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The Irish Problems

BY

H. N. BRAILSFORD.



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I

SOME IRISH PROBLEMS.

BY

H. N. BRAILSFORD

I

I.—The English Ascendency. II.—The Revival of Coercion. III.—The
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1903. j

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SOME IRISH PROBLEMS,

CHAPTER I.

THE ENGLISH ASCENDENCY.

TWO years ago there served in the Royal Irish Constabulary a certain Sergeant Sheridan, whose record of perjuries, notorious in Ireland, ought to be no less familiar to Englishmen and Scotsmen. A single crime may often serve to set in a glaring light some social evil. The Sheridan affair is not a resonant or a complicated scandal. But it does help to reveal the relations in which the Irish peasant stands to his masters. There is something to be learned from it about the ordinary procedure of the Irish Courts. Further, it shows the contempt in which the rulers of Ireland hold Irish opinion. Above all, it helps to explain the attitude which the Irish race in its turn adopts towards our administration.

There is no dispute about the facts. Mr. Wyndham responded to the challenge of the Irish members frankly and honourably, and there is no need to use a harsher word than he has employed, or to breathe an insinuation which does not rest on official admissions. Sheridan was, in Mr. Wyndham's words, "a clever detective officer" who "became a villain in exercising his profession," and "dazzled some young men by the force of his character and ability."* He was employed up and down the country for a long term of years, chiefly in "detecting" what the Government calls "political" crime, a word which covers all acts of

* House of Commons, July 10, 1902. See also Debates of July 23 & 24.

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4 7"-^^ English Ascendency.

revenge against unpopular landlords, their agents, and the "blacklegs" (as English working-men would call them) who betray the cause of the tenants by taking evicted farms. Wherever Sheridan went, crime was certain to appear, and somehow this brilliant detective never hesitated for a moment in affixing the responsibility. For many a long year his accomplices kept his secret. At last, thanks in great part to Mr. Wyndham's candour, we know it. "He fabricated evidence, and had a hand in committing crime." In four instances his methods have been exposed. The crimes were committed by Sheridan himself. The criminals were innocent Irish peasants. One of them (Ryan by name) was, in Mr. Wyndham's words, "a poor old tramp, about sixty-five years of age, tottering, debilitated, and nearly blind." Him Sheridan charged with posting up a threatening notice on a gate. For another peasant, named Bray, Sheridan obtained three years' penal servitude. He was charged with arson, and he died of shame before the end of his term. A third victim, named McGoohan, was sentenced to two years' penal servitude for maiming cattle; and a fourth, named Murphy, was punished for killing a cow. It was Sheridan himself who fired the haystack, maimed the cattle, and killed the cow.

But how, you will ask, was it possible for Sheridan to hoodwink the jury and deceive the judge? The British public is quite prepared to inflict "resolute" government on Ireland, but it prides itself that if its agents are stern they are also just. The trials of Sheridan's victims, however, are still on record, and we can watch the process at work. Dan McGoohan was tried at Sligo, in 1897, for cutting off the tails of cows. This in the eyes of Dublin Castle is a "political" crime, when

the owners of the cows happen to belong to the dominant caste or its satellites. Therefore this wretched peasant received the honour of a sort of State trial, which means that the jury was "packed." The Nationalist jurymen is slow to convict because he regards police evidence with scant respect. Accordingly, before the Crown could find twelve men "loyal" enough to be trusted with McGoohan's fate, it ordered no less than sixty Catholic jurors to stand aside. Even the picked band of Protestants, attached though most of them probably were to the landlord interest, seems to have hesitated about its verdict, for there was nothing but the word of the police against the prisoner. But at the

The Sheridan Case. 5

critical moment the magistrate, an official appointed by Dublin Castle and removable at its good pleasure, came to the rescue. He told the jury that it "must convict the prisoner or brand Sergeant Sheridan as a perjurer." Confronted with that alternative the jury convicted. As in the Dreyfus case, the honour of an official caste, the whole fabric of a semi-military authority was at stake. The result of such trials as these has been to destroy the faith of the people in the Courts. From a packed jury and a removable magistrate no Irishman hopes for justice. McGoohan's counsel, an experienced lawyer, despairing of an acquittal, advised his innocent client to plead guilty. Murphy, an ignorant peasant, conscious though he was of his innocence, actually did plead guilty in the hope of obtaining a lenient sentence. The whole story reads like a chapter from some reign of terror.

The sequel is more amazing still. In the end, Mr. Wyndham, rendered suspicious by the Ryan case, investigated Sheridan's past. Some of his accomplices in the Constabulary were alarmed, and told the truth. Mr. Wyndham released three of Sheridan's victims who were still in prison and gave them compensation. But there his activity ended. Sheridan himself was quietly dismissed, and was allowed to emigrate to America. Two of his police accomplices were permitted to resign. They had aided the commission of cowardly crimes and sworn away the liberties of innocent men, but this in no

way invalidated their claim to be rewarded. One of them, named Reid, received hush-money to the extent of £10; the other, Keegan, started life afresh with £200; donations officially known as "compassionate allowances"; the third rascal is still in the police force, although, in Mr. Wyndham's own words, he was "guilty of giving false evidence." As for Sheridan, though admittedly he had been guilty of maiming, arson, and perjury; though he remained at large for two months in England; though his present haunt in America is known, and though he could with ease be extradited, Mr. Wyndham refuses to put him on his trial. One at least of his accomplices has publicly offered to give evidence. Mr. Wyndham is sure enough of the facts to compensate his victims. Mr. Asquith, a former Home Secretary, declared positively in the course of the debate on July 24th, 1902, that there is "plenty of evidence" against Sheridan, and that "a skilful lawyer

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could have framed half-a-dozen indictments against him." Mr. Asquith will not be accused of an exaggerated sympathy with the popular cause in Ireland. We must not be surprised if Irishmen feel bitter where he is indignant. They hint that it is the fear of further disclosures which ties the Government's hands, and even suggest that Sheridan's real offence was the crime of being found out. That is demonstrably unjust, but it is true that under a system of coercion no administration can afford to be nice about its instruments. One reluctantly tolerates in a blood-hound the instincts that would be mischievous in a sheep-dog.

The facts of the Sheridan case could create only one emotion among patriotic Englishmen. Even the extremist, who is quite prepared to keep the Irish race under a perpetual system of coercion, justifies his policy on the ground that it is the best for Ireland herself. If there are many Sheridans in the Irish Constabulary that pleasing theory would crumble to the ground. The facts which sent a shudder through the House of Commons, on the whole received scant notice in the Press, though the Times went so far as to regret in its leading article

(July 24th) that Mr. Wyndham had not prosecuted Sheridan and dismissed his accomplices. "An Irish Night," however, is a head-line which warns the average reader to turn to some other column. Those who heard the story at all comforted themselves with the assurance that such a monster must be unique. This easy optimism must have received a shock during the brief Autumn Session of 1902. Mr. William O'Brien unearthed a recent but entirely distinct case hardly less shameful. Nature has after all produced her second Sheridan. His name was Sullivan, and he, too, was a sergeant. Realising that promotion depended on the detection of "political" crime, and finding that none existed in his district, he set to work to provoke it. He forged a letter purporting to come from the local president of the United Irish League, suggesting the moonlight murder of an unpopular neighbour, and addressed it, with a sum of money, to a youth who had a reputation for recklessness. To this day Sullivan is retained in the force; and his comrades, on whose word of honour depend the liberties of every man in Ireland, are tacitly assured of immunity in the work of provoking artificial crimes. These facts are known to every peasant

The Irish Constabulary, j

in Ireland.* In every constable who shadows his chosen leaders, stops a public speech with the veto from which there is no appeal, or swears to the evidence which sends a member of Parliament to hard labour, he sees only a potential Sheridan, or a Sullivan in waiting. He compares such cases as these with that of another perjured constable, named Rolls, who trumped up quite a trivial charge on the spur of the moment during Coronation week against an innocent citizen, and was at once dismissed, put on his trial, and condemned to five years' hard labour. But that happened in London. Rolls might have done as he pleased in Dublin.

It would be easy to denounce Mr. Wyndham for his refusal to punish this pair of criminals. It is more important to consider the system he represents. If the Government of Ireland were an institution which existed to protect the law-abiding majority from a small percentage of

criminals, it would indeed be the most futile and unfortunate of human inventions. But that is not its purpose. "The conquest of Ireland began in the year 1169," as the child said in his Board-school essay," and is still going on." The Royal Irish Constabulary is not exactly an invading force, but it is maintained on a military footing. The packed juries and removable magistrates are some stages in advance of the primitive courts-martial, but their habits of thought scarcely fit their civilian procedure. An English magistrate analyses evidence and passes sentence, secure in the knowledge that he has to answer only the dictates of his own conscience; authority is impotent to dismiss him. In Ireland, a magistrate is subject to Dublin Castle, an abstraction which stands for English rule, and in the last resort for a Chief Secretary who is answerable, not to Irish opinion but to one or other of the English parties. This magistrate himself is of the landlord caste, often an ex-agent or a promoted police officer ; and the permanent officials at the Castle have been reared in the same class-atmosphere. As for the jury system, it is an exact inversion of the English practice. The English theory of juries regards them as a protection accorded to

* For details from the Irish point of view, see two leaflets issued by the United Irish League, *Who is Sheridan ?* and *Sheridan the Second*. Price is. per 100 post free, from the Offices, 2, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.

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the citizen from the possible official bias of the permanent servants of the Crown. In Ireland the panels, which are carefully selected from among the Protestants on the jurylists, are chosen precisely because it is expected that they will share the attitude of the Executive towards Catholic and Nationalist prisoners. True, this process is usually confined to "political" cases, but Dublin Castle is not greatly interested in other classes of crime. In English history it is precisely of the functions of juries in political cases that the Constitution has been most jealous.

