

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 principal 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 the bucket had very little more than a drop of water in it at the time. The total number of

PROPRIETORS

at that time was no less than 5,000, or very nearly one million the number of Irish proprietors, and a number 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, and in considering this question, we must not forget that circumstance. There are in Ireland no less than 533,000 distinct farm tenancies, of which no less than 450,000 are under 50 acres, and no less than 50,000 more are between 50 and 100 acres, showing that the great bulk are under fifty acres, and no less than 500,000 out of the total 533,000 are under 100 acres. Although there are exceptions, as we know, principally in one of the provinces of Ireland, but also in the case of many estates scattered through other parts of the country, yet the bulk of these 533,000 holdings are yearly, and they are yearly in a country in which the custom has been that the tenant shall make the improvements, a custom which is wholly incompatible with the conditions of yearly tenancy. Now, Sir, while that is the number of

IRISH FARM TENANCIES,

let us see to what extent the ownership of farm lands prevails. In Ireland, one in every 257 persons owns farm lands, while in France one in every eight persons owns farm lands; in central and northern Europe, the tenure of land is widely diffused; and while we have seen a very gradual growth and a very imperfect development, in the continental countries of Europe, of the principles of popular and responsible government—while in that regard they are far behind the United Kingdom, yet we have seen, since the days of the French

revolution and the Napoleonic age, large advances made—much larger advances than have been ever dreamed of in England towards diffusion of the tenure of land, and the abolition of that most objectionable portion of the feudal system. In the Rhine Provinces, including Westphalia, there are 11,000,000 acres of cultivable land—and how many proprietors? 1,157,000 proprietors, or one to every ten acres of land; and if you read the history of the contentment and comfort, the work and labor, the energy and industry—the indisputable industry—that is displayed in many of these countries by the proprietors of these small areas, you must be convinced that the only thing that enables the Government of these countries to be carried on at all, burdened as they are with enormous expenses, with an imperfect development of constitutional government, with great military armaments, and with an oppressive system of conscription and military service—the only thing that gives the people heart and hope, and enables them to struggle on at all, is that wide diffusion of the ownership of land than which there is nothing better calculated to promote the stability of the people, to whom the land belongs. Take the State of New York, in which there are 22,200,000 acres of farm lands, and in which the holdings are large, as is natural in a new country, where there is so much land undisposed of as there is on this continent. The owners of the land, in 1870, were 216,000, against 21,000 in Ireland, including the owners of church lands. Look at two portions of Ireland, which may be selected as examples: take the agricultural counties of West Meath and Cavan, which comprise 1,360,000 acres, and in which there are 312 owners of less than 50 acres in that whole district; in the counties of Galway and Mayo there are 2,760,000 acres, and there are only 225 owners of less than 50 acres. The

NUMBER OF SMALL OWNERS

is insignificant in England, but that number is computed to be about ten times as large in proportion as the number is in Ireland, and that in a country of which I believe the greatest practical blemish to-day is its own land laws. I believe there can be no doubt that the greatest blemish in England and Scotland to-day is the condition of the ownership of land; but even there that difficulty was diminished relatively to the condition of things in Ireland. Now, Sir, there can be no doubt that the old penal laws, which among other relics of barbarity prohibited for a long time Roman Catholics either from owning or inheriting lands, had much to do with the creation of the present state of things as to the landholding in Ireland, and that state of things being once created and marked deeply upon the country, it became of course proportionately difficult to obliterate it. The result was a