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The Psychological Aspect of Land Reform in Ireland

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF LAND REFORM IN IRELAND.¹

THE many enactments dealing with Irish land, which have been placed on the Statute Book during the last forty years, have produced many interesting facts illustrative of problems of distribution. They have bettered the social position of the people in a marked degree. They have produced a certain amount of social peace where before was never-ending war. These facts are too well known to demand discussion, and any observer—and not the least a foreign one—would make himself ridiculous by telling a tale which does not need repetition. There is, however, another side to those great reforms which, so far as I know, has not yet been dealt with exhaustively—their influence on Irish production.

I.

It is well known that the old land system of Ireland was very defective; it is equally well known that it did not foster economic progress. Whether we assume that Irish history began with wonderful economic achievements, or whether we reduce those achievements to the moderate dimensions normal amongst primitive people, there is absolute unanimity about the backward state of Irish agriculture during the nineteenth century. The Irish people were perhaps not so wretched as they looked, but they considered a wretched appearance as the best guarantee against arbitrary rent-raising. Insecurity of tenure thus coincided with a wretched state of agriculture. Outside Ulster there was very little agricultural improvement. Ulster alone was quiet and progressive, but Ulster tenants enjoyed a fair amount of fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale.

Legal security as embodied in the Ulster tenant's rights seemed to offer him enough incitement to put forth his best efforts. Fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale succeeded in transforming the most barren part of Ireland into a flourishing

¹ Read before the Economic Section of the British Association, 1908.

and prosperous country, whilst the rest of it, wherever the outward pressure slackened a little, seemed to be worked in a half-hearted way. The old experience that a fair share in the results of his work and the certainty of enjoying it doubles a man's energy seemed to be proved again in Ulster.

Spread that system over the rest of Ireland, and you will transform her into a second Ulster. Agrarian strife will cease, and agriculture will flourish. These convictions grew in many minds; they represented, for example, the opinion of the commission of inquiry presided over by Lord Bessborough when they recommended fair rents, fixity of tenure, and free sale, for up to now "the feeling of insecurity has operated to check the process of improvement of the soil."

The Ulster system, however, and any system framed on its main lines, could only give a limited amount of security. To make Ireland really prosperous it would be necessary to change her shifting forms of tenure into peasant proprietorship. John Bright advocated this course, expecting wonderful results from its adoption. The Irish tenant was to buy his holding: "The next morning after he made that agreement he would explain it to his wife and to his big boy, who had perhaps been idling about for a long time, and there would not be a stone in the land that would not be removed and a weed that he would not pull up, not a particle of manure that he would not save; everything would be done with a zeal and enthusiasm which he had never known before, and by the time the few years had run on, when the farm should become his without any further purchase, he should have turned a dilapidated little farm into a garden for himself and family."¹

His optimistic opinion was shared by many an Irishman. Michael Davitt, who opposed a system of peasant proprietorship, as he wanted the nationalisation of the land, expected, notwithstanding his dissent, very great results from its introduction.

"It would be a great economic advance, for there would be increased production, better cultivation, a better tenant-farmer class. It would check emigration, and keep a great part of the capital in the country. The increased production would stimulate manufactures and commerce. These results have come from it in other countries; therefore we have a right to suppose they would be seen in Ireland. The fact, too, that the impetus given to the work of the tenant-farmer in Ireland by such a scheme would be equivalent to the difficulties under which he has

¹ *John Bright's Speeches*, 2nd November, 1866, p. 197.

laboured—action and reaction being equal, or nearly so, in social movements—must not be lost sight of, because it warrants us in supposing that the beneficial results of peasant proprietary would be even greater in Ireland than they have been in other countries.”¹

It was thus confidently predicted that a large measure of land reform would not only improve the social status of the people by freeing them of heavy burdens—that it would stifle agrarian agitation—it was expected to change the attitude of the Irish people towards work, towards production. The knowledge that the results of their labours would be their own was to show its effects in increased economic activity, and ultimately in a greatly increased agricultural output.

II.

During the last twenty-eight years an ample measure of agrarian reform has been given to Ireland. Fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale to a certain degree have been granted to most Irish tenants. In addition to that, a very considerable percentage of them have been transformed into peasant proprietors.

There are to-day about 490,000 occupiers of holdings above one acre in Ireland; on 369,483 holdings rents have been fixed for a first statutory term of fifteen years; in 131,637 cases rents have been fixed for a second term.² Since 1881 the tenants on 143,564 holdings have been converted into owners through the operation of the different Land Purchase Acts, whilst on 173,343 holdings they have concluded purchase agreements. An agrarian reform on an enormous scale has thus been carried out. Has it achieved the success its advocates predicted? has it awakened the slumbering energies of the people? has it changed the aspects of their holdings and transformed sloth into cleanliness? has it increased the wealth of the country, multiplied its produce, and,

¹ *Life of Michael Davitt*, p. 242.

² The number of land-holders is, of course, smaller than the number of holdings, as many land-holders occupy several holdings. A tenant who holds half a dozen farms in the same county is returned as having a single holding of their combined valuation. This method is used in the Census Reports. The Agricultural Statistics, on the other hand, give

(a) The number of all separate agricultural holdings (599,872);

(b) The number of occupiers (552,997).

The term “holding” under the different Land Acts does not correspond absolutely to the term “holding” in the Agricultural Statistics (1908, Parl. Paper Cd. 4412, pp. 2 and 3).

whilst giving increased opportunities for the employment of labour, raised wages, cheapened production, and kept the people in the land, thus stopping emigration and increasing population?