But nowhere is the tradition of conquest more dominant than in the Irish police force. In England the police are the servants of the public, enrolled to protect the public. The English police is an unarmed civilian force. It is maintained by local rates, and controlled, except in London, by local governing bodies—town or county councils, as the case may be. It is subject only to the same discipline which obtains in every branch of the Civil Service, and its officers are appointed by each community for itself. In Ireland, on the other hand, the Constabulary is as much a military force as the body which General Baden-Powell recently raised to maintain order in our new African conquests. It is armed with repeating rifles and ball cartridges. It is subject to rigid military discipline. It is supported only partially by local rates, and for the rest by the Imperial Exchequer. It is controlled, not by the town and county councils, but by the Secretary of State for Ireland. If our own policeman is a development of the citizen special constable, the Sheridans and the Sullivans are the legacy of conquest. They are not the servants but the masters of the people. They are the agents of an alien Government, which regards them as the first line of defence for its own system of ascendancy.

It is only when one turns from the constitution of this force to its duties, that one quite realises the part it plays in the perpetual conquest of Ireland. During the last fifty years the population of Ireland has dwindled by nearly one half. In the same period the strength of the Irish Constabulary has been doubled. The population of Ireland is now roughly the same as that of Scotland. There were in Ireland in 1900, some 12,320 police, against 4,911 in Scotland. The annual cost of the Irish Constabulary—which falls, by the way, ia

The Party of Ascendancy. 9

part on the English taxpayer—is ;^i,300,cxx>. The Scottish force costs less than a third of this sum—£\QOfyoo. The policing of Ireland costs 7s. per head of the whole population ; in Scotland the work is done for 2s. 2d., in England for 2s. 4d. One might suppose from these figures that Ireland was a country which riots in every

extravagance of crime. It is, on the contrary, the freest from crime of all the three kingdoms. During 1900, the criminal convictions in Puritan Scotland totalled 1,840, in Ireland there were only 1,087. Political discontent and economic misery that would have driven any other peasantry in Europe to anarchism, have left Ireland devout and relatively crimeless. To suppress crime in the ordinary sense of the word is the smallest part of the work of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Their functions are political, their business to repress the majority which elsewhere would be their paymaster and employer. Their duty is to " shadow " the leaders of the people, to follow a Member of Parliament or a local politician, on foot when he crosses the street, on their cycles when he drives in his car. Is there a gathering in the village, they are present to take notes of the speeches. Is there a mass-meeting on the hillside,* they attend in their hundreds to charge the unarmed crowd at the first spoken word which they are pleased to deem illegal. Above all, when an unmerciful landlord sends his agent to evict some miserable widow from her windy hovel and her patch of bog-land, they must march behind him in columns of four, with bayonets fixed, scouts on their wings, and skirmishers in the van. This formidable army is in effect the machine which collects the rent, the force that backs the party of ascendancy in its ceaseless war upon the people, sometimes by the odious work of espionage, sometimes by manufacturing and provoking crime, and, when need arises, by a crushing display of brute force. It is, however, only the active arm of a power which has other resources in reserve. On January 1st, 1899, the military garrison of Ireland numbered 23,687 officers and men. In Scotland, on the same day, there were 3,942.

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Only a long digression into history would serve to explain what, in fact, the Irish " party of ascendancy " is.

See page 19.

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It would be roughly true to describe the "loyalists" who compose it as the descendants of the conquerors, left behind to garrison the country after each successive invasion. It still numbers old families which came over before the Tudors, and peopled "the pale"—the rich Eastern counties which face England. In the North the majority of the population reckons the colonists planted on the land by James I. among its ancestors. Elsewhere it was in the interest of Cromwell's troopers that the native Irish were driven from the land, and cooped up in the bogs and mountains of the West. Conquest was followed by tyranny, tyranny by rebellion, and rebellion by plantation. The cycle was never varied, and it has made "the English garrison" what it 'is. No line of race, creed, party, or occupation would quite define it. It is not wholly Anglo-Saxon—it includes descendants of the Irish Kings, like The O'Connor Don. It is not wholly Protestant—it includes Catholic gentlemen like Lord de Freyne. It is not wholly a landlord's party—it includes the industrial population of Belfast, and the aggressive Orange proletariat of agricultural Ulster. It is not even identical with Irish Unionism—Mr. Horace Plunkett and Mr. T. W. Russell are devoting their lives to combating the ideals of "ascendency." Accident, indeed, has made sport of these natural divisions. If there are Celtic members of "the English garrison," the descendants of Cromwell's troopers in Tipperary have always been the vanguard of Nationalism. Mr. Parnell was an English Protestant, and Mr. Redmond is a landlord. But, roughly, the "garrison" is the Protestant English element in Catholic Celtic Ireland, the party of the landlords in a country of cotters and tenant farmers. It is, moreover, a "loyalist" party, but its loyalty is not an abstract devotion to the Unionist principle, or a sentimental respect for the dynasty. It is loyal to the status quo, loyal to the system which protects its interests, loyal for the same reasons that make the Nationalist majority disaffected. The party of ascendency has all the wealth, all the social prestige, and most of the education of Ireland on its side, but these advantages bring it no moral influence, because it trusts, not to these

natural levers but to the authority confided to it by the English Government across the Channel. To raise its rents and protect it from the hostility of the majority, exists all this machinery of packed juries and

The Monopoly of Power. 11

armed constables. In its feud the Sheridans commit perjury, and to stifle the protests against its rule the bayonets glitter at hillside meetings.

The policy of the party of ascendancy has been, and still is, to exclude the native Irish majority from every vestige of power in their own country. Up till 1778 it forbade Catholics to hear Mass, to keep schools, to practise at the Bar, and to hold landed property. Up till 1829 it successfully resisted Catholic Emancipation, and so silenced, even in the House of Commons, the protests of its subjects. Every halting amelioration of the land laws, every timid experiment in local government has encountered its strenuous opposition. It still regards every official appointment, every place of profit or power as its perquisite and its right. At the last General Election, under the lead of Lord Ardilaun, it even rose in revolt against the Unionist Government because Mr. Horace Plunkett, who has done so much for the material welfare of Ireland as the creator of the new Agricultural Board, had been courageous enough to appoint to an entirely non-political post a brilliant agricultural expert who happened to be a Catholic and a Nationalist. To this day, because of that seemingly commonplace act of tolerance and independence, Mr. Plunkett, though a Minister of the Crown, is unable to find a seat in any of the Unionist constituencies of Ireland. Statistics prove clearly enough how successful the party of ascendancy has been in keeping office in its own hands. According to a Parliamentary return obtained this autumn, there are in Ireland 1,014 Protestant magistrates against 251 Catholics. The population as a whole consists of three Catholics to one Protestant. It is governed by four Protestant magistrates and one Catholic.

It is not only by its monopoly of office that the party of ascendancy maintains its power. It has other resources which it uses to the full. The average Irish landlord who has mortgaged his estate to pay his lawyer's bill may not as a rule be wealthy. But there are the Londonderrys, the Abercorns, the Ardilauns, and the Barrymores, who devote to the defence of their landed interests fortunes made by other means. They doubtless contribute to the Unionist war-chest, and they can, so far as every party must be influenced by its subscribers, purchase twenty years of "resolute government" as the rest of us might buy as many yards of rope-end. In the Cabinet sit three great Irish

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landlords, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Londonderry, and Lord Lansdowne; Mr. Brodrick is heir to a large Irish estate, and Lord George Hamilton represents the powerful Abercorn family. In the House of Lords theirs is the only voice which speaks for Ireland, and on that assemblage of landlords hangs the fate of every measure that deals with the fortunes of the Irish peasant. If that were not enough they alone have the ear of society. In Dublin they make the Viceregal Court, in London they surround the Throne itself. Finally, as if wealth and social rank were bulwarks too unsubstantial, they have established in Ireland itself something approaching a monopoly of higher education. Up till the seventies Trinity College, Dublin, the only teaching university in Ireland in the full sense of the word, closed its doors to three-fourths of the Irish population. It was hedged rigidly by theological tests which no Catholic could pass. Native Irishmen who sought professional distinction were driven abroad, to Paris or Louvain, in search of knowledge and culture. Trinity College is nominally open to-day, but its atmosphere is as Protestant as ever, and rarely does a good Catholic dare to risk his faith within it. To its Catholic countrymen—though its motives may often be respectable—the party of ascendancy denies knowledge as it once denied votes and still refuses office, because knowledge, like votes and office, means power.

Viewed in relation to these facts the case of Sergeant Sheridan becomes intelligible. Of the Constabulary as a whole those who know it best are the readiest eulogists. But its prime virtue is obedience. It responds with the utmost sensitiveness to the dominant spirit at Dublin Castle. In such bodies of men power and isolation tend to breed a peculiar and anti-social code of honour. The wider the gulf between police and people, the more autocratic the authority they represent, the grosser and the more frequent will be their lapses. They are part of a system, and become a serious danger only when the habit of despotism has broken down the safeguards of justice. Without the packed jury and the removable magistrates, the Sheridans would be impotent. Mr. Wyndham's negligence was intelligible only because our whole system of government in Ireland is a defiance of the will of the Irish people. To Irish opinion he was absolutely indifferent, and

The Impotence of Irish Opinion,

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there his attitude was consistent. He might have stopped the outcry for the moment by prosecuting an offending constable. But the real offender is the whole system of racial ascendancy, whose maintenance demands a military police and a constant tampering with justice. The whole regime wears the appearance of something irregular and abnormal, only because we have extended to Ireland institutions that grew up under different conditions at home. Our citizen juries have no feud with the Executive because it rules only at their good pleasure. They do not suspect the police which they pay and control. Their impartiality is not subjected to the test of judging the chosen representatives of the people for using language which they heartily approve. In Ireland, while the alien dominion lasts, the packing of juries will be necessary and inevitable. We cannot expect a race to co-operate in its own coercion. If we approve the policy we must also tolerate the methods. The policy professes to aim at the maintenance of law and order. The methods are the negation of every principle and tradition of our Constitution. To administer justice

we corrupt the machinery of justice itself. The necessity that impels us to this monstrous contradiction is our resolution to exclude a majority from power, to assist a minority in its usurpation. The Irish Question is first of all a problem of administration. The solution of the land question, though it would dispossess the party of ascendancy of the lands which it has exploited since English rulers attempted to make of Ireland an English colony, would still leave it an official caste dependent on the favour of British parties. Nor have we approached the root of the difficulty while we dispute what better Parliamentary arrangements we shall make for the discussion of Irish legislation. These reforms would come no nearer to rendering the Sergeant Sheridans of the future responsible to Irish opinion.

