

## IRISH LANDLORDISM.

William O'Brien, M. P., Discusses the Question.

## A Burning Arrangement.

Mr. O'Brien's second letter in the series on "Irish Landlordism Up to Date," which he is writing for the Dublin Freeman's Journal and the London Daily News, is a very interesting document. He begins as follows:

My first letter gave some notion of the actual condition of the mass of the Marquis of Sligo's tenantry, living on mere morsels of mountain or bog land, tied together in co-operative misery and associations by means of the legal monstrosity called "tenancies in co." and their spirit broken and their bodies wasted by exact ones which, in any well governed country, would be criminal offences. Let me show you the companion picture to the tenants' present degraded condition those traces of desolate green pastures which lie in the same county, in the same parish, sometimes in the same electoral division with the congested patches of tillage in which the population swarm and slave. Within the past week the Marquis of Sligo carried out an eviction which has sent a thrill of joy throughout West Connaught. He has taken up possession of the enormous stock farm, more than 10,000 acres in extent, which the late Captain Houston and his successors accumulated from the evicted holdings of Lord Sligo's and Lord Lucan's estates of the great famine of 1846-48. The eviction of the great Houston ranch will be a golden date in the history of the Irish congested districts. It marks the definitive breakdown of the conspiracy formed by the Irish landlords after the famine year to convert Ireland into vast pasture farms by the simple process of banishing the existing population by the hundred thousand to America, or to use the workhouse, or to the bare mountain ridges where even the greedy eye of the landgrabber did not think it worth while to pursue them.

Mr. O'Brien then speaks of other clearances in Mayo similar to the Houston ranch. The after-famine poor rates, he says, had to be paid by the landlords. So these worthies, in order to escape the burden,

## CLEARED OUT THE TOWNLANDS.

by whole townlands, and turned over the large areas to Scotch graziers. After giving in detail the townlands which were depopulated to make room for Captain Houston's cattle, Mr. O'Brien continues as follows:

About 6,000 acres of the above are on the estate of the Earl of Lucan, whose predecessor in title, Sir Richard Bingham, Elizabeth's infamous governor of Connaught, would seem to have sat down one night with Lord Sligo's progenitor, and gambled for the barony of Murrisk, townland by townland, with varying fortunes, and with the bizarre result that the two lords cross and re-cross one another's estates in a sort of proprietorial rundale. It is not difficult to realize for oneself what a hecatomb of skulls it took to build these Tamerlanes of consolidation their trophy; how many agonized hearts, of which each separate evicted townland represents the breaking; how many despairing, hungry groups by the ditch side in the pitiless winter morning; how many footsore journeys to the workhouse, to the slums of some English manufacturing town; how many corpses, strewn along the Atlantic; how many blooming young Irish maidens preserved for a fate still more bitter; how many sworn enemies of England made ready to the hand of the rebel and the dynamiter. It was from the ruins of an evicted Mayo village like unto these that Michael Davitt arose to make Irish landlordism tremble to its guilty soul.

## TALK OF ARMENIAN ATROCITIES.

as indignantly as you will, but pray not with overmuch self-righteousness

in an empire where you can still talk with men whose eyes have seen all these things brought to pass under the free flag of England.

One of the pet pleas of Irish landlordism is an appeal to English prejudice against the innate criminality of the Irish tenantry. Whoever takes the trouble to look up the facts knows that, on the contrary, it is the Irish peasant who never strikes back, who is most mercilessly wasted, and that the only indulgence Irish landlordism has ever voluntarily yielded has been yielded within range of the Tipperary man's blunderbuss. It is nonsense to attempt to blink the fact. I have inquired diligently without being able to discover a single instance in which a life was taken on Lord Sligo's estate during the whole agony of these hearth quenchings, uprootings and banishments. Captain Houston's cattle were not more guiltless of blood than the men whose hearths they grazed over. Captain Houston lived for twenty years and died in peace in the midst of the people on the ruins of whose villages he was thriving. It is painful to think that the only reward of the people's self-restraint was a book by a member of the family libelling them as savages.