It is not easy to answer all these questions in a methodical way, as the available statistics are anything but complete. Fortunately, however, for such an inquiry, Ireland is not an industrial country, and in such a country the capacity of maintaining a population and increasing it is practically measured by its agricultural output. The statistics of agricultural production are thus, to a considerable degree, an index to national prosperity.

They are, of course, never absolutely accurate, and have to be handled with a certain amount of care. If they tell us of trifling changes, it would not be wise to lay too much stress on our results, and such figures only ought to attract our attention as are capable of an unconstrained interpretation.

Irish agrarian reform begins in 1881; its first period may be concluded with the introduction of the Land Act of 1896. This period might be divided into two parts, the first up to 1887, during which the first rents were fixed, but when the Act did not apply to leaseholders, and when land purchase was practically non-existent. During that period about 180,000 tenancies were fixed, a rental of 3·2 million £ was reduced to 2·6 million £, *i.e.*, a reduction by 19 per cent. Agricultural prices fell between 4·2 per cent. (young cattle) and 26·5 per cent. (flax); bad seasons, exhaustion of the soil, restrictions of credit coincided.

The second part of the period brought an enlargement of the scope of the Land Acts. 150,000 leaseholders were newly admitted to their benefits in 1887. Up to 1896 120,000 rents were fixed and reduced by 23·5 per cent. Land purchase as a settled policy began in 1885. Under the first Purchase Act, 25,203 tenants bought their lands; under the Act of 1891, 5,634 followed. From 1881–1896 about 32,000 holdings, covering about 1,100,000 acres, were purchased for about £12,000,000, and more than 300,000 tenancies were fixed and reduced by 20·9 per cent. Agricultural depression continued; prices were from 32·2 per cent. (flax) to 5·2 per cent. (young cattle) lower than in 1881, but political agitation slackened down towards the end.

The second period embraces the years 1896–1908. Whilst rents continued to be fixed for a first term, many revisions took place, as the original statutory term of fifteen years was ended. About 66,000 rents were fixed for a first time, bringing reductions of about 20 per cent.; 131,637 second rents showed a reduction of 19·6 per cent. on the first rent, or 35·7 per cent. on the

original rental. Land purchase was accelerated. Under the Purchase Acts of 1891 and 1896, 37,000 holdings were purchased up to March 31st, 1903, with a total value of 11 million £. The new Land Act of 1903 quickened this movement considerably. Up to the 31st of October, 1908, 69,855 holdings were bought, representing a value of about £26,000,000, whilst 173,343 tenants entered into preliminary agreements for the purchase of holdings of £54,000,000 value.

During this second period purchase was thus getting more important than rent-fixing. Whilst the previous period was an era of transition, the second period started with the certainty that the farmers' interests would be safeguarded in every direction. There was now no more uncertainty, and the reforms of the first period ought to have produced ever-increasing results, the more so as the agricultural crisis was practically at an end. From 1896 a very few articles show a further fall; in most cases there is a steady upward movement.

TABLE I.—*Movement of Prices in Ireland (from the Statistics of the Land Commission and the Department of Agriculture).*

A.—CATTLE AND DAIRY PRODUCE.

	One year old Cattle.		Two year old Cattle.		Three year old Cattle.		Springers.	Beef, per 112 lbs.	Butter, per 112 lbs.	
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
1881-1885 ...	123	2	191	9	—	—	—	63 4½	101	3½
1886-1890 ...	118	11	180	10	228	5	269 8	53 7½	89	3½
1891-1895 ...	110	8	171	8	219	9	254 11	53 4½	96	6½
1896 ...	118	0	173	2	214	3	253 5	52 1	89	9½
1904-1906 ...	138	2	191	6	247	4	266 6	53 7	96	10
1907 ...	143	9	197	6	250	3	275 0	55 0½	98	10½

B.—CROPS.

	Wheat, per 112 lbs.		Barley, per 112 lbs.		Oats, per 112 lbs.		Hay, per 112 lbs.		Flax, per 14 lbs.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1881-1885 ...	7	11½	7	2½	6	0½	2	6½	6	4½
1886-1890 ...	6	5½	6	2½	5	4½	2	0½	5	11½
1891-1895 ...	6	4	7	0	6	0½	3	2½	6	8
1904-1906 ...	6	9	7	1½	5	8½	3	1½	6	10½
1907 ...	8	1½	7	1½	6	2½	2	9	7	0½

III.

Ireland's chief industry during the last thirty years has been the pastoral industry; agriculture pure and simple has had very little scope. What has been the influence of those great agrarian reforms on the production of that staple industry?

The Irish cattle trade is mainly organised on the following lines:—The smaller farmers do the breeding; they go in for dairy work and rarely keep the stock above the age of one year. They sell the young cattle to a grazier, who keeps them for some time, grazing them on pasture lands. He rarely does the finishing work, but disposes of his stock between the ages of two and three years old to a finisher, who either does the real fattening in some select Irish district, or exports the stock to be fattened in Great Britain. A glimpse at the cattle statistics of Ireland does not reveal any marvellous changes. Until quite lately the number of cows in Ireland has been almost stationary since 1875–7; sheep have undergone several fluctuations, but have not increased; pigs have decreased, but both classes of animals have increased since 1880–2. There has been a steady increase in horses (which reached its maximum 1895–7), and a very great continued increase in poultry. The value of eggs and poultry export came to about 3·5 million £ in 1906, to almost as much as the value of the export of butter (3·6 million £).

