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A Plea for a Labourers' League. III

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## YOUNG SUMMER.

As a companion piece to that little gem of early English lyric poetry which we gave lately—

Summer is i-comen in  
Loud singe cuckoo—

we give, from the Gaelic, Finn's poetical celebration of our Irish May time.

Young Summer! delightful time!  
How beautiful the colour!  
The blackbirds sing their full lay. Would  
That laighaig (?) were here.  
The cuckoos sing in constant strains.  
How welcome the noble  
Brilliance of the seasons ever. On the margin  
Of the branchy woods  
The summer swallows skim the stream,  
The swift horses seek the pool.  
The heath spreads out its long hair, the weak,  
White bog-down grows.  
Sudden consternation attacks the signs,  
The planets in their courses running  
Exert an influence.  
The sea is lulled to rest, flowers cover  
The Earth.

The young Finn made this poem about the young Summer in the valley of the Boyne, at a spot where the river rests a little in a deep, still pool under Slane, and he made it, writes the historian, "in order to prove his poetry." I think he made it because he enjoyed making it.

The word for young Summer is *cettemain*, which is translated by O'Daly as "the beginning of Summer."

Finn, as I make him out, never at any time cared to "prove" anything about himself. He just went his own way, a great, quiet-minded, tranquil mass of antique heroic-Irish dignity and power, and let every one think about him as they pleased.

## A PLEA FOR A LABOURERS' LEAGUE.

## III.

BY G. MORTOGH GRIFFITH.

I TAKE it that a labourers' Union of this kind would have sense enough to recognise that their betterment as a class cannot ever be adequately brought about by the existing Labourers' Acts, and that while, at present, profiting by these acts as much as possible, they would agitate, not for alms, as under the present system they are practically receiving, but for something which would raise their social status and increase individual self-respect amongst them; while at the same time giving, at an ultimate profit both to themselves and the nation, the same houses, with, say, four times as much land, as they receive under present conditions. Added to which, instead of having these houses erected spasmodically, or in some districts not at all, there would be a systematic erection of labourers' cottages going on yearly all over the country. What I would have the labourer agitate for, is an Act empowering the Imperial Treasury to set aside for them, say £800,000 yearly, in the first instance for ten years. This money could be divided among the different counties *pro rata* according to their size, and to the number of labourers within their boundaries. The money might be broken up into 5,000 loans of £150 each (absorbing £750,000), repayable in sixty years, and bearing interest at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. The Act should contain a compulsory clause empowering the Commissioners or the Board appointed by the Government to administer its provisions, to take, if they should deem it necessary, not more than 8 acres of land from all persons in occupation of 100 acres of *grass* land (taking 4 acres more for every additional 50 acres up to 200, and 6 for every 50 or part of 50 acres beyond that number, 4 acres to be taken also from persons holding between 50 and 100 acres of *grass* land), which had not been broken for tillage, within five years prior to the 1st of January preceding the Sessions in which the Bill was introduced. The Department of Agriculture might be appointed to carry out the working of the

scheme. Compensation for the land thus acquired, to the extent of £50 in the first case, and £30 payable in annual instalments of £3 for ten years, to be given and divided on a basis fixed by arbitrators, between the landlord and the occupying tenant. As the new occupier of the 4 acre plot will have to pay this £3 per annum, he is not to be required by the Government to pay anything but the interest on his loan for the first ten years. I know very little of finance—so little indeed that it is with trepidation I am putting forward this scheme, and the following table. I throw myself, however, on my readers' mercy, asking that they may be kind enough to correct my figures, if I am wrong.

Loan £150 at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Interest. Interest on loan £5 5s.

For the first ten years an Annual rent of £8 5s. is paid for the house and 4 acres of land, which works out roughly at a rent of 3s. 2d. per week. (During this period none of the borrowed money is being paid, the £3 added to interest which makes up the £8 5s. going to the £50 already allotted as compensation between the landlord and the former occupier of the holding). The borrower continuing the payment of £3 of the principal, finds himself at the end of the 2nd period of ten years with £120 remaining to be paid. His "rent" is now about 2s. 9½d. weekly.

At the end of the 3rd period of 10 years, £90 principal remains to be paid—about 2s. 4½d. weekly; 4th period, £60 principal—about 1s. 11½d.; 5th period, £30 principal—about 1s. 6½d.; and in the 6th period the reduction still goes on, till the purchase money has been paid, and the holding and house become the exclusive property of the occupier.