CHAPTER II.

THE REVIVAL OF COERCION.

The previous chapter dealt with the normal administration of Ireland under a Unionist Government. The exploits of Sergeant Sheridan, the tampering with the machinery of justice that made them possible, the indifference of the authorities to Irish opinion which made them safe—these were not the incidents and conditions of some civil war. No exceptional legislation was in force, and the popular party, busied with its own internal feuds, offered only the passive and unorganised resistance that has never been wanting since the Union was consummated. With the closing of its ranks and the concentration of its efforts on the land question, which have come about since Mr. William O'Brien founded the United Irish League, and compelled the two wings of the Nationalist Party to amalgamate under Mr. Redmond's leadership, the Unionist Administration has developed another, if still a familiar phase. In normal years it plays with the forms of justice; under a regime of coercion it suppresses them. In normal years it ignores Irish opinion and its leaders; under coercion it makes war upon them.

There are circumstances which justify any Executive in resorting to exceptional legislation. During a reign of terror, when armed peasants, maddened by some unbearable wrong, have taken to

raiding by moonlight and to wayside ambushes; when their leaders are so overpowered by a sense of the justice of their cause that they will not persuade them to milder methods or punish them in a court of law, a Government has to choose between the odious subterfuge of packing juries or the franker expedient of suppressing them. It is for times like these that the tremendous instrument of repression known as the Crimes Act was designed. It was passed in 1887 with great reluctance by the Unionist Party, goaded to the necessary panic point by the Times' revelations about Parnellism and

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Coercion Without Crime. 15

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Crime. Mr. Pigott's forgeries were its real begetter. It abolishes such freedom of speech as we allow to Ireland in normal times. It authorises the suppression of newspapers. It suspends trial by jury, and permits the Government to remove the venue of a case, if it pleases, from a Catholic to an Orange district. In fine, it places the liberties of Irishmen at the mercy of two removable magistrates, who may or may not have a competent knowledge of the law, and are, at the best, the servants of an alien Executive.

A mere proclamation can set this Act in force at any moment. It was revived in the last weeks of 1901. The country over which this lesser state of siege was proclaimed was neither rebellious nor disorderly. It was, on the contrary, remarkably free from crime. From its foundation the United Irish League had set itself to discountenance violence. It was not the bayonets of the Royal Irish Constabulary which kept it quiet. They had failed during earlier agitations. They would have failed again during the past year but for the unceasing exhortations of every Irish leader, from Mr. Redmond himself down to the humble secretaries of the village branches of the League. To these efforts the statistics of Irish crime bear eloquent witness. The Coercion Act was first proclaimed over the counties of Mayo and

Roscommon. Their population is roughly the same as that of Cumberland or Monmouthshire. In the year 1901, the indictable offences in Mayo and Roscommon totalled 123 ; in Cumberland they numbered 283; in Monmouthshire they rose to the enormous figure of 580. In April, the Crimes Act was proclaimed over nine Irish counties and two cities. After the close of the Parliamentary Session it was further extended over practically the whole of Celtic Ireland, including even the City of Dublin. Yet in the debate on January 24th, the Irish Attorney-General (Mr. Atkinson) said :— j

There is no serious crime in Ireland. Hon. Members were perfectly right in saying that crimes of violence were never at a lower ebb than now. J

Mr. Wyndham stated with equal frankness that Ireland had never been freer from agrarian crime; and in the debate of April 17th he not only repeated this declaration, but administered an indignant rebuke to certain newspapers who had, he said, been guilty of " an infamous abuse " in

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attempting to create the impression that outrage is once more rampant.

What then, if not to suppress crime, was the object of this revival of coercion ? Its genesis is tolerably clear. The United Irish League had inscribed, as the first item on its programme, the buying out of all the Irish landlords at a fair, even a generous price, with the aid of compulsory powers. This was a sweeping measure, but so little seditious that Mr. T. W. Russell advocated it while still a member of Lord Salisbury's Administration. The first move of the landlords' party in the Cabinet was to procure Mr. Russell's dismissal; its second to demand the revival of coercion as a means to the suppression of Mr. O'Brien's League. Mr. Wyndham was slow to move, but in the long run he could only obey the policy dictated by a Cabinet in which sit five representatives of the Irish landlords. No attempt was made to conceal the quarter from which came the demand for coercion. In the

first week of April, 1902, two leaders of the irreconcilable party of ascendancy (Lord Clonbrock and Mr. Smith-Barry) issued a circular inviting the adherence of all the Irish landlords to a new defensive Trust. The second week of April closed with the publication of the Coercion proclamation, and below it stood as its sole sanction the signatures of these same two landlords, this time in their capacity of Privy Councillors. Their selection for this duty had a certain dramatic fitness. Coercion is, like the Landlords' Trust, a measure of defence adopted by a powerful class on behalf of its private interests.

The line of apology which Mr. Wyndham actually adopted when the revival of the Crimes Act was challenged during the debate of April 17th, deserves careful consideration. He could not allege the prevalence of crime in the ordinary sense of the word, but he claimed that society in Ireland was threatened by conspiracy, intimidation, and boycotting. About the facts there is no considerable dispute, for the United Irish League is not a secret society. In the old days of Irish agitation it used to be said that a tenants' movement could hope for success only when it approached a British Minister with the head of a landlord in one hand and the tail of a cow in another. That is now an obsolete cynicism. The new League has inspired no moonlighting, and the only dumb animals which

The Extent of Boycotting.

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have suffered were those which Sergeant Sheridan maimed. The methods of the national organisation are summed up in the pledge which Mr. Redmond made to the tenants of the De Freyne estate (January 23rd, 1902) :—

So long as these tenants stand by their present combination, and conduct their movement with clean hands on the lines of public, open agitation, and do not stain their cause with crime and outrage, so long will the Irish representatives give them every assistance and every support that is in their power.

The " combination " of which Mr. Redmond speaks is, of course, the "conspiracy" which Mr. Wyndham regards as an occasion for coercion. This is not the place to discuss the nature of the grievance which provoked it (see p. 31). It was a tenants' combination, which first of all urged Lord de Freyne to sell his wretched estates to the Congested District Board, that had just taken over the adjacent and very similar property of Lord Dillon. Failing in that petition, it demanded that the rents should be lowered to the figure which the Board had fixed for the holdings across the road. Failing again, the tenants determined to take what the landlord would not give, and pledged themselves to pay only the same reduced rents as their neighbours on the Dillon estate. This was, to be sure, an arbitrary proceeding, as a strike in a labour dispute is an arbitrary and now almost illegal proceeding. Before one assents to Mr. Wyndham's claim for special legislation against this type of conspiracy, one must reflect that Lord de Freyne has a weapon against the conspirators which no employer could ever use against a striker. Without the aid of any Crimes Act he can evict his tenants one by one. He can demand from them not only rent and arrears, but legal costs which amount to more than a cottier's yearly income. Behind Lord de Freyne stands the wealthy landlords' organisation, determined to make his dispute a trial of strength between the "garrison" and the nation. For months past desultory evictions have been in progress, with armed police to overawe the country-side; indeed, only the intervention of the local priests has prevented the depopulation of the district. During the first nine months of 1902, according to the official returns, there were 2,371 evictions in Ireland, affecting probably some 10,000 peasants. Illegal this tenants' movement may have been, but it was neither immoral

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nor dishonest. One must not be misled by English analogies into supposing that the tenant who demands a lower rent is repudiating a contract. His rent was not arrived at by a process of free commercial bargaining. It has been fixed by a Fair Rent Court, probably many years ago. When the tenant sees that another Government

department lowers the rents of the neighbouring estate by 7s. in the pound, rents that had also been fixed by the same Court, he naturally feels that the authority on which he accepted the valuation of his own lands has no longer any basis in reason or justice.

It was, however, even more on the alleged prevalence of boycotting that Mr. Wyndham founded his recourse to coercion. Boycotting is the inevitable consequence of a land war, as the more or less open persecution of "blacklegs" is an incident in most strikes. The victims of boycotting are chiefly the persons who have taken the farm of an evicted tenant. The tenants protest, as workmen- will protest against the filling of a post from which a comrade has been, in their opinion, wrongfully dismissed. Both methods of warfare are cruel to individuals. One wrong begets another, and a peasantry made callous by the misery of wholesale evictions becomes in its turn pitiless and reckless. But it is a form of class warfare against which the law is nearly impotent, as Lord Salisbury in his candid moments has admitted. What, for example, can a Government do in the case to which he once referred—a boycotted "landgrabber" enters the church at Mass-time and the whole parish silently rises and walks out? But what, in the light of statistics, is the extent of the evil which has induced Mr. Wyndham to suspend constitutional rights over three-fourths of Ireland? There are precedents in these matters. In 1887, when the Crimes Act was first put on the statute books in the days of the old Land League, there were 3,000 boycotted persons {i.e., about 600 cases) in Ireland. Mr. Wyndham, with all the help of his Constabulary, was only able to count 42 cases of boycotting in February (1902), 51 in March, and again 42 in October. What he meant by "boycotting" in these cases it is not easy to say. It was, he admitted, only "partial." An anonymous threatening letter perhaps had been sent, an individual had been denounced at a League meeting, or the villagers would turn their backs when the unpopular neighbour came

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Mr. GDonneWs Case.

among them. If "moonlighting" were on foot this would be serious. In a crimeless country it hardly seems a matter for the law. And yet Mr. Wyndham would not commit himself to any statement more precise than that 40 or 50 families were living in "an atmosphere of threat" (Debate of April 17th). Only five households were totally boycotted in March, unable, that is to say, to purchase the necessaries of life without police protection—five families in a population of nearly five millions. Even in Irish history there was never a more flimsy pretext than this for coercing a nation. According to the boycotting returns for October there is not a single case in the whole province of Leinster. Yet the counties of that province are not exempt from the Crimes Act. And the reason is obvious. Coercion is not a simple police measure. It is an incident in a class war.