There has been a not inconsiderable increase of cattle other than cows. Starting from the average of 1880–82, cattle have

TABLE II.—*Number of Live Stock in Ireland.*

Average.	Cattle.	Cows.	Sheep.	Pigs.	Horses.	Poultry.
	Millions.	Millions.	Millions.	Millions.		Millions.
1875–1877 ...	4·1	1·5	4·0	1·4	540,000	13·0
1880–1882 ...	4·0	1·4	3·3	0·9	548,000	13·7
1895–1897 ...	4·4	1·4	4·0	1·3	623,000	12·5
1904–1906 ...	4·6	1·5	3·8	1·2	601,000	18·6
1907 ...	4·7	1·6	3·8	1·3	596,000	24·0
1908 ...	4·8	1·6	4·1	1·2	605,000	24·0

increased from 4 millions to 4·8 millions in 1908. The greatest increase seems to have taken place in the number of cattle under two years, a slight increase in older cattle. Looking all round a certain improvement is thus visible, but no improvement wonderful enough to demand a deep psychological analysis of the effects

agrarian reform has had on the Irish mind. The changes since 1895-7, when the full force of former reforms might be expected,

TABLE III.—*Ages of Cattle (other than Cows).*

	Above two years.	One to two years.	Under one year.
1881	900,000	787,000	877,000
1891	963,000	981,000	1,062,000
1906	1,058,000	1,040,000	1,083,000
1907	1,014,000	1,000,000	1,075,000
1908	1,013,000	1,050,000	1,114,000

and when agricultural prospects became more favourable, are rather smaller than those in previous periods—in fact, from 1895-7, with the exception of poultry, very little numerical progress is visible.

That impression is strengthened by a glimpse at the figures of exports to England; a considerable improvement during the first period, no great changes, in some directions even a set-back, during the second period.

TABLE IV.—*Export of Live Stock to England.*

	Cattle.	Sheep.	Pigs.
1880-1882	700,000	617,000	420,000
1895-1897	740,000	737,000	617,000
1904-1906	766,000	700,000	432,000
1907	841,973	660,415	482,000

TABLE V.—*Stage of the Exported Cattle.*

	Fat cattle.	Store cattle.
1880-1882	267,000	335,000
1904-1905	228,658	463,701
1906	240,617	474,230

There is, moreover, a considerable change in the ages of the cattle exported. Store cattle increased very greatly in numbers, but fat cattle have fallen off. A half-finished article seems to become the staple export of the country. Without pressing that

point unduly, it certainly does not indicate the adoption of a more intensive system of agriculture.¹

Figures alone are not quite sufficient for the formation of an unbiassed judgment of the progress of the Irish cattle trade; we ought to qualify them by data indicating the changes in quality. Unhappily, figures of that kind are not forthcoming. One must be content with the opinions of experts. There has been undoubtedly a good deal of progress in the Irish pastoral industry, for which a great deal of credit is probably due to the Congested Districts Board, to the Department of Agriculture, and to graziers who are not affected by the Land Acts. But experts are certainly not of the opinion that the Irish cattle industry has made marvellous strides as far as quality is concerned. The report of the Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland speaks of the "tendency of the farmers to sell all their best young stock and to keep the inferior ones for breeding purposes."² An expert examined by that Commission says: "Many of the small holders do produce cattle that they practically cannot sell for fattening purposes";³ the period required for growing and fattening is far too long, according to other experts.

We may, however, presume that a certain improvement has taken place. As young cattle have risen 20s. in price since 1875-7, and are 15s. above the price for 1881-5, there ought to have been ample incitement for unheard-of efforts. Such efforts, however, do not seem to have taken place in any great degree. The Irish cattle industry is still carried on, on the ranching system. In most parts of the country cattle are still kept out during the winter, though the grazing may be supplemented by hay and feeding stuffs. Very often cows only are sheltered, whilst the other animals are unprotected, and thus lose a portion of their value through cold. Stall feeding is done to a very small degree only, and that mostly in places which have always been known for progressive agriculture. Dairying remains thus a kind of summer industry; very little butter is produced, just when prices are most remunerative.⁴ This is done, though all experts consider mixed farming more profitable for small holders

¹ The general changes in the condition of the English market are, no doubt, reflected in these figures; it is important, however, to state facts plainly before looking round for explanations.

² § 59.

³ Vol. III., 614, 694.

⁴ *Report of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society*, 1907, p. 5. "The conditions," continues the *Report*, "under which milk is supplied to the creameries still leave much to be desired."

than extensive grazing. Where grazing is supplemented by fodder, &c., imported grains and cakes are mostly used, instead of crops grown on the farms.¹

The statistics of Irish agriculture carry out these observations to a very marked degree. The area covered by all sorts of agricultural crops has continually decreased. From over 5 million acres in 1880-2 it fell to 4·8 million acres in 1896-7, and to 4·6 million acres since. With the exception of meadow, there is a decrease in all sorts of crops. For part of that shrinkage, the fall of prices or an increase in the cost of production may be accountable, though flax has actually risen in price since 1881-5, whilst the area devoted to it has shrunk by two-thirds; and oats and barley have not fallen considerably.