Now this is, I know very crude, but I cannot see that it is impracticable. It would create 5,000 peasant proprietors every year at no expense whatever to the State, which would all along receive  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on its money, (money which could be borrowed by an issue of consols for the amount at  $2\frac{3}{4}$ , giving the Treasury a clear gain of £60,000 in the first instance on the total sum of £8,000,000). The principal, too, would be absolutely safe—no one, no matter how dishonestly inclined, can run away with or hide a house and plot of ground. If a tenant or proprietor failed in his payments without due cause (*i.e.*, through laziness or neglect) the State should be able to step in and send him about his business—it would be very easy for them to find another tenant. But I consider it probable that it would be only in very few cases that non-payment would occur. When one takes into consideration that most labourers are paying from 1s. 6d. to 2s. per week, for houses, all over the country, and deducting that amount from the highest weekly instalment they would be called on to pay under the foregoing table we get from one-half to one-eighth—a preposterously low sum, when the fact of their having 4 acres of land to make it out of, is also taken into account. Quite recently the Chief Secretary stated in the House of Commons that the Irish people were most reliable and punctual in the repayment of loans made to them by the Government—and I have seen it stated also, in the case of loans made to the fishermen of the west, for the purchase of boats and gear, that except through some unforeseen circumstance, such as damage by storms or a bad take of fish during the season, there has never been an instalment unpaid. This, in my opinion, augurs well for the success of this scheme. The gain to the State would be double, from the increase in population and prosperity and consequent increase in revenue. It needs no words of mine to prove that the more wealth produced by the people the greater the return to the State—and the openings for intensive agriculture are boundless.

When the labourer has his little cottage built, and his four acres fenced in, he will find that it is not going to employ his whole time. Some of the holders may be fishermen, others rural carpenters, masons, &c., others (and the preference should always be given them) the merely agricultural labourer. Now, the co-operative system might step in with advantage. On the occupiers of say every four plots, the keep of a horse would fall very lightly—on days when not required he could be hired out for carting and other purposes, and thus, of course, would lessen the

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cost of his upkeep. As two horses are required for ploughing, the owners of one could co-operate with the owners of another on the plots adjacent, and thus have their work cheaply and expeditiously performed. A cow might be kept on the same principle. All of the holdings would not be broken up for tillage—pasturage would be required for a goat, a cow, and perhaps a calf or two. A little cut away for a fowl run, hay perhaps for winter feeding, &c., &c.

Under this scheme £750,000 of the £8,000,000 allotted is expended yearly in loans, leaving a balance on hands of £50,000. Allowing £10,000 for expenses of administration—a rather wide margin I think, but the maw of officialdom is capacious, £40,000 yet remains to be disbursed, and this sum could be most advantageously used in the establishment of agricultural banks. Through this medium the holders of plots could negotiate loans, at long periods, for the purchase of cattle, seeds, &c.

As an alternative proposal to the compulsory acquisition of grass lands, I would suggest that the hillsides, many of which have been tilled within living memory, and which in a great number of cases are only covered with furze, amenable to vigorous stubbing at the slight expense of £2 or £3 an acre, should be taken over.

This is my scheme in brief—it is very crude I know, for I am no statesman—only a simple Irishman of the masses with the welfare of my race at heart. But the readers of "A. I. R." are "longheaded" people, and if it sets them a-thinking, so that some one of them may put forward a better scheme, or improve on mine—then my work, in some measure, at least, is done. Who knows even when they "dream dreams" and send them forth to travel amidst pathways and mazes, how soon they may wander into that field, yclept, "practical politics." Opportunism is all things in party politics—and men make opportunities—and labourers are men.

(To be continued.)

NOTE.—I propose to give as a supplement to this paper a synopsis of the Labourers' (Ireland) Acts, and also of the "Small Dwellings' Acquisition Act (1899). G. M. G.

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#### DESTRUCTION OF DA DERGA'S HOSTEL.

(Continued.)

"I beheld the room that is next to Conaire. Three chief champions in their first greyness are therein. As thick as a man's waist is each of their limbs. They have three black swords, each as long as a weaver's beam. These swords would split a hair on water. A great lance in the hand of the midmost man, with fifty rivets through it. The shaft therein is a good load for the yoke of a plough team. The midmost man brandished that lance so that its edge-studs hardly stay therein, and he strikes the haft thrice against his palm. There is a great boiler in front of them as big as a calf's cauldron, wherein is a black and horrible liquid. Moreover, he plunges it (the lance) into that black fluid. If its quenching be delayed it flames on its shaft, (and then) thou wouldst suppose that there is a fiery dragon in the top of the house. Liken thou that, O Fer-rogain?"

