

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, March, 1903.

Land Legislation.

It rarely has there been a time of such intense general interest and anxious expectancy as we have passed through within the last month since it became known that the Chief Secretary, Mr. Wyndham, intended to bring in his Land Purchase Bill on the 25th of March, on Lady Day, which is, curiously enough, the spring-gale or rent-day of the Irish farmers.

Every man and woman in Ireland having any interest in the country looked forward to the morning of the 26th, when all would know the fate of the peasantry who have made as brave a struggle for life in their own land as ever a people made. Every Irish member of Parliament, every Irish landowner who could be present was in his place in Parliament to hear the Chief Secretary's speech in proposing the Bill, and the poorest man in the community at home found the price of a newspaper next morning.

Many weeks before this reaches you, the cablegrams will have given you all the details of this long-looked-for and most momentous Bill, a Bill so long due and which, it was hoped, would be of such ample scope as would make some amends for many disappointments, would realise the hopes so long deferred, would, in fact, be, not just, for in the present state of England's war budget it would be impossible to repay the hundreds of millions of over-taxation that have been drawn from Ireland for imperial purposes, but a Bill that would give peaceful ownership and comparative comfort to the peasantry and at the same time satisfy the natural desire of the out-going landlords not to be losers by the bargain.

I do not pretend to understand all the intricacies of the proposed scheme, all that I can clearly see is that the Bill (upon which so many national hopes were built) is a Landlords' Bill, that unless the Irish Parliamentary Party persuade the Government to reconsider and amend its principal clauses, it is such as could not be accepted by the nation, save at the cost of hanging a millstone round the farmers' necks for two generations to come and loading their pockets with stones for ever and amen. Anyone can see, with half an eye, that the landowners, at least the smaller owners, are more than pleased, are astonished at the terms offered them, even though they try hard to hide their smiles, for, as you doubtless already know, the owners of small estates come under the category of sellers who get a bonus of 15 per cent., while the large estates of high value will only bring their owners a 5 per cent. share of the inducing bonus, and as the Government absolutely refuses (so far) to make sale compulsory the very men whose estates, divided out, would prove the greatest boon to the many are the men who, in all probability, will not sell at all.

It is a pity the Government did not make a big, honest effort instead of peddling, or peddle it is, as things stand now, and great as is the self-command the people are exercising, though there is something like the hush of a grief or a disappointment too great to be expressed, still it is evident that disappointment is the general feeling. However, before very many days are over, the National Convention called to consider the Bill will be held in Dublin, and the interval will give the Irish people time to con over, to consider, to mutually advise upon this momentous crisis. The Irish peasantry are an intelligent people and a wise people, as Mr. John Redmond said in his speech on the introduction of Mr. Wyndham's Bill, and they will not decide unwisely at that Convention as to the course to be pursued.

Of a certainty, if the clauses laying down the price to be paid by the farmers, the time—69 years—to be consumed in that payment, the additional sum to be paid in perpetuity (the eighth of the purchase money, when a peppercorn would serve the purposes of the reserve) and the scale of bonuses given to owners as inducements to sell, if these clauses be not materially altered it will go hard with the Irish farmers in the future should they now, in their longing for peace and security, consent to buy at such a price. There is little happiness in owning the roof over your head if you have hungry children beneath that roof. The children will still go away to the free lands and send home more and more cattle and corn to beat down still lower the prices at home. Yes, it is a pity Mr. Wyndham was not more courageous. Both England and Ireland were prepared for his being so. He had a magnificent opportunity.

