England and Scotland, not the nobody in Ireland, nobody paid any attention to it in England. Then circumstances occurred which drew the attention of the people to the Irish Church. I said myself, in 1865, and I believe that it was out of the range of practical politics, that is the politics of the coming elections.”

Now, what was it that brought it within the range of practical politics; what was it made it possible to carry that measure of reform? Some new events, some new chain of reasoning that led to conviction on the part of the people that it was a just measure? I will read you what it was:

“When it came to this, that a great jail in the heart of the metropolis was broken open under circumstances which drew the attention of the English people to the State of Ireland; and when in Manchester policemen were murdered in the execution of their duty, at once the whole country became alive to Irish questions, and the question of the Irish Church revived. It came within the range of practical politics.”

That is the reason in this great measure of legislation by which the people and politicians of the United Kingdom were led to the belief that the question was within the range of practical politics, and led to see what was their duty to the people of Ireland. Once again there was the same moving cause to the remedy. Once again there was the same long heart-breaking delay, and once again English and Scotch opinion would not act until compelled to do so. Once again, therefore, there was no need of grace in the measure so obtained. It was forced from the British Parliament, and was so acknowledged, and therefore if it did remove the grievance it did not—as timely and cheerful legislation would have done, as any consideration of justice would have done—contain the element of grace and did not excite a feeling of gratitude in the hearts of those to whom the benefit was granted. Sir, that measure was a great measure in two distinct aspects. First of all it destroyed the pre-eminence of the church of the minority. It removed a crying injustice; it changed a condition which had combined the religion of the majority with their patriotism, a patriotism which, so long as it was the policy of the Parliament and people of the United Kingdom to maintain the church of the minority, was necessarily an anti-national patriotism. Besides that, there was the material gain that Irish funds to the amount of many millions were set free for legitimate and proper Irish purposes, not denominational, not sectarian, not for the minority, not for the majority, but for the whole people. Besides all this, the practical results of the disestablishment of the Irish Church, it had the indirect effect hardly less important. It was the first effective measure for giving to the occupiers of the Irish soil a great and tangible interest in the soil, and for increasing the number of Irish proprietors. The just provision which gave to the tenants, on church lands the pre-emption right to purchase those lands on moderate terms, a very small sum being payable down, and the residue being spread over instalments for thirty-two years, compounding principle and interest at a low rate, which made the annual payment not materially more than the accustomed rent, gave the tenants of church lands an opportunity of which they gladly availed themselves of becoming the owners of the lands they occupied. And thus it added no less than 5,000 to the number of Irish proprietors of the soil. With our notions, having regard to the figures I have given as to the population, you may say that 5,000 Irish proprietors is a trifle. What is the use of saying so much about 5,000 Irish proprietors? I admit that it is a drop in the bucket, but then the bucket had very little more than a drop in it at the time. The total number of Irish proprietors at that time was but 16,000; so that this measure in its operation added no less than 5,000, or very nearly one-third, to the number of Irish proprietors, and a measure which has such an effect cannot but be regarded as a very important measure of relief. Now, Sir, Ireland is a country of small agricultural holdings,