TABLE VI.—*Area under Crops (Meadow Included).*

1880-1882	...	...	...	...	5·1 million acres.
1897-1903	...	...	...	...	4·6 " "
1905-1907	...	...	...	...	4·7 " "
1908	...	...	...	...	4·6 " "

TABLE VII.—*Area under Different Sorts of Crops.*

					Corn crops.	Green crops.	Meadow.	Flax.
					Million acres.	Million acres.	Million acres.	Acres.
1880-1882	...	...	...	...	1·76	1·25	1·11	35,000
1895-1897	...	...	...	...	1·42	1·12	2·2	71,000
1897-1903	...	...	...	...	1·35	1·08	2·17	44,000
1904-1907	...	...	...	...	1·29	1·08	2·3	51,000
1908	...	...	...	...	1·26½	1·00	2·3	47,000

But prices of agricultural produce are of no importance on a holding that is not worked by paid labour; whose agricultural produce is not meant for the market and ought to be used as fodder for cattle. There is, however, no increase visible in the area devoted to tillage for such a purpose. There is a reduction in the area planted with potatoes, and a decrease in the area under turnips. The shrinkage of the potato crop may be looked upon as a change for the better, inasmuch as the potato does not any longer form the staple diet of the people. There is, however, no corresponding increase in the acreage under oats—1·39 million acres have shrunk to 1·06 million acres. And it seems quite probable that Indian corn and other food is bought where grain might be raised on the farms.

¹ In 1906 the total value of imported cattle-feeding stuffs came to more than £4,000,000.

TABLE VIII.—*Area under Potatoes, Oats and Turnips.*

	Potatoes.	Oats.	Turnips and Mangels.
	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.
1875-1877	885,000	1,490,000	384,000
1880-1882	840,000	1,390,000	339,000
1889-1891	774,000	1,225,000	345,000
1896-1897	690,000	1,184,000	364,000
1904-1906	617,000	1,071,000	354,000
1908	587,000	1,060,000	351,000

TABLE IX.—*Yield of Different Crops per Acre.*

	Wheat.	Oats.	Potatoes.	Turnips.	Flax.	Hay.
	Cwt.	Cwt.	Tons.	Tons.	Stone.	Tons.
1877-1881 ...	14·0	13·1	2·8	11·7	28·2	2·1
1881-1890 ...	14·7	13·6	3·5	12·3	29·6	2·0
1895-1897 ...	16·2	14·3	3·6	14·4	23·0	2·2
1899-1901 ...	17·6	15·9	4·1	15·4	35·1	2·1
1907... ..	18·6	16·0	3·8	14·9	31·2	2·3

There is, however, one improvement visible. There is undoubtedly an improvement in the yield of the different crops. It is not safe to press that point too much, inasmuch as statistics of yields are not very reliable. The improvement is, however, so marked that there seems to be some real ground for it. It may be partly due to good seasons, or it may be owing to the well-known fact, that shrinkage of area means concentration on the best soil and concentration of capital, and consequently increased yields; anyhow, there is some reason for the belief that there has been a real improvement.

IV.

Nowhere, however, do we see changes on such a scale as to show the working of wonderful strong forces which at last have had a chance to expand. A more detailed inquiry in some other direction will enforce this point.

There are about 599,872 holdings of all sorts in the hands of about 552,997 occupiers; 83,574 holdings are under one acre, and are of little agricultural importance. The newest agricultural statistics divide the holdings into those occupied by tenants and those occupied by owners; 369,451 holdings are, according to

them, occupied by tenants, 230,421 by owners.¹ If we look at the different Poor Law Unions into which Ireland is divided, we find about twelve where, according to those somewhat imperfect statistics, the number of owners equalled or surpassed the number of occupiers in 1906. In nine Unions, on the other hand, some very rich tillage or grazing districts, some very poor congested districts, there are very few purchasers at all.² If we look for those different Unions (a) at the number of horses used for agriculture, (b) at the number of milk cows, (c) at the total number of cattle, (d) at the percentage of their area under crops, we find in nearly all of them a considerable decrease in the area under crops; in some we find an increase, in others a decrease in the number of horses used for agriculture; in some of them the cows have increased, in most of them cattle have increased, but I cannot see that the Unions where purchasers preponderate have shown a development very markedly different from that of the other Unions.

The general development of the country is reflected in most of those units, but nothing is visible that would give any clue to the working of different forces in the different districts.

In fact, Irish agriculture has nowhere changed its character. Extensive grazing is still going on where it is possible, *i.e.*, where the land permits it, and neither rent reductions nor purchase have changed the character of Irish farming essentially. It is still backward.

"This backwardness," says an expert, "is shown by the preponderance of uneconomic holdings, by the want of working capital, or of an inducement to invest in the improvement of land, and by the want of proper housing for the farmer and his family or for his stock."

The large and steady increase in the area of second class pasture, which might yield three or four times more wealth if well tilled—a too prevalent practice of selling the best and breeding from inferior stock—the almost complete loss in certain districts of the art of tillage; the want of a regular system of rotation; the aversion to doing more than the minimum towards cleaning

¹ Up to October 31, 1908, the number of holdings sold and agreed to be sold came to 316,984. The number of holdings remaining unsold was 282,888. (Cd. 4412, pp. 2 and 3.)

² The division in Unions with many, and in Unions with few purchasers is made on the basis of the statistics for 1906. The numbers of owners and tenants given are those for 1907, which showed an all-round increase of owners. The statistics for live stock, crops, &c., are those of 1907. They could thus reflect changes in ownership carried out in 1906; but it would be too early to see the effect of changes just beginning.

TABLE X.—*Number of Horses Used for Agriculture, of Milch Cows, of Cattle, and of Acreage under Crops in Different Poor Law Unions for the Years 1881, 1891, 1906, and 1907.*

A.—UNIONS WITH A STRONG PERCENTAGE OF PURCHASERS.