Hidden away in the small print of the Times for the past year lie the records of this period of coercion. One biography is worth piecing together out of these neglected records. Mr. John O'Donnell is one of the men who rallied the Western peasants to the United Irish League. At the General Election of 1900, he was chosen member for South Mayo. On July 25th, 1901, he was announced to speak at a public meeting at Kilmaine, in his own constituency. The peasants who elected him assembled in large numbers. The meeting was orderly, and Mr. William Redmond, M.P., the brother of the Irish leader, was allowed to finish his speech without interruption. It was then Mr. O'Donnell's turn. The sequel is best told in the words of Mr. W Redmond himself (House of Commons, July 25th, 1902):—•

A police inspector at the head of 50 policemen, armed with rifles, advanced, and without explanation declared that my hon. friend (Mr. O'Donnell) would not be allowed to speak ; and when he came forward he was dragged from the platform up the village street, and lodged in the police station.

The crowd was then "dispersed, bludgeoned, and beaten."

It appears, however, that Mr. O'Donnell did sometimes contrive to address his constituents. Two months later we find him on his trial before two removable magistrates (see Times[^] January 9th—13th, 1902), without the benefit even of a packed jury, for the crime of "unlawful assembly." The police evidence did not suggest that the meeting he

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addressed was anything but orderly. The charge against Mr. O'Donnell was not even that he had used threatening or incendiary language which might have led to a breach of the peace. His offence was that he urged the tenants "to combine for the purpose of obtaining reduction of rents." The policeman on whose report the prosecution relied, admitted that "some of the speakers told the people that they should act within the law," but he was pleased to add that "he thought that advice was dishonestly given." On that evidence Mr. O'Donnell was convicted, and imprisoned for two months.

Six months elapsed, and on the eve of the Autumn Session of Parliament Mr. O'Donnell, for a political speech at a meeting in the town of Birr, was once more sentenced by a pair of removable magistrates, without a jury, in a Coercion Court. It was a peculiarly vindictive sentence, so contrived that he should spend six weeks of his three months of hard labour on a plank bed and subsist for nine days on a diet of bread and water. The hearing of an appeal, however, allowed him to attend Parliament for a few days.* The Session which was to have been devoted to English Education opened with a demand from the Irish members for a day on which to discuss the revival of coercion, extended since Parliament last met over the greater part of Ireland. Mr. Balfour, hardly rising from his seat, met them with a curt and decisive refusal. Two or three members were allowed to press this demand. Then Mr. O'Donnell rose. At once Mr. Balfour moved the closure. Mr. O'Donnell behaved foolishly. He forgot that while the constitutional rights of Irishmen can be signed away with the scratch of an official pen, the decorous

customs of the British House of Commons remain sacred and inviolable. With two terms of imprisonment behind him and a brutal sentence still to serve, dragged from his platform by the Irish police when he ventured to address his own constituents, closed by Mr. Balfour when he rose in Parliament to voice their grievances, for a brief moment of anger he defied the proprieties which sometimes seem dearer to the House of Commons than the liberties of those it rules. He tried to speak, disregarded the closure, and even left his seat to shake his fist in Mr. Balfour's face. The episode was brief,

* The sentence has now been reduced to one month's imprisonment. (January, 1903.)

A MedicBval Weapon, 21

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and while the House of Commons moved Mr. O'Donnell's suspension, he quietly walked out to his plank bed and hard labour.

The history of Mr. O'Donnell might be repeated and varied at will. Dublin Castle usually preferred to choose its victims from among the elected leaders of the people. Twelve Irish Members of Parliament in all have been sentenced to imprisonment under the Crimes Act, not to mention newspaper editors and members of county and district councils. The sentences range from six to one month's hard labour. In every case the offence was one of the lip or the pen, an expression of opinion which in England, if it were tried at all, would be tried with every presumption in the prisoner's favour before a jury of his equals, selected at random. Whatever these men may have said or written, they had a whole nation behind them, a nation which elected them expressly to say this particular thing. They were tried by the removable servants of the Executive and punished for political utterances embarrassing to the Executive. Mr. O'Donnell, moreover, was not the worst sufferer from coercion. One of these political prisoners (Mr. P. J. Flanagan), a nervous and delicate man accustomed to comfort, and highly respected in his district, has lost his reason under the degradations of gaol life, and is now finishing

his four months of hard labour in a lunatic asylum. The Irish people contrast such brutalities as this with Mr. Wyndham's tolerance towards the perjurer Sheridan.

But in Ireland it is not always necessary to convict a man of a specific offence. There is a rusty statute, passed in the year 1360, in the reign of Edward III., to facilitate the summary punishment of vagrants and tramps.* It authorises the punishment at the magistrate's discretion of anyone whom he may be pleased to consider a bad character. This Act, passed for the suppression of brigandage in mediaeval England, is used in modern Ireland as a political weapon. It has long been obsolete and forgotten in England. In Ireland it may be used even when no Coercion Act is in force. There is absolutely no limit to the judge's discretion ; indeed Judge Gibson even ruled (King's Bench Division, Dublin, 26th February, 1901) that in cases where surety is demanded for good behaviour,

* See Law Times^ 28th June, 1902.

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" evidence on behalf of the defendant cannot be heard." * A Russian bureaucrat could hardly ask for ampler powers. An Irish leader makes a speech which Dublin Castle dislikes. But he has, let us suppose, been careful to keep within the law, and even under the Crimes Act it would be useless to prosecute him. There remains the procedure which Norman England invented for its tramps. He need only be summoned under this Act of Edward III. No specific charge need be made; it is only necessary to require him to find sureties for his future good behaviour. If he is a man of any spirit he will refuse, and he can then be sent without further trouble to prison. That was the case of Mr. William Redmond, for example. Nothing in his past made him amenable even to coercion law. He has been punished for what he may hereafter do. He is at present expiating his future under a six months' sentence. In this topsy-turvy land perjured policemen are rewarded with " compassionate allowances," while to the leaders

of the people we mete out the treatment designed for vagabonds in the feudal ages.

If the revival of coercion was unnecessary, this chapter of recent history is a record of wanton provocation; if the revival was necessary, it is a comment on the failure of a century of English rule. We are still unable to dispense with the barbarous shifts of the Middle Ages. We are still treating the leaders of the people like common felons. We are still trying political offences as they are tried in Russia. The Crimes Act is nominally an exceptional law. It is in truth a familiar weapon with which few English administrations have been able to dispense. There have been thirteen such Acts since the Union that professedly admitted Ireland to the benefits of the British Constitution, and the present measure is by no means the worst of its kind. To be sure, some degree of agitation always preceded these reprisals. But it is the commonplace of Irish history that the British Parliament has never done anything for Ireland without agitation. Grattan's Parliament owed its existence to 60,000 Irish volunteers with muskets in their hands. Peel, the most embittered opponent of Catholic

* See *Humours of Law and Order in Ireland*, by Alfred Webb. Dublin : M, and S. Eaton.

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\ Ireland at the Coronation. 23

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Emancipation, was forced to grant it only, as he himself boldly confessed, because the alternative was civil war. The practice of levying Anglican tithes on Catholic peasants was abolished after a series of bloody battles between police and people. The disestablishment of the Irish Church was the reward of Fenianism, and the terrorism of the Land League led to drastic land reform. The moral has not been lost on Irishmen. They are neither grateful for the grudging reforms of the past, nor scrupulous in their manner of

demanding more. Coercion does not represent to them the majesty of the offended law. It is simply the last effort of an alien Government to delay a graceless surrender. \

It is still the fashion on English platforms to denounce Irishmen because they alone in this "free, tolerant, unaggressive Empire" are not loyal. We forget that we have celebrated each of our great Imperial festivals with coercion. We passed the Act of 1887 during Queen Victoria's Jubilee. While all the climates of the earth sent their volunteer contingents to march in her procession, from Ireland came only a black cohort of armed constabulary. At the King's Coronation we revived that Act. The descendants of amnestied Canadian rebels, grateful for selfgovernment, came to do King Edward homage. The children of pardoned Indian mutineers formed his bodyguard. Only in Ireland were we still busied in prosecuting the leaders of the people, and in waging war upon the aspirations of a race. And only in Ireland did the National party meet on our day of rejoicing to strike a note of protest and of discord.

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CHAPTER III.

THE LAND QUESTION.

The arid pages of the Irish Census are themselves the most effective pamphlet which could be written on British rule in Ireland. Here in the tables of emigration are the annals of that despair which has slowly sapped the hopes of a sanguine race. It is not, like our own Colonial history, a record of expansion and conquest. The Irish have not naturally sought the sea and the remote West in a quest of riches and adventure, as did our own countrymen, who left England not so much under the pressure of want as at the bidding of their restless and exuberant energies. These Irish emigrants were exiles, not

empire-builders. The first half of the century had been a period of increase. The peasantry were miserably poor, but Irish agriculture enjoyed its share of the artificial benefits of the Corn Laws. The population rose from five to close on nine millions. Then came the famine, and with it the tide of emigration which to this day has hardly slackened. Hunger and want played their part, but the torch and crowbar of the landlord were busy in the work of eviction. The tenant might have built the cottage himself, drained the bog and made it arable, he might even have paid his rackrent punctually; but that, in those days, in no way prevented the landlord from doing as he pleased with " his own." The only real obstacles to the depopulation of Ireland were the secret societies, which met oppression with outrage. The laws have been revolutionised in the last generation, but still without doing much to satisfy the landhunger of the peasants. In the last fifty years 3,841,419 Irishmen have emigrated, in the last decade as many 2is 433*526—nearly a tenth of the whole population. While the rest of the United Kingdom increased its popu

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lation by twelve per cent, in the last ten years, thaⁱ of Ireland declined by over five, j

