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Current Events

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All Ireland Review.

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 1902.

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EDITED BY STANDISH O'GRADY.

[ONE PENNY.]

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Current Events.

SINCE we last wrote, the *Irish Times* has gone one better in its new and creditable policy with regard to the Land Question. It favours the idea of that committee proposed by Dr. Thompson, not only sitting in Ireland during the coming recess, but of taking into consideration not merely Mr. Wyndham's poor effort at statesmanship, but the Irish land question in its entirety. The fact that the *Irish Times*, which never in our time set its foot down about anything, has set its foot down here, is a proof that the average public opinion of the country must be in favour of such a step, or at least not opposed to it.

Now, once we have gone so far, the prudence, and indeed, the necessity of going a little farther will be at once apparent. Dr. Thompson's proposed Committee sitting in Ireland and debating here a great Irish question, and with the white light of an intelligent Irish public opinion flashing upon it day by day and week by week, would be a great historical event, and, whatever the issue, an educational process for us all, worth millions of money. For the first time our popular representatives and our representative Peers would be weighted as to their utterances with a grave load of public responsibility, and the same sense of the gravity of the situation would infuse wisdom and moderation into the deliverances of the Press and compel our pressmen to study the subject about which they write, and desist from the wild and whirling talk which has hitherto done duty for rational discussion. Such an event would be without parallel in our history, or if such a parallel may be found, it must be looked for in the great epoch-making period which intervened between 1777 and 1783, when Ireland for the first time, and the last time, so far, concentrated a national will and intellect upon great public Irish questions.

Now those questions, great as they were, and they were great, pale and dwindle before the mighty question which a long succession of events, which Time, with its happenings, and Destiny, with its veiled purposes, is thrusting upon the attention of Irishmen of this generation. It is not a question of trade, or of the laws governing imports and exports, or of taxation, or of political rights—constitutional powers and constitutional limitations—or of things of importance only to a few. This question embraces all Ireland, every square foot of it, inland and seaboard, town and country, waste land and tillage land, moor and mountain, lake, river and foreshore. It is the Irish land question, the all Ireland problem of Man and the Earth, which the most representative organ of Irish public opinion declares to-day ought to be publicly discussed here in Ireland, and "in its entirety." And I

for one thank the *Irish Times* for saying that word, and whether the *Irish Times* be conscious or not of the full significance of its words.

THEN, it is a question which concerns us all, high and low, propertied and unpropertied, men, and women and children, and the unborn generations, of whom, under God, we are the sole trustees, guardians and protectors. The question is not at all a mere struggle of interests between owners and occupiers; with the nation excluded, or looking on as mere spectators of a quarrel with which they have no practical concern. The land question began, indeed, with that quarrel, that conflict of interests between some owners and some occupiers, but it will not end there. The question to which the intellect of the country is applying itself to-day, and will continue to apply itself with an ever-increasing intensity and concentration, is the greatest which ever yet came up here demanding a solution—the question, who owns Ireland? This is the root of the matter. Apart from all minor considerations as to vested interests, legal prescriptive and other rights, who owns Ireland? Where is the Fee, the absolute dominion? What are the rights, if any, of Irishmen and Irishwomen in this their native land, and what the rights of the children, and of the coming generations.

THE notion that Dr. Thompson's proposed committee could discuss, even tolerably, such a profound, intricate, obscure, and far-ramifying subject as this is preposterous. It could not even discuss in a tolerable manner the comparatively small question of the several rights of landlords and tenants out there in the country, for the rights of labourers and of the landless rural population are already, and seriously, involved in the dispute. Under the Labourers' Acts thousands of such have already acquired possessory rights in the soil, and twenty times as many are moving in the same direction and will demand the expansion of that committee so as to include in it direct representatives of their class—that of the rural landless labouring population. The landed interest would not be represented by the twenty-eight Representative Peers, who stand essentially only for great properties and solvent estates. Again, the Land Question does not stop in the suburbs of the towns and cities. It runs under the towns and cities, and is as vital and pressing, perhaps more so, where the fee of an acre is worth £10,000 as where the fee of an acre is only worth £16. The village and town populations will therefore, and rightly, claim representation. In short, this committee can never reach even its first session without a pledge that it will only sit with the purpose of promoting a National Convention representing all orders, degrees, and interests—as full and fair a representation of this country as can be secured.