				Horses.	Cows.	Cattle.	Area under Crops.
							Percentage.
<i>Armagh—</i>	Owners ... 4,426	{	1881	5,404	14,934	38,987	54·9
			1891	5,558	14,914	48,755	48·7
			1906	4,866	14,238	43,430	44·3
			1907	4,829	14,151	42,658	43·5
	Tenants ... 3,984						
<i>Ballymahon—</i>	Owners ... 1,775	{	1881	1,744	4,086	20,748	26·9
			1891	1,799	4,103	23,709	24·1
			1906	1,728	3,824	23,448	22·0
			1907	1,800	4,311	26,747	20·7
	Tenants ... 1,322						
<i>Ballyvaghan—</i>	Owners ... 346	{	1881	447	1,240	7,103	6·0
			1891	419	1,322	6,646	4·9
			1906	475	1,444	6,535	5·9
			1907	434	1,390	6,919	6·4
	Tenants ... 407						
<i>Callan—</i>	Owners ... 1,766	{	1881	2,030	8,584	29,262	30·7
			1891	1,963	9,019	30,902	26·3
			1906	1,912	10,014	34,606	26·3
			1907	1,794	10,181	34,412	24·9
	Tenants ... 1,201						
<i>Castlecomer—</i>	Owners ... 1,412	{	1881	1,238	5,538	15,329	35·0
			1891	1,226	5,165	15,646	33·7
			1906	1,295	4,973	15,700	34·4
			1907	1,347	5,522	16,428	34·7
	Tenants ... 540						
<i>Coleraine—</i>	Owners ... 2,447	{	1881	4,095	9,156	23,499	39·1
			1891	4,059	9,422	24,850	38·5
			1906	4,311	10,361	28,391	36·0
			1907	4,056	10,270	26,578	36·8
	Tenants ... 1,568						
<i>Cootehill—</i>	Owners ... 3,428	{	1881	2,289	9,670	22,670	41·3
			1891	2,543	10,983	26,983	39·3
			1906	2,668	10,689	25,753	36·0
			1907	2,691	11,637	26,851	35·7
	Tenants ... 1,737						
<i>Irvinestown—</i>	Owners ... 1,763	{	1881	1,537	7,647	16,087	31·5
			1891	1,626	8,248	19,128	29·5
			1906	1,687	8,845	20,216	27·6
			1907	1,681	9,433	20,467	27·3
	Tenants ... 1,309						
<i>Lisburn—</i>	Owners ... 4,102	{	1881	5,065	11,370	27,856	50·9
			1891	4,794	13,055	34,536	46·3
			1906	4,532	13,396	36,086	44·1
			1907	4,401	13,617	36,185	42·9
	Tenants ... 1,748						
<i>Lurgan—</i>	Owners ... 3,538	{	1881	2,832	6,817	16,989	59·7
			1891	2,690	7,437	20,576	51·3
			1906	2,924	8,317	23,653	48·5
			1907	2,733	8,581	23,443	49·5
	Tenants ... 2,096						
<i>Shillelagh—</i>	Owners ... 1,303	{	1881	2,274	5,608	17,453	30·2
			1891	2,220	5,870	19,041	29·0
			1906	1,709	3,910	14,064	26·3
			1907	1,626	4,135	13,884	24·6
	Tenants ... 494						
<i>Tralee—</i>	Owners ... 3,128	{	1881	3,026	24,912	47,473	20·2
			1891	2,720	24,972	53,528	19·2
			1906	3,159	28,075	59,945	19·6
			1907	3,201	28,889	60,704	20·5
	Tenants ... 1,968						

B.—UNIONS WITH FEW PURCHASERS.

			Horses.	Cows.	Cattle.	Area under crops.
						Percentage.
<i>Castletown—</i>			1881 764	6,537	13,777	11·2
Owners ...	170	{	1891 665	6,018	13,578	10·3
Tenants ...	1,475		1906 737	6,165	17,022	9·9
			1907 680	6,100	15,818	9·1
<i>Carlow—</i>			1881 4,096	9,998	39,298	36·5
Owners ...	1,392	{	1891 4,038	10,169	41,969	33·8
Tenants ...	4,647		1906 4,479	10,424	46,659	32·8
			1907 4,320	11,516	46,355	33·9
<i>Ballinrobe—</i>			1881 1,983	4,912	18,239	18·3
Owners ...	1,529	{	1891 1,645	5,012	21,698	14·0
Tenants ...	3,128		1906 1,935	5,597	23,593	14·2
			1907 1,858	5,896	24,985	13·6
<i>Clifden—</i>			1881 1,123	4,370	13,415	5·6
Owners ...	211	{	1891 1,146	4,797	16,116	5·0
Tenants ...	3,073		1906 1,217	5,517	17,684	4·8
			1907 1,085	5,685	16,129	4·5
<i>Ennis—</i>			1881 1,764	7,806	26,087	22·7
Owners ...	536	{	1891 1,708	7,988	29,029	21·5
Tenants ...	2,416		1906 1,799	7,940	30,798	22·8
			1907 1,697	7,939	29,756	21·8
<i>Millford—</i>			1881 3,055	6,842	16,787	24·0
Owners ...	696	{	1891 2,925	7,280	19,641	22·1
Tenants ...	3,004		1906 3,039	7,417	20,638	22·3
			1907 2,966	7,760	20,587	21·7
<i>Navan—</i>			1881 1,474	2,492	28,764	28·1
Owners ...	745	{	1891 1,405	2,417	34,546	21·3
Tenants ...	1,677		1906 1,260	2,767	37,085	19·4
			1907 1,244	3,193	39,030	17·7
<i>Oldcastle—</i>			1881 1,504	4,050	21,259	29·7
Owners ...	1,229	{	1891 1,540	4,150	23,107	30·0
Tenants ...	1,699		1906 1,763	4,320	23,695	28·4
			1907 1,735	5,021	24,798	27·9
<i>Westport—</i>			1881 1,755	5,272	19,011	9·3
Owners ...	355	{	1891 2,552	8,947	30,842	6·0
Tenants ...	5,883		1906 2,451	10,971	35,980	7·1
			1907 2,503	11,041	36,371	6·6