"Easy to say. Three heroes who are best at grasping weapons in Erin, namely, Sencha, the beautiful son of Ailill, and Dubthach, Chafer of Ulaid, and Goibnenn, son of Turgnech. And the *Luin* of Celtchar, son of Uthider, which was found in the battle of Magh Tured. This is in the hand of Dubthach, Chafer of Ulaid. That feat is usual for it when it is ripe to pour forth a foeman's blood. A cauldron full of poison is needed to quench it when a deed of manslaying is expected. Unless this comes to the lance, it flames on its haft and will go through its bearer or the master of the palace (wherein it is). If it is a blow that is to be given thereby, it will kill a man at every blow,

when it is at that feat, from one hour to another, though it may not reach him. And if it be a cast, it will kill nine men at every cast, and one of the nine will be a king or crown prince or chieftain of the reavers."

"I swear what my tribe swears, there will be a multitude unto whom to-night the *Luin* of Celtchar will deal drinks of death in front of the Hostel. I swear to God what my tribe swears, that in their first encounter three hundred will fall by that trio, and they will share prowess with every three in the Hostel to-night. And they will boast of victory over a king or chief of the reavers, and the three will chance to escape."

"Woe," says Lomna Drúth, "to him who shall wreak the Destruction, were it (only) because of that trio."

"Ye cannot," says Ingeél, etc.

"And, after that whom sawest thou there?"

"There I beheld a room with a trio in it. Three men, mighty, manly, overbearing, which see no one abiding at their three hideous, crooked aspects. A fearful view, because of the terror of them. A . . . dress of rough hair covers them, so that their bodies . . . of their savage eyes through a . . . of cow's hair, without garments enwrapping down to the right heels. With three manes, equine, awful, majestic, down to (their) sides. Fierce heroes, who wield against foemen hard-smiting swords. A blow they give with three iron flails, having seven chains, triple-twisted, three-edged, with seven iron knobs at the end of every chain; each of them as heavy as an ingot of ten smeltings (?) Three big, brown men. Dark equine back-manes on them, which reach their two heels. Two good thirds of an oxhide in the girdle round each one's waist, and each quadrangular clasp that closes it as thick as a man's thigh. The raiment that is round them is the dress that grows through them. Tresses of their back-manes were spread, and a long staff of iron, as long and thick as an outer yoke (was) in each man's hand, and an iron chain out of the end of every club, and at the end of every chain an iron pestle as long and thick as a middle yoke. They stand in their sadness in the house, and enough is the horror of their aspect. There is no one in the house that would not be avoiding them. Liken thou that Fer-rogain."

Fer-rogain was silent. "Hard for me to liken them. I know none (such) of the world's men, unless they be yon trio of giants to whom Cuchulainn gave quarter at the beleaguement of the men of Falga, and when they were getting quarter they killed fifty warriors. But Cuchulainn would not let them be slain, because of their wondrousness. These are the names of the three—Srubdaire, son of Dordbrúige, and Conchenn of Cenn Maige, and Fiadsceirne, son of Scipe. Conaire bought them from Cuchulainn for . . . so they are along with him. Three hundred will fall by them in their first encounter, and they will surpass in prowess every three in the Hostel; and if they come upon you, the fragments of you will be fit to go through the sieve of a cornkiln from the way in which they will destroy you with the flails of iron. Woe to him that shall wreak the destruction, though it were (only) on account of those three! For to combat against them is not a pean round a sluggard!" and is "a head of"

"Ye cannot," says Ingeél, "Clouds of weakness are coming to you, etc. And after that whom sawest thou there?"

"Then I beheld another room, with one man therein and in front of him two servants with two manes upon them, one of the two dark, the other fair. Red hair on the warrior and red eyebrows. Two ruddy cheeks he had and an eye very blue and beautiful. He wore a green cloak and a shirt with a white hood and a red insertion. In his hand was a sword with a hilt of ivory, and he supplies attendance of every room in the house with ale and food, and he quick-footed in serving the whole host.

"Liken thou that, O Fer-rogain?"

(To be continued.)



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