The problenn is not how best some irresistible economic force can be circumvented. The poverty of Ireland depends neither on the nature of the soil, nor the waywardness of the world's markets, nor yet on the perverseness of the Irish character itself It depends on a system of land tenure, the legacy of centuries of conquest. The thing was an artificial creation, and what a legislature did, it can undo. The successive colonisations and plantations by Tudors and Stuarts made of the native Irish a class of landless serfs. Up till the close of the eighteenth century no Catholic might own an acre of his native soil. The conquerors recognised none of the duties of a landlord. They neither built nor repaired the tenants' hovels, neither drained the land nor fenced the fields. What agricultural value a farm or a croft possessed it owed entirely to the improvements of successive

tenants. The rent, which the landlord levied, on land and improvements alike, was historically a tribute which England authorised him to collect as a reward for political services to herself. It was the wages of "garrison" duty. For seventy years after the Union this system was legalised and perpetuated by the English Parliament under the influence of a fatal misunderstanding. It persisted in legislating as though the relation of landlord and tenant were the same in Ireland as in England. That false analogy lies at the root of most of the agitation, the poverty, and the outrage which have made Irish history for a century. It also explains the prejudice of the uninformed Englishman who saw only dishonesty in the Irish peasant, whose ideas of property differed fundamentally from his own. It illustrates better than all else in the history of the Union the arrogance of which one nation is guilty when it undertakes to legislate for another. With the facts in view the absurdity is obvious, and luckily it is now sufficiently recognised. An English landlord lets a farm, an Irish landlord lets nothing but the land. That is the situation in a sentence. When the Englishman charges a rent, in practice he does little more than reap a moderate interest on the money which he and his predecessors have spent on buildings and improvements. The Irish landlord up till 1881 reaped where he had not sown, rented the tenant on the fruits of his predecessors' toil, and rack-rented him on his own improve

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ments. He could evict without a penny of compensation, and appropriate with a word the toil of generations. Spoliation and robbery are words too often used in Irish controversies. There is no other name for such a system as this. While it lasted, and it lasted through four-fifths of the Union period, it caused the tenants to regard the landlords as their natural oppressors, widened the breach that history, race, and religion had made, and taught Irishmen to see in the law and the bayonets on which it rested only the sanctions of injustice and tyranny. It sapped their energies, and turned their

hopes to politics. Why labour, argued the peasant, for the profit of another, or "improve" a farm from which the caprice of an overlord may drive one at the year's end? And so it came about that his thoughts ran ever to revolution.

The political instinct of the Irish peasant was not unsound. In the long run he literally coerced the British Parliament into facing the facts. Reason and information had done nothing. In 1845, a Royal Commission, under the Earl of Devon, a great Irish landowner, was appointed to study the whole question of tenure. It presented a careful report, and summed up in favour of all those tenant rights to which the Statute-book remained a stranger until 1881. The landlord party in the House was too strong to be dislodged by persuasion and exposure. It was the Land League which terrified England into doing what the Devon Commission had advised in vain. The first Irish Land Act—and it remained almost a dead letter—which showed that England had begun to face the question, was passed by Mr. Gladstone in 1870, and was designed to prevent wholesale and arbitrary evictions. There was no large reform, however, until 1881, when Mr. Gladstone carried the real charter of the Irish peasant. It gave him a property in his own improvements. It protected him from capricious eviction. It created a Court whose duty it was to find out what on each holding is really the landlord's property, and to fix a fair rent upon that alone. It gave the tenant, in a word, "the three F's," as they have come to be called—fixity of tenure, a fair rent, and free sale.

This new system of land tenure was a system of dual ownership. It created a partnership between the two elements in Irish society whose discords had made the

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history of the previous eighty years a story of agitation and outrage, eviction and coercion. Their interests remained hostile, and the relationship which began in the Courts required their constant

intervention. Dual Ownership has broken down in a welter of litigation. To the landlord it is a grievance that he must go to Courts at all. He would prefer to bargain, his back firmly planted against the whole structure of society and the system of ascendancy, with the solitary peasant whose only effective choice was to cling to his holding at any price, or else emigrate to America. The Fair Rent Court has never been known to raise a rent. In fifteen years it has lowered rents at the first revision on an average by twenty per cent., at the second by a further twenty-two per cent. The Courts appear to realise that Irish rents have been grossly excessive, but they have preferred to deal out justice by instalments, a process irritating to the tenants, yet sufficiently menacing to the landlords. No section of the community regards the Land Courts with any confidence. The landlord sees in them the reluctant instruments of a policy of spoliation. The tenant regards them, as he regards the whole Irish Bench, as an outlying bulwark of the party of ascendancy. They have, in fact, done their utmost to wrest the plain meaning of the Acts in the landlords' favour, and from 1881 to 1896 a single decision {Adams v. Dunseath) all but obliterated the tenant's property in his own improvements. In this poor country a malign fate drives both classes into the costliest litigation. Against almost every decision of the Fair Rent Courts one side or the other appeals.* The delay that results amounts, as Mr. Wyndham has admitted, to " a denial of justice." The consequence, as he put it in his Bolton speech the other day, is that "the soil of Ireland is starved both of the landlord's capital and the tenant's industry. In a country mainly dependent on agriculture, we see both classes doomed to a perpetual litigation. Nothing can save Ireland till she is delivered from that curse."

Mr. Gladstone's system of dual ownership was in fact no more than a half-way house between serfdom and peasant proprietorship. The idea of making landlord and peasant partners and co-owners has in practice broken

* For details see Mr. T. W. Russell's Ireland and the Empire. London: Grant Richards. Price 6s.

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down, and it is admitted on all sides, by Mr. Wyndham and the Government as well as by the tenants' leaders, that the only hopeful solution lies in the total extinction of the landlord's interest in the soil. That solution has long since passed the stage of experiment. Mr. Bright was the first to harbour the idea, and as early as 1869, under the Act which disestablished the Irish Church, some 6,057 peasant proprietors were enabled to become owners of the glebe lands. Under three subsequent schemes 26,976 tenants were emancipated from landlordism. Finally, in 1891, Mr. Balfour declared the day of experiment over, definitely adopted the policy of gradual voluntary purchase in an Act which was revised and confirmed in 1896, and pledged Imperial credit for the purpose to the extent of thirty-three millions. In all 62,241 tenants have benefited by these Acts. There is nothing but success to report. The tenant whose landlord agrees to sell, pays less in purchase instalments than he used to pay in rent. He is delivered from litigation. He becomes his own master and works with a will, assured that he and his sons will enjoy for all time the fruit of his toil. The zeal which he once reserved for agitation now goes to the work of improving his little property. Estates which a few years ago were hillside slums have become orderly peasant communities. Crime has vanished with the oppression and the misery which produced it, and in these favoured districts the despairing rush of emigrants to happier lands has been stayed. The peasant who was only dragooned into paying his rent by a legion of armed policemen faces his obligation to the State with alacrity. He meets justice with honesty, and Mr. Wyndham was able to report in his speech of March 25th, 1902, that

Land Purchase has this merit, that the State has incurred no loss under it, and is, I believe, exposed to no risk. Under the Acts of 1891 and 1896 more than 30,000 purchasers are paying annually ;[^] 171,214 to the State. I have no case of bad debts to offer.

Here at last is a chapter in the history of England's relations with Ireland which can be read without shame.

Unfortunately the Purchase Acts seem already to have exhausted their usefulness. Ireland is still entitled to over twenty millions of the credit voted in 1891, but the sales of land have grown with each year fewer and seem at length

The Poverty of the West, 29

to have ceased. The landlords who have sold were mainly absentees, men who really relied on other investments for their income. The Irish landlord who in any degree looks to his rents for a livelihood, has not on the whole availed himself of the Acts. And yet his case is far from enviable. The Fair Rent Courts have reduced his nominal income by 42 per cent, in fifteen years, and further reductions are in sight. Litigation eats his revenues, and the periodical agrarian agitations threaten their very source. To a man of kindly nature, especially if the national revival has stirred some patriotic spring within him, his position as a sort of privileged pariah among the masses of his countrymen can be nothing less than painful. Interest and sentiment alike plead with him to sell. He abandons no such beneficent power as an English landowner may wield. Not for him the satisfaction of riding over a great estate which owes its prosperity to his improvements, his influence, his skilful expenditure of money and thought. He is no longer a landlord, he is a mere receiver of rents. The question for him is simply whether he can afford to exchange a dwindling and uncertain income for a secure but rather smaller annuity. In principle he is not unwilling. The result of the recent plebiscite of landowners goes to prove that over a thousand would gladly sell to their tenants under somewhat more generous terms.

On the side of the tenants the very success of the Purchase Acts has made the present condition of things impossible. These Acts have created a class of privileged tenants (62,241 in all) too small to make an appreciable difference in the condition of the vast multitude (the total number of agricultural holdings is 586,717) who live by the land, but large enough to render the unemancipated many impatient and discontented. The policy of reforming by instalments inevitably

creates as many anomalies as it remedies. In these anomalies began the agitation which has now leagued the tenantry of Ireland, Protestant as well as Catholic, in a movement to rid the country of landlordism. The typical case was in the West, and there coercion was first revived. To the peasants of Connaught the question is one of life and death. There is land enough for all, but the emigration of so many millions has not distributed it more evenly. The grazing farms have taken soil that might well be tilled, and incessant evictions have driven the Celtic peasantry once more to the hills and bogs, as Cromwell's

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troopers drove them after the massacres of Wexford and Drogheda. There are typical districts* in Connaught from which the total of emigrants to America in the last fifty years practically equals the present population. For those who remain there are special trains and special boats every week of the season to carry their labour to reap the harvests of England. For every acre in the possession of the peasantry on which they can grow food, ten are held by landlords and graziers for raising cattle for export. Practically all of these graziers are absentee capitalists. Land which once was tilled has reverted to heather, and a single herdsman draws a meagre wage from a hillside which might maintain ten thrifty crofter families. Nowhere in Europe, except perhaps in Turkey and in Russia, could a parallel be found to the misery which prevails. As many as 7,683 Irish families, according to the last Census, are still living like Kaffirs in mud huts. One may read in the recent report of the Local Taxation Commission the bald statement that "in certain parts of Ireland there are only two classes of the population, the poor and the destitute." For a measure of this poverty and destitution one need only turn to reports of the Congested Districts Board, which has laboriously investigated the domestic finances of typical families in the West. It found that the receipts of a family in "ordinary circumstances" amounted in one year to ;[^]23 8s. 7d., or 9s. a week. An English labourer thinks himself ill-circumstanced if he does not eat meat at least three times a week. In Connaught the luxury is bread. The

staple food of the people—their diet like their housing resembles that of Kaffirs—is the coarse Indian meal, which we in England give to our dogs and our poultry. The landlord is not the only power that exacts an exorbitant tribute on this poverty. Of its £2[^] this typical family, whose budget the Congested Districts Board investigated, spent £\<[^] on Indian meal, tea, sugar, and tobacco. Every one of these items, since the Corn Duty came into force, is taxed. The rent which these families pay for their strips of reclaimed bog-land is not an " economic " rent. It is not, that is to say, a margin which remains for the owner after the cultivator has dug a subsistence from the soil. It is a tribute which the law enables the landlord to levy on the

* See *The Problem of the West*. Dublin; M. and S. Eaton, 56, Mid Abbey Street.