the land; the want of pride in the performance of farm work and in the surroundings of the homestead; the tendency to put off ploughing, sowing, and harvesting, until the last moment; the small value that is put upon time; the want of recognition of the fact that the best and most productive manure that goes into the land is labour.”¹

¹ *Evidence of the Royal Committee on Congestion*, Vol. IV., Q 20,449

V.

The great agrarian reforms thus far have not succeeded in giving increased chances of employment to the people. Though the number of occupiers of holdings above one acre has fallen only from 479,729 in 1881 to 470,399 in 1907, emigration has continued.¹ From 1891–1900 about 430,000 people emigrated; since 1901 more than 200,000 followed; from 5·2 millions in 1881, the population has dwindled down to not quite 4·4 millions in 1906; the number of agricultural labourers (outdoor) has fallen from 163,000 in 1891 to 146,000; the number of servants (indoor) from 104,000 to 77,000. Whilst since 1891 the change in the numbers and types of the units of production, the agricultural holdings, has not been very great, the number of people who live by them has certainly decreased.²

These facts are so well known that far-reaching demands for further reform are being based on them. Ireland, it is said, being an agricultural country, could only maintain a bigger population if her agriculture was more intensive. Intensive agriculture is, however, impossible at present. A large area is in the hands of big occupiers, whom it pays to go in for extensive cattle grazing; a large part of the small holdings are either too small or too bad to afford people a decent living or a chance for more intensive cultivation.

There are 91,000 holdings in Ireland above 50 acres, which cover an area of 9·5 million acres; whilst the 363,287 holdings below 50 acres cover only 6·8 million acres. The average holding of 19 acres contrasts thus with one of an average of 104. On the big holdings 80·8 per cent. of the area are under permanent grass, and 19·2 per cent. under crops of all sorts; on the small holdings 62·4 per cent. are under grass, and 37·6 per cent. under crops. If the number of those small holdings were increased in the country, runs the argument, and if a certain amount of social redistribution were carried out, Irish agriculture would be greatly intensified.³

As far as I am aware of, there are no statistics of the size of the different holdings purchased. Land purchase seems to have started on the assumption that the size of the holdings did not matter; holdings which could certainly not maintain their

¹ The total number of occupiers increased from 529,684 to 552,997.

² Holdings between 1–15 acres fell from 231,116 to 215,796 (1907). Holdings above 15 acres increased from 295,627 to 300,502.

³ *Appendix to Eleventh Report of Royal Commission on Congestion*, pp. 56 and 57.

occupiers were purchased as well as big farms. But there must be many holdings in the hands of purchasers, big enough for more intensified agriculture, and capable of being worked without outside help. The purchase of these holdings, which must be quite considerable in number, has had no appreciable effect on Irish production. The average rent of the purchased holdings was :—

	Holdings bought under					
	Acts of 1885 and 1888.			Acts of 1891 and 1896.		
In Ulster	£16	0	0	£12	0	0
„ Leinster	34	0	0	24	0	0
„ Connaught	13	13	0	9	8	0
„ Munster	40	0	0	26	10	0

The average price of holdings sold under the Act of 1903 is :—

For Ulster	£242	2	0
„ Leinster	528	8	0
„ Connaught	211	8	0
„ Munster	452	13	0
„ Ireland	£360	19	0

On such a holding, according to most experts' opinion, tillage with a view to stall-feeding would pay. More than twenty-five years of agrarian reform, however, have not been sufficient to make a people of born agriculturists avail themselves of their opportunities. Neither security of tenure nor purchase has succeeded so far. Quite the contrary, a witness before the Royal Commission on Congestion speaks of tillage, of ploughing with a horse, as “a lost art”¹; and an employer of labour says he would not trust Irish labourers “with his horses and carts.”² “On many an estate in Ulster,” Mr. Bailey reports, “as well as in the centre and south of Ireland, we find that there is a prevailing tendency to give up tillage as much as possible, and keep the land in grass.”³

The result would be a considerable increase in the gross value the same seems to be the case in the congested districts where the people were accustomed to very small holdings, which they had to crop continually. “They seem to prefer to struggle along, instead of taking loans from the Congested Districts Board, letting portions of the new holdings at as high a rent as they can get.”⁴

Where grazing ranches have been cut up the purchasers have often merely cut the hay, without adding manure, but they have

¹ *Royal Commission on Congestion*, 58,821.

² *Ibid.*, 20,478.

³ *Report of an Inquiry into the Present Condition of Tenant Purchasers under the Land Purchase Acts*, p. 18 (1903).