ALL this, no doubt, is a little alarming, and perhaps the *Irish Times* did not fully perceive the consequences of its action. It is a little alarming, truly, because the subject is itself huge, obscure, alarming, formidable, intricate, most perplexing. But what would you have? Can this gigantic question—this Man and the Earth problem—the Irish aspect of it—be solved and settled and folded up and laid aside for ever by a handful of Parliamentary wind-bags and a few great landlords? If it cannot, then the choice is between a National Convention on the one side, and on the other the continuation of the present distressing state of things, with the ultimate certainty of the British Government settling the question over our heads, and by the simple process of giving Ireland to the occupiers, and in the process sacrificing the interests both of the nation and of the landlords. That will plainly be the end if we permit the British Government to settle the matter, viz., Ireland for the occupiers as proprietors, and the proprietors as a prey for the money power.

I HAVE received the following very fair protest against that fundamental law which I enunciated last week concerning the right of man and woman to the use of the

Earth. Indeed, I fully expected that some such protest would come to me:—

DEAR A.I.R.—Since a short time after you started I have been not only one of those whom you once described as your “Caryatides,” but also a constant reader, agreeing with some of the things that you say, and considering a great many other things no better than sounding nonsense. You must pardon this, dear A.I.R., but I have set out to write to you with perfect sincerity.

[Pooh! don't mention it. The adjective relieves the substantive, and both together are almost complimentary. There is so much nonsense that does not even sound.—Ed.]

I am a manufacturer, and in my business am subjected to the endless strain of an immense competition coming in upon me out of England and Scotland. The profits are therefore so small that it is with difficulty I keep my business going, and a small increase in the expenditure would abolish my margin of profits.

Now, sir, I don't believe half or a quarter of what you say about the money that can be made out of plots of ground, but I will assume that you are right, and that my girl workers could live, and live well, by tilling such plots, and need not come to work with me unless I give them a great increase of wages, besides treating them with profound “consideration and respect,” whatever you mean by that. Now, dear Mr. O'Grady, I assure you that if I gave them any sensible increase of wages at all, it would jeopardise my business, and might destroy it, and you cheerfully contemplate not a small but a great increase, because you believe so profoundly in the vast profits of intense agriculture. Handicapped in this manner, I and my brother-manufacturers would have to face the competition of the manufacturers of England and Scotland, where wages would be still fixed by competition amongst the workers, and where the latter would not have that alternative of living, and of living well, upon such holdings as you generously undertake to provide for “every Irish boy and girl when they reach the age of 16.” Your fundamental law is, of course, only moonshine, but if it were enacted and worked out as you expect, it would mean sudden death to every Irish manufacturer, and complete victory in this country for the foreign manufacturer.—Yours truly,

SAVE-US-FROM-OUR-FRIENDS.

DEAR MR. Save-us-from-our-Friends,—I think your letter as sensible as it is straightforward and to the point. You must, however, remember that the right of Man to get at the Earth is founded upon immutable Justice, and that the law which I have announced is actually fundamental, written in every atom of his body and fibre of his being. It is native, original, absolute: a Right which is the correlative of a Duty. Man's right to the Earth springs out of his “duty to learn and labour truly to get his own living.” Now, as you don't deny the justice of the claim, but only point to possible ill results, you are not really arguing with me at all, though you think you are. The right of Man to the Earth is—Justice! and when and where did Justice ever do any one any harm? Never: and never will. In ways that you and I cannot now think of, or forecast, the reward will come round to us. Surely; and to our children, and our children's children, if we resolve to throw to the winds all such timorousness and apprehension as fill your letter, if we determine to stand by Justice, and follow it, nothing doubting, wherever it may lead us.