Land Values

A book that is not mal a propos of this land purchase question has just been published. It is by Mr. Rider Haggard, who has spent three years studying the subject of the depreciation of land values in England. The result of Mr. Rider Haggard's investigations is startling and it strikes the Irish mind that it would be instructive reading for both English and Irish (Tory landlords, law officials, etc., etc., who still permit themselves to call the Irish peasant 'a man of predatory habits,' and so on. The statistics contained in Mr. Rider Haggard's book are long and dismal, and if

statesmen who have gone to the next world still know of and take an interest in terrestrial matters, one would give a good deal to know John Bright's and Mr. Gladstone's opinion of the outcome of Free Trade, supposing these gentlemen to be permitted still to keep an eye upon their favorite children here below. Taking a few examples of the fall of land values in rural England, briefly, we learn that—

In Dorsetshire, famous for its dairy products, rents have fallen in the measure given in the following tables :

1860-1870.	1900.
£.	£.
(1) 870	400
(2) 750	250
(3) 450	240

Total £2070 £890

Reduction, 1870 to 1900, 52 per cent.

Wiltshire, chiefly tillage and sheep farming. Rents on arable farms—

1870-1875.	1900.
£	£
(1) 2600	825
(2) 1500	600
(3) 2000	400
(4) 800	250

Totals £6900 £2075

Reduction since 1870, 70 per cent.

And the same startling figures are given for the other counties, while the reduction in the selling price of farms is even greater throughout the entire of rural England.

Irish History 'as she is Wrote.'

We hear incessantly of 'higher education' nowadays, so much so that many people are evidently falling into a way of believing that young people are now endowed with far deeper, broader, finer intellects than were those of a generation, or any generation back, and have not to learn the A.B.C. of knowledge in the self same way that their forefathers did. They jump into knowledge, as it were, and are, or are supposed to be, profound at an age when the miserable little boys and girls of long ago played marbles, rolled hoops, and talked to dolls. At times, though, some of us get shocks. The other day I took up a volume of English History, a history in use in a boys' college. A page fell open at the following lucid and eminently instructive summing up of an agonising period in Irish modern history :—

'The year 1847 was also marked by great distress both in England and Ireland. The potato crop again failed there was a famine in Ireland; and, though the British Parliament voted several millions to buy food for the starving Irish, they nevertheless rose in rebellion. O'Connell had now vanished from the scene, and Mr. William Smith O'Brien, who attempted to sustain his part had not the requisite qualities for it. His attempt to excite a rebellion in 1848 proved a ridiculous failure: he was captured in a cabbage garden, convicted of high treason, and transported. The Irish, being deprived of their principal agitators, by degrees settled down into a more tranquil state. A large emigration, the introduction of a more extended corn-cultivation and the investment of a large amount of English capital have since much improved the condition of the country; and thus the potato rot, which at first appeared a curse on Ireland, eventually turned out a blessing.'

There are men and women yet living, at home and in the colonies, who know something of the real history of Black '48. But is it any wonder that the English, as a nation, cannot realise the whys and wherefores of Irish discontent and Irish agitation, when it is thus the history of one of the most terrible periods of our nation's story is told? Strange, that the Irish have never yet come to see the blessing of the potato rot and of all the horrors that came in its wake, that still oppress our people. It has been remarked that never since '48 have the Irish laughed so merrily as they used to do before the famine. I once asked a thoughtful farmer why were not the country people so gay and light-hearted as they were said to be long ago. 'I think,' he said, 'it's because their mothers were all young in the famine times and the sorrow that struck into their hearts then has descended, in a manner, on their children.'

M.B.

COUNTY NEWS

DUBLIN.—Catholic Truth Society

At the annual meeting of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland it was reported that since the last meeting held in June, 1902, over 530,000 books had been despatched, and within the same space of time 81 new branches were registered in connection with the Catholic churches throughout Ireland. The business connections formed in the United States and in the British colonies had been further developed, about 50,000 publications having been sent to Australia and 5000 to America during the past year. New publications printed during the twelve months brought up the total number issued to 157. General gratification was expressed at the success of the society, and the officers and council were warmly thanked for their efforts. Archbishop Healy was again elected president, and a widely representative committee was chosen to direct the affairs of the society for the next twelve months.