⁴ *Ibid.*, Q 3026, 3031-2.

not tilled the land. They have occasionally even refused an offer of £30 from the Estate Commissioners, being satisfied to struggle on.¹

The Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland were of opinion that a more intense system of agriculture was profitable in Ireland, and almost a necessity if the number of small but economic holdings was to be increased. "We did not, however," they have to acknowledge, "see any small holdings where this system was actually in practice."²

The agitation which has sprung up in Ireland during the last years, and which has succeeded in inducing the Government to bring in a new Irish Land Bill, is an open acknowledgment of such a state of affairs. It is aimed, of course, at expediting the sales of estates, whose owners have not yet been willing to part with them. Whilst—on the basis of the Poor Law Valuation—lands for about £100,000,000 have changed hands, or are in the process of doing it, another £90–100,000,000 still stand over.³ To hand them over to the tenants—if needs be by compulsory purchase, and if possible at cheap rates—is one of the objects of the Bill. The other object, which was only half-heartedly aimed at by former Acts, is a redistribution of lands. Not only are the uneconomic holdings of the congested districts to be levelled up to the size of workable farms; the large areas of untenanted land all over the country may be given to the following persons:—(a) A person being the tenant or proprietor of a holding not exceeding £10 in rateable value; (b) A person being the son of a tenant or proprietor of a holding on or in the neighbourhood of the estate not exceeding £30 in rateable value;⁴ and the same holds good for the nine counties which are to be handed over to the Congested Districts Board, where the erection of new holdings, not only the enlargement of old ones, is contemplated.⁵

A policy of redistribution of lands is thus to accompany the transformation of tenants into owners. It may be an extremely wise policy, but it is an open acknowledgment, that neither the transformation of tenants at will into statutory tenants, nor the transformation of the latter into peasant-proprietors, has brought the millennium.

Some of the most eager advocates of such a policy of redistribution doubt even its success if it is not accompanied by compulsion. They advocate compulsory tillage, as the grant of a workable

¹ *Commission on Congestion*, Q 41,543, 41,562, 19,743.

² Q 141.

³ Cd. 4,412, pp. 2 and 3.

⁴ Clause 14 (1).

⁵ Clause 39.

tillage farm would not induce a people to increase their production, whom security and the magic of ownership have not transformed from herds into earth-tillers.

VI.

The results achieved have thus far fallen short of the predictions liberally indulged in for the last thirty years. There has been a considerable improvement; but, if we take into account the great impetus which the Co-operative Movement has given to self-help in Ireland, the share directly attributable to land reform is much smaller than the ardent reformer might wish for. What is the explanation of that phenomenon?

(1) Any puzzle in Irish life may be ascribed to the peculiar character of the Irish. Friends and foes have often indulged in the sport of demonstrating that the Irish are a species of homo sapiens absolutely unexplainable by the ordinary laws of mankind. I am quite willing to accept this explanation provided nothing else is forthcoming; but it is certainly not a good one to start an inquiry with.

(2) A second argument might run thus:—The Irish peasant has a very low standard of comfort; when his few wants are satisfied he will not work except under compulsion. Rack-renting provided the pressure needed. When it was abolished the peasant's activities diminished *pro tanto*. As the share levied from him decreased, his wants did not increase, and his total output naturally dwindled. There is much in Irish history to maintain such an argument.

"For what need they to Work," Sir William Petty wrote more than two hundred years ago, "who can content themselves with Potatos, whereof the Labour of one Man can feed forty? . . . And why should they desire to fare better, tho with more Labour, when they are taught that this way of living is more like the Patriarchs of old, and the Saints of later times, by whose Prayers and Merits they are to be reliev'd and whose Examples they are therefore to follow?"¹

Many an Irish landlord up to latter days has acted on a similar principle, and has hoped to stimulate the tenants' slumbering energy by "salting their lands," as the process of rack-renting was called.²

This argument fails however to explain the modest effect

¹ *The Political Anatomy of Ireland*, pp. 201, 202.

² *Congested Districts Commission*, V., Q 23, 359.

agrarian reform has had on Irish production. Firstly, notwithstanding heavy reductions of their burdens, the total produce of the Irish agriculturist has not shrunk; it has even increased a little. Secondly, there is one element of unanimity amongst all discordance: the standard of living has increased all over the country. Some statistics about housing might prove that; the same might be done by inquiry into the consumption of articles liable to indirect taxation. The enormous increase in bank deposits may not be a reliable index to the growth of wealth of the agricultural classes. It shows, however, an increased desire for banking facilities which in itself is a sign of an improved standard. Though many minor circumstances may have been contributory causes in that process, it would have been impossible without land reform.

(3) It may be argued that the time elapsed since reform began is not sufficiently long to admit of great changes. Now, if all the purchasers of land in Ireland had purchased their holdings in 1907, it would be unjust to look forward to improvements in 1907. But, not only has there been a good deal of purchase twenty years back, the fixing of fair rents on such an enormous scale ought certainly to have had an influence on production. If the Ulster Tenant Right succeeded in making Ulster a flourishing country, a similar system ought to have produced similar effects in other parts of Ireland; and if the hope of further reductions paralysed the tenants' efforts, and in some cases even led to a deterioration of the farm, this has nothing to do with the shortness of the time elapsed since the day it was possible to follow such a course. Results which are not visible after twenty years ought not to be called magical.

(4) Land reform in other countries has passed through critical stages. The same, it might be said, ought to be expected in Ireland. In most other countries, however, the tenant was made the owner under onerous conditions. He had worked his lord's demesne by servile labour. He had to compound for that labour either in money or by ceding parts of his lands.¹ He had to sell his produce to make the money, whilst he had formerly subsisted on it. The entire organisation of agricultural industry was dislocated. No such change took place in Ireland. The tenant had always been obliged to pay his rent in cash. What happened now was merely a reduction of his burdens.