The Case for Peasant Ownership.

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earnings of the emigrants who go in their thousands from these districts to reap the harvest in Great Britain, and on the wages of the Irish servant girls who send home their savings from Chicago and Philadelphia.

Conceive, then, what it means for a peasantry steeped in this squalor of want and despair, when their landlord suddenly decides to sell to the State. The historic instance is the case of the Dillon tenants. Lord Dillon sold his interest in his estate in County Mayo to the Congested District Board. Immediately the Board wiped out arrears of rent that amounted to ;[^]20,000. It reduced the rents of some 4,000 cottier tenants by thirty-three per cent, with a further reduction of ten per cent, in prospect at the end of ten years. At the same time it enlarged the peasants' holdings by distributing the grass farms among them, constructed drains and roads, substituted neat whitewashed cottages for the mud hovels, and offered the most generous assistance in improving the degenerate breeds of poultry and cattle. And with all these gains it is no longer a rent that the tenant pays, but a purchase instalment. The Board has re-sold to the

tenant. In forty-nine years he or his son will own a holding which, thanks to his own hard work, will in time possess a substantial value. Meanwhile, provided he pays his moderate assessment with reasonable regularity, he is his own master. The fear of eviction has gone from him, and he has a piece of land on which he can hope to live without becoming for half the year a nomad exile, reaping for wages the harvests of wealthier men.

Marching with the Dillon estate, on the same bleak hillsides and barren bog-lands, is another which belongs to a landlord who does not choose to sell. The Congested District Board has offered Lord de Freyne the same terms as Lord Dillon, but he prefers, with the aid of armies of military police, to draw his rents as before. His tenants demand the same favours which the State has conferred upon their neighbours. Is it reasonable, they ask, that the man over the hedge should pay 13s. 4d. where they pay 20s. ? Is it right that the State should help him to build a clean and roomy cottage, while they fight with the elements in a filthy cabin of mud ? Is it tolerable that he should leave an unencumbered possession to his son, while they can bequeath only a legacy of debt and litigation? It

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32 The Land Question.

needs no rhetoric or agitation to enforce the meaning of such a contrast.

There is only one way of remedying this grievance. The Dillon estate cannot be restored to its landlord. The De Freyne estate, and others like it, must, if necessary, be purchased by compulsion, as a slum property in an English town may be forcibly purchased by the municipality. As early as 1895 the Congested District Board unanimously demanded compulsory powers. The Government shrinks from that remedy. It has preferred to revive coercion. But the inequality remains, and the protest of those it wrongs has not been silenced.

It is easy to excite English prejudice by representing the Irish demand as a vast scheme of confiscation. The plan involves at first sight a brusque interference with private property. But an Irish rent is already a charge fixed by the State, which has for thirty years stood outside the domain of contract and bargaining. The Act of 1881 overrode political economy, and we cannot apply to the state of things it created the conventional notions of property. But after all there is nothing novel in the principle of compulsory sale. There is no reason why an Irish bog should be considered more sacred and inviolable than an English slum. But luckily no wholesale process of compulsion will be necessary, since the majority of the landlords are willing to sell. The problem is simply to fix: a price which will neither burden the tenant too heavily nor reduce the landlord's income too harshly. Probably the interest of the landlords in the land could be bought for ;^icx),000,000. It is this sum which the State is asked to guarantee. The taxpayer will not be called upon to provide a penny of this money. It is only necessary that he should consent to the floating of a loan. There is no risk—experiment has prOved the honesty of the Irish peasant. The security is the land itself, and in fifty years the whole sum, interest as well as principal, will have been paid back by instalments. It is just possible that the State may be asked to provide a bonus to compensate the landlords for compulsory disturbance, but this could hardly amount to more than five, or at most, ten millions—less, probably, than the sum we gave after the war to resettle South Africa. These facts must be weighed in this connection:—

Tfte Land Conference.

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(i) Ireland is heavily over-taxed. The Royal Commission appointed in 1894 reported by a majority of twelve to one that while we raise in Ireland one-eleventh of our total tax-revenues, her taxable capacity really stands to that of the United Kingdom as a whole, only as one to twenty. Financially, then, as well as morally we owe a debt to Ireland.

(2) The buying out of the landlords would enable us to effect great economies in administration. The armed police, the disproportionate military force, the legions of magistrates whom we pay to keep order in a "crimeless" country —these largely exist to maintain the landlord caste in its false position, to coerce the tenantry and collect the rent

(3) Finally, it is only because we refuse to allow to Ireland as a whole the power which every municipality enjoys of raising money by loan, that she is obliged to appeal to our generosity at all. If we would but consent to grant her any national organisation, however rudimentary, she would be able to raise for herself in the money market the sums which she requires to work out her own salvation.

In all the discussion about the methods of land purchase one point is vital. A solution which goes to work " step by step " can only aggravate the intolerable inequalities which now exist. It is not enough if we emancipate from landlordism a score of peasants where ten are free to-day. That could only deepen the discontent of the unemancipated majority. The more widely a coveted privilege is diffused the more galling does it seem to be excluded from its benefits. If the State is to confer occupying ownership on the peasants the gift must be universal.

I

THE LAND CONFERENCE.

While these pages were in the press, a conference between eight representatives of Irish landlords and tenants met in Dublin. These included Lords Dunraven and Mayo on one side, and Messrs. O'Brien and Russell on the other. It has presented a unanimous report. This recommends a universal system of land purchase, on terms extremely generous to the landlords, which are to be open to them for five years. In the meantime, the demand for compulsion is postponed. Few landlords would be likely to refuse terms which

will assure them an annuity, to be guaranteed by the State, equivalent to their present maximum nett income from rents, as fixed by the Courts at the second revision. The tenants' representatives explained that, while anxious to abolish landlordism, they wish to encourage the landed gentry to remain in Ireland. To this end their private demesnes and their sporting rights are to be respected. The Landlords' Convention, including the strictest sect of the ascendancy party, led by the Duke of Abercorn, has already approved this solution. It only remains to be seen how far the Government will go towards adopting a scheme which involves not merely a loan but a large grant from the Imperial Exchequer.

This amazing unanimity, under conditions that made for irritation, is the most striking development in recent Irish history. The future of the land question now rests with the British taxpayer. The rather extravagant terms which the Dublin scheme offers to the landlords make the chief difficulty. The average market price of land in Ireland is now twenty or twenty-one years' purchase. Lord Dunraven's scheme offers practically thirty years' purchase, less 10 per cent., which is supposed to represent the cost of rentcollection. It makes no allowance for bad debts, unlet farms, and the probable decline of agricultural values in the future. Mr. Davitt calculates that this generosity means a bonus to the landlords of some forty millions, of which the Exchequer and the tenants will have to pay nearly equal shares. On the other hand The O'Conor Don, supported by Mr. Redmond, estimates that the burden to the taxpayer, if spread over ninety-seven years, need not exceed ;[^] 166,000 per annum—a relatively trivial sum, just equal to the cost of the late war for a single day. Mr. Russell, who is careful in handling figures, thinks that a successful scheme of land-purchase would save the Exchequer as much as ;ⁱ1,000,000 per annum, by reducing the cost of administration. The risk, however, is that a partial and niggardly scheme, such as Mr. Wyndham proposed last Session, so far from bringing appeasement, would only aggravate the present unrest.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman has suggested that some representative Irish body ought to be created, which will stand

between the Exchequer and the Irish tenant, to administer this scheme and guarantee the British taxpayer against any 'possible risk. The scheme, as Mr. Davitt points out, will in practice amount, during the next half century, to the nationalisation of the land. It vastly enhances the importance of the State in the daily life of Ireland, and in that way raises new political problems, while it solves the old.

CHAPTER

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A PLEA FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT.

I

Paradoxical though it may seem, this year of agitation and repression in Ireland is perhaps more pregnant with hope than any period since the fall of Mr. Parnell. The attempt to maintain inequality by coercion has broken down. A new Land Bill of a large and sweeping character has been promised. To look to Mr. Balfour for a solution of the land question by the general extension of occupying ownership would not, perhaps, be unduly sanguine. To solve that problem in a generous way is to achieve besides much indirect good. Without the sting of poverty and the consciousness of personal wrong, future Irish agitations would inevitably assume a milder and more constitutional form. The pretext for coercion would be gone. No longer at war with the tenantry, the landed class, whose fears and panics have always supplied the stimulus for the exercise of arbitrary power, would tend to lose its solidarity, merge with the mass of its countrymen, and in time adopt a more national habit of thought. The instruments of coercion, the military police and the army of legal officials, are costly as well as obnoxious. The conviction that they are also needless would reinforce the obvious argument of the purse. Inevitably the quasimilitary government of Ireland would tend to grow civilian.