You seem to think that I am playing fast and loose with other people's interests, having none of my own of that kind to consider and safeguard. It is not so. I, too, am a manufacturer. Week by week I manufacture this paper. The adoption and recognition of that fundamental law acknowledging the right of Man to get at the Earth; if he wants to, may compel me to pay my hands twice as much as I do now, and end this bit of Irish enterprise as well as yours. And so, farewell for the present, Mr. Save-us-from-our-Friends, and try to cultivate in your mind the conviction and sure belief that if a thing is Right it will never, in the long run, do any of us any harm. Also, I have thought a good deal about those apprehensions of yours, and I believe that they are groundless. I may address you again upon the subject.

IRISH POETRY.

DEAR A.I.R.—I wish you would get your correspondent, “R,” to develop somewhat further his curt

criticism on Irish poetry, which I see he describes as “poor stuff.” We want some real criticism in that region, and “R,” if he did not furnish it, might at least be the means of eliciting it. Can he read Irish poetry? I have seen articles in a contemporary of yours pretending to estimate the merits of Irish writers, of whom the reviewer was evidently unable to translate a single sentence. There is no value in opinions, whether favourable or the reverse, which are not based on real study and thought.

I have not read enough to form a general opinion with any great degree of assurance, but so far as my reading, has gone, the matter seems to shape itself to my mind somewhat as follows:—The anonymous popular poetry of Ireland which is lately getting to be known and valued, is a product as striking and beautiful as the popular music has been long known to be. Such things as “O'Curnan's Lament,” or “Chuma chroide chailin,” or “Lonnchad Ban,” are simply pearls of beauty; I know no poetry of the class which comes near them, just as I know no folk songs which come near the “Coulin,” or “The Lark in Clear Air.” The “Red Man's Wife,” taken with the meaning which I believe you rightly put into it, is another excellent piece; better, I think, than you seem to take it for.

But the excellence of poetry of this class is limited. It has not thought, it does not relate its passions with universal ideas, or contemplate them in Spinoza's phrase, “sub specie æternitatis.” And when we go beyond them and look for the poetry of culture in Gaelic Ireland, we scarcely find it as yet. That is so much the better, no doubt. If there were a completely developed literature behind us we should have nothing to add to it, the nation's word would have been said. But do not let us imagine, in a fervour of misdirected patriotism, that it *has* been said, and that we have in the 18th century a hedge school-master like Eoghan Ruadh O'Suilleabhain, a greater writer than Plato or Spenser, as his editor has affirmed! It is just the Eoghan Ruadhs and O'Rahillys who are the weak point in Irish literature.

They had not the naïveté and pure passion of the peasant singer; they had just cultivation enough to make their mistaken pretensions verbiage and elaborate mechanical verse-structure for fine art; and beneath all this pomp and circumstance they largely buried whatever poetic faculty they had. I can understand R's epithet as applied to them. They were best in satire and invective, and these are the realm, in which the spirit of pure poetry has least sway. When we get a stage above them again, and come to a man like Keating, we find high cultivation and thought, and the dignity and power associated with them. No one who knew what he was talking about could call Keating's poetry “poor stuff,” nor is the epithet in the least applicable to the songs which sprang directly from the emotions of a sensitive and imaginative peasantry, who as Father Barry rightly said, in his recent lecture, are the true core or basis of the Irish people.—Yours, etc.,

T. W. ROLLESTON.

IRISH GARDENING COMPANY.

Mr. Boswell writes me again to say that if our Company can be brought together, arrangements ought to be complete in time for a September planting, so as to be ready for the early markets in 1903. Mr. Boswell's full address is the Lindens, Bromsgrove, England, and he is willing and ready to do himself that which he recommends to others. In a tentative pioneering experiment of this nature no person joining in ought to count upon success, though of course he will hope for it, and the probabilities seem to lie in that direction. If the experiment be made on the shores of Bantry Bay, there ought to be a sufficient local demand for the output in consequence of the great Government engineering works now going on in Berehaven. I have friends, too, in this district, who would give every kind of help and advice to the promoters at the start. There is no doubt about the climate. Soil is not very necessary, for in intensive culture the grower makes his own, and yet in the sheltered hollows and lowlands of West Cork there is native soil as good as any, and the probability is that the local demand would be sufficient in the first instance.