The great experiment of black cattle as rent payers vice men flourished apace. Lord Sligo received his rent in one big nugget, instead of drawing it like drops of life blood from a thousand peasants with blighted potatoes and hungry children. Results, it is true, were not so satisfactory for the peasants. Such of them as could not be packed into the American sailing ships

## OR INTO THEIR GRAVES.

hovered on the out-kirts of the Houston ranch. They were disposed of in two ways. Some found refuge on the already overcrowded estates of smaller and more compassionate landlords in the neighborhood. An example is the congested village of Shraleen, the most woe-begone in the parish of Aughagower. The landlord was a kindly man, and did not repulse the homeless wanderers from the Erriff valley. Shraleen became as overcrowded as the Erriff valley became desolate. The villagers got sunk in misery, and the landlord drifted into the court of chancery, and the shallow political economist visiting Shraleen to day will think he has mastered the whole problem when he points to the thickly huddled cabins and throws up his hands with a cry of "over-population."

A much larger body of the Sligo tenantry were suffered to remain upon such ineligible bits of bog or mountain as did not excite the cupidity of the great graziers. Whenever, by force of reclamation or otherwise, it became worth while to incorporate one of those co-tenantry holdings with the great stock farms, nothing was simpler. Some member of the co-tenantry partnership was always sure to be in arrears. The co-tenancy was evicted, the land transferred to the grazier, and any of the co-tenants who were especially good payers were transported to some new and wild mountain strips where they had to begin the world all over again, against heather, rock and storm. This was the origin, recent or remote, of many of the settlements in impossible corners of the district well called Tirnacruacha (the country of the mountain peaks) under shelter of cliffs called after the eagles who preceded Lord Sligo's tenants in possession.

I have already laid bare the system upon which these poor inheritors of the homes of the eagle are dwelt with—bound together,

## THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

in co-tenancies which secure that everybody shall be as miserable as his neighbor, and in that impoverished condition compelled to pay the poor rates which the law directs to be paid by the landlord, and at the same time

deprived of the franchise by a landlord who pays no rates, but elects guardians of his own nomination to spend them. The more I learn of these co-tenants the less I am inclined to abate anything I have said of the incredible inhumanity of the system. In fact, many of the black details have yet to be filled in. The six co-tenants of Derryculish were possessed for a year and a half's rent. They offered to pay a year's rent—men with not more than a month's supply of potatoes in their pits, and to whom government relief will have to be presently administered. The offer was refused, and a bill of law costs run up against them. This is, however, too common a story to be worthy of special remark. There are two circumstances in which their experiences even surpass those of Boulabrian. The Derryculish men's valuation exceeds £1 apiece. They pay all the poor rates. On almost any other estate with which I am acquainted, even Lord Lucan's, the landlord returns half the poor rates thus paid by the tenants. Lord Sligo returns nothing. The Derryculish men pay it all. They pay the whole county cess in addition, which is this year at the rate of 1s. 9d. in the pound—the cess which repairs the roads and bridges and sustains the lunatic asylum and guarantees light railway dividends, in all of which Lord Sligo's brother, Lord John Browne, is the disposing power as foreman of the grand jury, and in all of which the Derryculish co-tenants, who supply the cess, have no more voice than they have in the march of the planets. But

## THIS SITUATION OF THE POOR.

is never without the touch of irony, for, while the peasant has to pay the whole county cess of 1s. 9d. in the pound, there is an additional levy of 114 pence for the relief of distress, and the landlord out of his bounty solemnly returns the half of the 114 pence for the relief of distress, while he leaves the emaciated villagers to pay the 1s. 9d. Surely here is a stroke of grim humor worthy of Mephistopheles at his gayest.