It is possible to admit that a final solution of the land question may have consequences so beneficent as these[^] and still to doubt its adequacy as a method of appeasement. The roots of Ireland's discontent are not all in her rackrented bogs. If nothing but her poverty and the singularity of her land system separated her from the rest of the United Kingdom, the distinction could be smoothed away by such a diffusion of wealth and contentment as a universal measure of Land Purchase seems to promise*

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But nothing in a Land Purchase Act could obliterate the ideal barriers that separate England from Ireland—the sense of nationality, the pride of race, the memory of historic wrongs, the attachment of a faithful people to a religion that boasts a tradition of martyrdom and persecution beside which our own annals of Reformation and Dissent are brief Ireland may be more prosperous and crimeless today than at any period since the Union. Her comparative comfort and repose have only given her the more leisure to strengthen these ideal barriers. The Gaelic movement has long passed the stage of ridicule. The attempt to revive the/ Irish language has had a degree of success which betrays the trend of the people's thinking. But this is only one symptom of a national awakening. A new literature and a new theatre have sprung into being, ambitious only to give to the Irish mind a fresh and a national expression, to exaggerate, it may be, what is peculiar to the Celtic spirit, to play on its delicacies, its subtleties, its fancies, with all the extravagance of a race which at last is coming to its own. With these tendencies in evidence it seems futile to expect that a further diffusion of comfort, and therefore of leisure, can result in any weakening of the sense of nationality. It would be more plausible to argue that an access of strength and self-respect must lend new force to the demand for self-government. A race which feels a new independence in all the personal relations of life is likely to be less tolerant than ever of an alien authority. Abolish the local despotism of the landlord, and the rule at Dublin

Castle of a Minister responsible not to Irish opinion but to an English party, becomes an anomaly without parallel, a violation of what is natural and customary. That a prosperous Ireland with new hopes, new needs, new interests, should confide the growing volume of her affairs to the accidents of English party politics, will seem an absurdity less defensible than the "resolute government" by an alien Power of a poor and distracted people.

The Act of Union—an Act passed by corruption in defiance of Irish opinion—nominally admitted the Irish people to the benefits of the British Constitution, and to Parliamentary government. In what sense can Ireland be said to enjoy Parliamentary government? Nominally the Irish

Has Ireland Parliamentary Government? 37

members have all the rights of British members to initiate legislation, to criticise and question the Executive, and to control the expenditure of money. An Irish party might, if it pleased, draft Irish Bills and submit them to the House of Commons. In practice that privilege is obsolete. The time of the House is under the absolute control of the Government, and no Bill on which the leader of the British majority looked askance could ever hope to go further than a second reading. But even if an Irish Bill has secured the approval of the Cabinet, the House of Commons and its leader, as did the Home Rule Bill of 1893, there still awaits it the House of Lords, a Chamber crowded with Irish landlords, and containing not a single representative of the Irish popular party.

The right to question and criticise the Executive is apparently more freely recognised. The Irish members do, in fact, maintain an incessant guerilla warfare by means of questions. In October last we saw the House of Commons, called together to discuss a Bill for the reorganisation of the whole system of English education, adjourned by the Irish members to debate whether the Customs House at Belfast should have iron railings round its steps. On the other hand, Mr. Balfour refused to grant the Irish party a day to debate the revival of coercion. The right of criticism which Ireland enjoys is, in fact, far

from being an unmixed advantage either to her or to us. It is not the criticism of a responsible party, which may one day be called to put its theories to the test of administration. It is the reckless criticism of a party of protest permanently excluded from power. We have never given to Irishmen in their own country that opportunity of acquiring experience in the art of government which alone can make criticism helpful. The result is that there is not in Irish politics that temper of tolerance and moderation which governs English parties. For centuries the race has been criticising without the opportunity for action. It has learned to denounce, to satirise, to expose, but not to construct or to administer. Its malady is a mania for criticism, and nothing will ever cure it save the responsibilities which we have always denied. We are keeping Hamlet for ever from his heritage, and we blame him for his melancholy and his whirling words.

The control which Ireland enjoys over her finances is no less illusory than her right to initiate legislation. The

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Irish Estimates are usually left till the last days of the Session. They are carried by a wholesale use of the closure, and often without so much as an appearance of detailed debate. The English members, with no knowledge of the subject and no desire to learn, spend their time in the reading-room and troop to record a perfunctory party vote when the division bell sounds. Even if they were as keen as they are, in fact, indifferent, the case would not be bettered. They must support their party, and their party is elected partly on Imperial, partly on English, but never on Irish issues. There may be an overwhelming case for a pier in some Irish port, the refusal to prosecute Sergeant Sheridan may be a scandal which even the Times regrets; but to admit this in the division lobby would involve the overthrow, not of an Irish but of the Imperial Government.

But after all, the reader may object, the Irish vote counts for something. It may hold the balance between English parties in the House of Commons, and it controls a score of constituencies in England and Scotland at a general election. This is true to a limited

extent, and so far as it is true it only aggravates one absurdity by another. Since 1885 the Irish vote has held the balance between English parties for three years, and even during that period it was effectively checked by the House of Lords. The same thing will never happen again if Lord Rosebery and Mr. Asquith mean what they have said. They have pledged themselves to refuse office rather than accept it at the mercy of an Irish party. It has come then to this, that both parties in the State conspire to exclude Ireland not merely from the control of her own destinies but even from the opportunity of modifying our policy. It is a harsh decision, but there is a reason for it. It is just as intolerable that an Irish party should dictate to us in our domestic policy as that we should impose our views upon her. One of the most reactionary amendments to the Education Bill was carried solely by the Irish vote. Englishmen have as much right to resist such interference as Irishmen have to complain of the whole vista of English misrule in Ireland. The Act of Union, as Mr. Redmond has often put it, introduced a foreign body into the English Parliamentary system. It is idle to expect anything better than irritation, inflammation, and disease. It is vain to hope that the Irish party, even if its immediate grievances were redressed, could ever

The Remedy for Disloyalty. 39

I coalesce in a stable alliance with either of the English

parties. The Irish party is at once a Roman Catholic and a popular party. On the former ground it can have but an imperfect sympathy with British Liberalism, on the latter no real community with Conservatism.

The disloyalty of the Irish party is often advanced as an argument against Irish self-government. Undoubtedly the Irish party is disloyal. To what should Ireland be loyal—to a fraudulent Act of Union, to Coercion, or to Dublin Castle? It is in revolt against things as they are. Let us assume—and it is an assumption against all precedent—that this state of feeling were to survive the restoration, under whatever form and whatever safeguards, of Irish self-government. Whatever democratic authority we create in Dublin would be busied

with purely internal affairs. Its opinions on Imperial affairs would be utterly irrelevant. It would have no control over armaments or armies. It would lack both the opportunity and the motive for active disloyalty. A free Ireland would not lightly risk the advantages won after a century of misery and agitation. At the worst she would in the end submit to the same arguments which keep her outwardly to her allegiance to-day, the presence of a British garrison in her midst and a British navy on her coasts. The grant of internal selfgovernment could alter nothing for the worse so far as the safety of the Empire is concerned. The argument from disloyalty, puerile as it is in this application, tells in a precisely contrary sense and with force. To admit an openly disloyal party to our debates on Imperial affairs, to risk our most vital decisions on the votes of men who are too honest to conceal their unwavering hostility—that indeed is a madness, and a gambling with our own destinies. The school of thought which advances Irish disloyalty as an objection to Irish autonomy is much pre-occupied with the part which an Irish Parliament might play in some future Armageddon. But what would be the role of an Irish party at Westminster in such an event? It would widen our domestic divisions, clog the energy of our decisions, and hamper with all its resources the work of deliberation and supply. That risk is remote. But the danger of subjecting our domestic policy to the influence of a party which is far from making our prosperity its concern, is ever present. The Irish members are, in fact, at Westminster. The mere instinct of self-preservation ought to teach us that it is

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necessary to win their friendship. Of all possible means of counteracting disloyalty the most fatuous is to invite it to our counsels, while we refuse to meet its fundamental demands.

There is only one way of winning Ireland to loyalty, the way which has succeeded in every other region of our Empire—to concede to her the right of managing her own affairs. This Irish question has been too long at our doors, and its details have too much absorbed our attention. Could we but approach it afresh with even the

relatively unprejudiced mind which we bring to South African affairs, we should hardly hesitate over the solution. We propose so soon as the ravaged territory has recovered from the unrest of a long war, to confer self-government on the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. And yet the present generation of Boers can never be "loyal" in any sentimental sense. We hope, however, that by leaving them free to manage their own affairs we may at least persuade them into acquiescence and contentment. They will be loyal, if not from love, at least from a calculation of selfinterest. Is there any reason to suppose that Irishmen would be more unreasonable, more difficult, or more irreconcilable ? The miracle which happened in Canada, where the concession of autonomy converted a rebel race of French Catholics into devoted subjects of the Crown, will be repeated in Ireland on the day when we realise that the loyalty, which coercion cannot compel, may be won by trust. It is impossible to transfer to an island at our doors the exact species of autonomy which works so admirably in the Colonies, but the connection between loyalty and self-government rests on a fundamental fact of human nature, which no accident of geography can alter. The principles which have made our Empire free and tolerant are sometimes better understood overseas than in England. Canada, Australia, and the Cape have suffered in their day from the same timidity which denies selfgovernment to Ireland. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Edmund Barton make no secret of their belief in Home Rule, while Mr. Rhodes was the most generous subscriber to Mr. Parnell's party funds.

It is characteristic of the change which has come over the whole moral attitude of our politics in the last ten years

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The Ulster Difficulty.

that the various solutions of the problem of Irish government which have been propounded recently, start rather with the idea of relieving ourselves from an inconvenience than of redressing the wrong inflicted on Ireland, The artificial poverty which our land laws created, the despairing rush of emigration to a more fortunate republic, the habitual violation of liberty which follows inevitably on the attempt to govern against the will of a conscious nation— these things have ceased to stir shame. On the other hand, we do feel acutely the waste of time and the corruption of our Parliamentary manners which result from the presence of the Irish members at Westminster. The necessity of imposing discipline on them has served year after year as a pretext for invading one after another the most cherished privileges of the House of Commons. The time of the House, moreover, will no longer suffice for the adequate discussion alike of Imperial, British and Irish affairs.

Lord Rosebery has recently revived Mr. Chamberlain's proposal, made in the year 1885, that a council for local business should be created in each of the four provinces of Ireland. The four provinces, however, are artificial units which correspond to no actual divisions of race, sentiment or economic conditions. No local patriotism centres round the idea of Leinster or Munster. While Dublin Castle remains, with its centralised boards and departments, it is difficult to see what functions these provincial councils could exercise which do not already belong to the County Councils. This scheme would never have been suggested save as a means of meeting the Ulster difficulty. That the Catholic majority in Ireland would oppress the Protestant minority had always been a standing objection to any form of selfgovernment. This objection would be met if the Protestants could be isolated in their province of Ulster. Unfortunately the Irish Protestants are numerous in many districts outside Ulster, while within Ulster itself the population includes a very large minority of Catholics—indeed, if one omits the town of Belfast, Catholics actually predominate in Ulster. The method of isolating creeds is quite impossible, and the idea of provincial councils boasted no other attraction. But the whole religious difficulty has been vastly exaggerated. The Orange sentiment of the North, as Mr.