¹ In Prussia, for example, which is always noted as the prototype of Irish reform, the bigger tenants only were made owners. Some of them had to cede as compensation one-third to one-half of their farms, others had to pay 25 years' purchase on an unreduced rental.

VII.

The methods through which his burdens were reduced explain easily the somewhat meagre results land reform has had on the agricultural output of Ireland.

An Irish tenant paying a rent of £100 in 1880 would have it cut down to £80 if he applied to a rent court in 1882. He might re-enter the court for a second fixing in 1897; his rent would then be cut down to £62. Since 1882 his burden would have been eased by 38 per cent. Part of that reduction was undoubtedly due to a severe fall in prices. But on many a holding the price of the articles actually sold has fallen very little indeed; during the last decade it has even risen. And in many cases the increased price of tenant-rights shows clearly that a part of the reduction has been capitalised for the tenants' benefit.

There has thus been an enormous reduction of burdens; there has even been in some cases an actual free gift to the statutory tenant. The chances of getting such a gift have sometimes out-balanced the benefits which fixity of rent meant to secure him. Increased effort might produce increased wealth, and might, after fifteen years, lead to a rent raising: The fear of an increased rental at a future fixing kept many a tenant religiously from too far-reaching improvements; they even tempted him, not infrequently, to positive deteriorations.

Still greater were the benefits emanating from the purchase Acts. If a holding whose rent was fixed in 1887 at £75 were sold under the Ashbourne Act, the purchase price would come to £1,275; the purchaser's annuity would be £51, a fourth of which was sinking fund. If a tenant bought on the basis of a (second) rental of £62, his annuity under the Wyndham Act fell to £49; under the Act of 1891 it might even fall as low as £41. Agrarian reform in Ireland converts tenants into owners by striking off from their obligations up to 33 per cent. The credit of the British Government gives the Irish tenant absolute security, by reducing his burden without any effort whatsoever on his part. In fact, provided his landlord is willing to sell, he must make a great effort not to become an owner. The magic of property permits him to take off a third of his working day were he so inclined. But if he did resist that magic, he would then have to work as strenuously as before.

A great deal of money which formerly had to be paid somehow, remained in the pockets of the people. The Ashbourne

Act meant a yearly remission of about £200,000 to 25,000 tenants. The Acts of 1891-1896 gave a remission of £220,000 a year to 47,000 tenants, and the estates commission have, by direct sales, taken off from about £280,000 a year from 61,381 individuals (up to March 31st, 1908). These reductions are mainly due to the credit of the British Treasury, and are not counterbalanced by any fall in prices; they were struck off rentals which the fair rent courts had already dealt with (taking off 1.5 million a year by first term reductions, and £500,000 by second term reductions). Though a part of that sum has been swallowed up by the fall in prices, another part has certainly remained. The reductions described above thus constitute what one might call an "unearned increment."

Agrarian reform, in fact, was carried not only without putting any extra strain on the Irish tenant, but by giving him a chance of dispensing with his customary efforts. Purchase means practically immediate rent reduction, and the prospect of paying no rent whatsoever in years to come. And the margin this remission creates between landlords' rents and State annuities largely accounts for the very limited number of cases in which tenants have fallen in arrears with their yearly instalments.

Land purchase has been attractive to the Irish tenant not merely because it makes him the owner of his holding, but because he realises an immediate reduction of his burdens. The controversy connected with land purchase centres always about the one point: Is the land bought at such a price as to make sufficient reductions possible, or not? The psychological aspect of land purchase does not reveal a people craving for ownership under whatever conditions they can get it; they merely crave for a decrease of their burdens—a very natural, but in no way mystical, desire. Whilst in other countries, land reforms meant merely the chance of an increased income by offering opportunities for special efforts, in Ireland it produces an increased income almost automatically. The income thus gained has enabled the people to raise their standard of comfort; it has probably, too, been one of the causes contributory to an increase in their savings. It has not been used in a marked degree for an extension of production. Though the standard of comfort has been rising, the Irish are not filled with a mad desire for gain. They have no objection against accepting a share of this world's goods, but they are not so greedy as to try to increase them by never-ceasing, systematic toil. They enjoy a greatly enlarged competence. To try for more would not only be burdensome, it might be risky. You never

know whether the soil will respond and return the capital you trust it with. The man whose lot has been so wonderfully improved by distributive agencies ought not to tempt the gods. There are, however, still many individuals who have not enjoyed all those distributive advantages which the very liberal finance of the Purchase Acts extends to them. They, of course, wait for their share before they exert themselves vehemently, and if all the tenants of Ireland have bought under favourable circumstances, that is not yet the end of possible changes in distribution. Most Irish Land Acts were considered as final measures, but I venture to think that nobody any longer expects an Irish Land Act that is really the last. With such experience before him, the faith of the Irish farmer in the distributive agencies must needs be great. They have given him safety to enjoy the fruits of his industry, and they have given him an increased income without extra efforts on his part. Moreover, he has ample expectations that a future increase of his income may be brought about by similar methods. It is hardly marvellous that under such conditions his productive activities should not respond as quickly as was expected. It is human nature—not merely Irish peculiarity—to prefer an increased income from distribution rather than from production; especially when an experience of more than twenty-five years has shown that a unit of energy applied to legislative activities secures a bigger and safer return than a unit of energy spent on raising crops.

M. J. BONN

Munich, May, 1909.