But the Derryculish co-tenants have had another appalling experience, which, I am afraid, is not theirs alone. They assure me—and I can find no reason for doubt—that they have been legally evicted twice over already in the course of the past ten years! That is to say, at the end of their six months' period of redemption the sheriff took legal possession, and when they were re-admitted it was no longer as tenants, but as mere caretakers and moveable chattels, subject to the payment of whatever rent the landlord chose to name, and to expulsion whenever the landlord saw fit to chase them! The most fearful thing that has occurred, all silently and unnoticed in Ireland since the seventh section of the Tory land act of '87 was passed, is that what has happened to the Derryculish co-tenants has happened, according to my best belief, in at least 30,000 cases throughout Ireland, and that, unless Mr. Morley's bill comes to their relief, all these thousands of co-tenants will have been excluded for aye from the benefits of Mr. Gladstone's land legislation, and will remain as absolutely the creatures of the landlord's will and pleasure as the pheasants in his coverts.

Time has brought its revenge, however, to the evicted of the Houston ranch—at least to those sparse ones who have survived famines and coffin ships and forty years of hungry sorrows. The American and Australian cattle trade rose up to dissipate

## THE LANDLORD'S DAZZLING DREAM.

of a county of great graziers. Captain Houston's son fell into difficulties and quitted the country. Mr. Houston-Howell, his successor, convinced him self by a short experience that fifteen miles of mountain pastures, vast as they looked, were no match for the

illimitable American prairie that competed with them. Another source of condemnation came from the very heart of nature itself. The best portion of the stock farm was in the Erriff river valley, which was reclaimed by the tillage tenants of old. It is a recognized fact here among agriculturists that the reclaimed lands are less fruitful than the cold and sparsely soils of the neighborhood in their natural condition. But the reclaimed lands in their untilled condition withered under the feet of the grazier. It is not a metaphorical but a well known fact. The old tillage became overspread with tuesses, which choked the natural grasses, so that neither the dairy or the white clover which are, so to say, the richest colors of a bountiful pasture, upshot was that, forty years after the great crime of the famine cleared, Lord Sligo was last week obliged to bundle out the big grazier in turn, and this enormous tract of people's inheritance is at this moment without a tenant.

The event is a memorable one which marks once for all the collapse of the policy of bullocks runs to which hundreds of thousands of Irish tenants were sacrificed. Will it mark also the beginning of the reverse policy of restoring the land to the people? In any other country it would be easy to return a confident affirmative. Here within the bounds of one horizon, we have the bane and antidote.

## OF WESTERN MISERY.

set forth side by side; the congested villages harried for rent arrears while they are crying to the government for food, and, not a rifle shot away, thousands of acres of good tillage land and tens of thousands of sound mountain pastures idle under the eyes of men to whom they would mean bread farms and rustic plenty. Some of those who were crying in the wilderness on this subject for many a day are quite solitary now.

Whatever may be the defects of the congested district board as it was constituted by Mr. Balfour's act, the board has begun to realize the mockery of State remissions for quinquennial famine in the West, while the people are locked out of the good and sufficient lands which are temptingly set forth before their eyes, and which our small cultivators who are their own laborers will ever succeed in turning to adequate account. The board has already made one successful experiment on a small estate in Galway. It is about to make another on Clarin Island—so long the theatre of rent collecting expeditions of war by British gunboats. Can it be possible that government and landlord will madly let Captain Houston's 42,000 acres in derelict or slip away to some other fatuous landgrabber, while the men who could enrich them and whom they could enrich lie wretched, cribbed and congested at the other side of the boundary fence? In Ireland only could such a thing happen; but in Ireland, where the veto of a man with

## LORD SLIGO'S INSANE DISREGARD.

for his responsibilities to the country to which he owes his revenue equal without rhyme or reason negative any attempt of the congested districts board to restore the Houston ranch to the people. Lord Sligo's veto on any such project is just as likely as his brother peers' veto on a home rule bill.

It is too sad for words to think what a change for the worse the lapse of more than a hundred years has made in the Westport district since Arthur Young paid his visit. Young found that Lord Altamount of his day (the family had not yet sold their county and their country to Castle Reach for a marquessate of Sligo and £15,000 cash) "an improver whose works deserve the closest attention" busy among his tenantry, immersed in all sorts of schemes for reclamation and improvement, established a linen