Russell bluntly tells us, has been fostered by the landlord interest for its own purposes. In cities like Dublin, where Catholics dominate municipal affairs, there is no persecution

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of Protestants. Moreover, to suppose that an Irish Parliament would evolve a solid Catholic majority, which would oppress the minority from Ulster, is to read the history of the past generation with a very superficial glance. Irishmen may unite in a national party to combat English ascendancy. Remove that stimulus to unity, and inevitably the ordinary lines of party cleavage would appear among them. There was latterly an anti-Clerical party under Mr Parnell. There is the nucleus of a Clerical party to-day under Mr. Healy. The centre, while it is strongly Catholic, is by no means Clericalist. Among all these natural divisions the Protestants of the North would be singularly devoid of political instinct if they could not manage to make their vote an effective force in any Irish assembly.

A second device for relieving Parliament of the Irish difficulty has been proposed by Mr. T. W. Russell. He would have an Irish Parliament at Westminster; that is to say, he would allow the Irish members to meet separately as a sort of Grand Committee to discuss Irish legislation and debate the Irish Estimates. The proposal is interesting because it involves the acceptance of the principle of selfgovernment by the ablest of the Irish Unionists. It is not a thankful task to criticise any suggestion which comes from a politician who has done so much to hasten the solution of the land question, and to persuade English opinion of the impossibility of maintaining the system of ascendancy and coercion. But his proposals illustrate very aptly the difficulty of accepting any half-measure as a permanent solution. Some points in his scheme are obscure. Would Mr. Russell

allow the Irish members to sit in the House while English and Scottish business was under discussion ? And if not, what would happen if the Government of the day relied on their votes for a majority? The proposal is open to all the objections raised against Mr. Gladstone's "in-and-out" scheme in 1893. But the chief weakness of Mr. Russell's scheme is, that while it confers upon Ireland fresh opportunities for criticism, it still leaves the real responsibility, and the whole work of administration in the hands of a Minister who represents not Irish but English opinion. It would do very little to abbreviate the discussion of Irish questions unless the Irish Secretary of the day loyally followed Irish opinion. He would again and again be obliged to appeal to the Imperial Parliament against the



Executive and Legislature.

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decisions of the Irish committee. What, for example, would happen if Mr. Wyndham had to face an Irish committee with a Sheridan scandal to defend? He would undoubtedly be defeated, and would fail to carry the Constabulary vote in the Irish Estimates. Parliament would, of course, restore it, not because it approved of Mr. Wyndham's handling of this affair, but because it did not wish to pass a vote of censure on the Unionist Ministry. If, on the other hand, the Irish Secretary were to take his policy from the Irish majority, and if the several boards at Dublin Castle—Education, Public Works, and the rest—which at present are purely bureaucratic, were to be converted into departments with Parliamentary Secretaries, like the corresponding British Ministries, then Mr. Russell's Parliament would be quite as generous a measure of autonomy as Mr. Gladstone's. But why, in that case, should the Irish Secretary, responsible as he

would in reality be to Irish opinion, remain the nominee of a British party and retain his place in a British Cabinet, sharing its fortunes and in turn involving it in his own vicissitudes ? An Irish Legislature without an Irish Executive would be a mockery of Irish aspirations and a travesty of representative government.

It is not the aim of this pamphlet to make constructive suggestions. But this at least is clear, that no future scheme can hope for success which does not seek to enlist in the service of Ireland the dominant passion of Irish minds—their love of country and their consciousness of nationality. Nationalism is a hostile and a disturbing force only so long as we seek to repress it. Unless an Irishman will take service under an administration forever engaged in combating the popular cause, there is no national work in which he can employ himself save that of opposition. Protest he must, and while he protests we coerce. We shall solve no problem and effect no improvement until we have made the Government of Ireland an instrument that responds to Irish opinion. Some sort of body there must be—Council, Parliament, or Committee—which can legislate for Irish needs; and it is not less important that this body should have power to control the great spending departments, supervise the police, and influence the policy of the boards of Education

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and Agriculture. No change less sweeping than this could be final, for nothing short of this would give the Irish nation a real responsibility for its own destinies. No doubt an Ireland dependent on her own initiative would make mistakes, as we have made mistakes. But this advantage she would have, that she would suffer directly and swiftly for her own errors. We, on the other hand, have no personal knowledge of the errors we commit in Ireland. We do not ourselves suffer, and accordingly we delay redress for a decade or a generation, until a menacing Irish agitation compels us to move. Of whatever errors, whatever lapses a native Irish Administration might be guilty, it is inconceivable that it should stumble as we have

stumbled, from sheer ignorance and apathy. The economic results of its legislation might not always be fortunate, but they could not bring about a poverty more abysmal than our Land Laws have produced in the West. Its fiscal policy might not be ideally just, but it would not be likely to tax every article in the meagre diet of a Connaught peasant, as we unthinkingly do. However slow it might be to learn the lesson of toleration, it would scarcely venture to condemn the leaders of any Irish party which opposed it, to hard labour and plank beds, and if it were tempted to tamper with free speech or with juries, it could do nothing worse than we have habitually done. If a malicious imagination were to run riot in conceiving possible scandals which might flourish among a police controlled by an Irish Ministry, it could fashion no horror so gross or improbable as the Sheridan affair. We have not made such a success in our attempt to play Providence to a nation, that we can afford to refuse it the right to face its own problems at its own risk. If we are not ashamed to rule a sister people by naked force, if we have no sympathy with a race reduced to the despairing alternatives of wholesale emigration or perpetual revolt, there is still a self-regarding motive which might weigh with us. We have it in our power by an act of faith to win for the Empire four millions of loyal subjects at our very doors, and these of a race not less gifted than the few thousand Dutch farmers on whose conquest we have spent our treasure and our blood. We could subjugate no people, annex no territory, which could add so much to the strength and unity of our Empire as a free and loyal Ireland.

44 ^ Plea for Self-Gov eminent.

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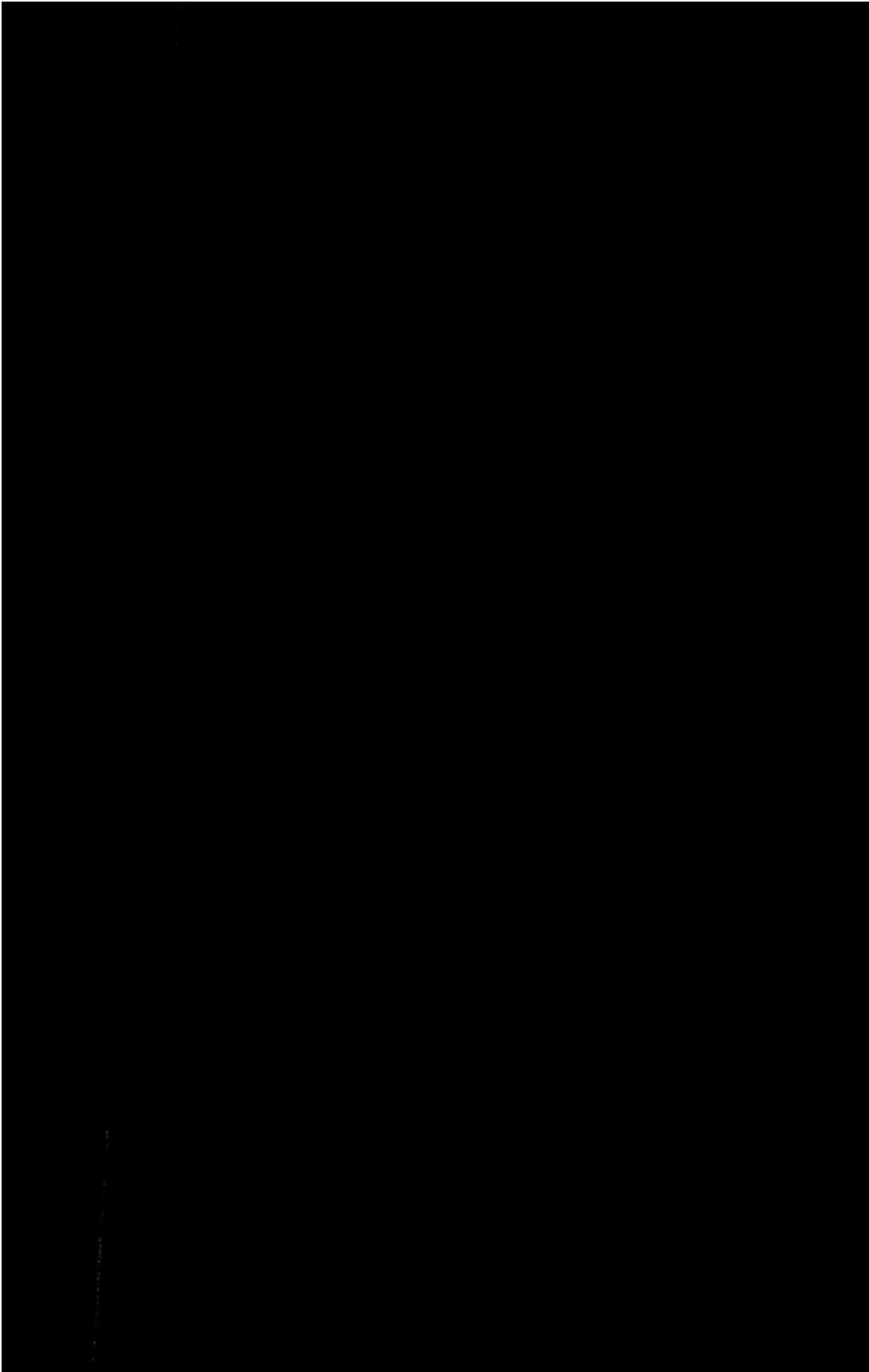
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