

Europe; you must cross the Black Sea, and leave the Caspian far behind; you must traverse Persia, from west to east, and cross the mountains of Afghanistan until you see again flying over the Indus this same accursed flag of Britain." In a second lecture Mr. Mitchell went on to show that the erection of an independent class of peasant proprietors would be no innovation. He adduced the example of Prussia, where such a state of things had been brought about within the course of the present century. "In the early years of the present century," said he, "the soil of Prussia belonged entirely to the class of nobles; and the tenures were mere modifications of the ancient feudal arrangements. It was then, as it still is, an almost purely agricultural country. Nobles, as in France before the Revolution, paid no direct taxes; their vast estates were knight-free (*ritter frei*); for it was reckoned unknighly and ignoble for barons to contribute directly in money to the maintenance and defence of the State—their counsels in peace, their swords in war, were all they could give their country consistently with the exalted chivalry and nice feeling of honour which distinguished that noble order. The industrious people were to maintain all public burdens and maintain the non-paying nobility too. The genuine system of feudal law and pure institutes of chivalry had been corrupted and died out in Germany as well as in France and Spain; and in the dead forms of fiefs, freeholds, and feudal duties and services, there remained hardly the tradition of life or a glimpse of meaning. The defence of the country was committed to a great standing army; all powers of self-taxation were taken from the baronial courts and local jurisdictions, and vested in a despotic monarch; and the relation of lord and vassal was thenceforth reduced into a relation not of mutual interest, mutual dependence, and good offices, but of oppression and exaction on the one side, and hatred and fraud on the other. This is the history of corrupted feudalism everywhere." He then goes on to sketch the rise of Prussia under King Frederick the Great and her humiliation by Napoleon. There was, however, one man who saw the means of rescuing his country from degradation. "This was the Prussian Minister, Baron Von Stein: he perceived that if Prussia was to remain a kingdom on the map of Europe, Prussia must be for the Prussians; the tillers of the ground must be made to feel that they had an interest in the State, and that their own safety and honour were identified with the independence of their country. Fortunately, the King had the independence and the grace to give Von Stein uncontrolled authority in the business. Under the muzzles of French cannon the cautious Minister matured his plan; and, within twelve months after the carnage of Jena—three months after the peace of Tilsit—began to put it in practice." The condition of the land tenure, as Von Stein found it, was as follows: "Under the feudal institutions there had gradually grown up on the estates of the great barons a vast number of small holdings, called peasant-fiefs (*Bauer-hofe*), comprising from 40 to 100 acres each. It had been always the policy of the State to encourage the growth of these peasant-fiefs for fiscal purposes, because most of the revenue of the kingdom was derived from them. The nobles, as I said before, were free from direct taxation: and when a standing army began to be kept on foot, and permanent burdens had to be imposed upon the land, the tenants of the peasant-fiefs were obliged to pay all. It had always been the policy of the State, therefore, to encourage this class of tenures, not so much for the sake of the tenants as for the sake of the revenue they produced; and there had been at various times laws passed to restrain the lords from interfering with these peasants, from evicting them, or taking possession of their lands, because those lands, the moment they came into possession of the lord, were, of course, tax free, to the loss and injury of the revenue. Besides their dues to the State, these tenants of the *bauer-hofe* gave a certain number of days' work in the week to their superior, as well as other feudal services and duties. The law had, therefore, recognised in these men a permanency of tenure, although very heavily burdened. Besides these, there were also a numerous body of free-holders (*freibauern*), being generally manumitted serfs who had settled with the consent of their lord upon waste lands, and reclaimed them. These also appear to have had a perpetual tenure by the operation of the general law restraining nobles from entering upon the 'peasant-fiefs.' Then there were also on every barony a great number of serfs who paid daily labour for their patches of land, and 'who originally,' as Mr. Laing says, 'were intended by the proprietor to be his servants and day-labourers for cultivating his mains, or home-farmed land; but who, by long usage and occupation for generations, had become a kind of hereditary tenants, not to be distinguished from those occupants acknowledged to be proprietors, or what we would call copy-holders.' All these plebeian tenures were subject to some form or other of taxation, and, as encouraging industry, were profitable to the State; and upon this account the lord was not only prohibited from evicting the occupiers, but was even obliged to keep some kinds of the farms supplied with responsible tenants and taxpayers. The peasants, of course, could not purchase noble or 'knight-free' land upon any terms or at any price. Such is a general sketch of the actual state of land in Prussia up to the year 1807. You will observe that Government had always been anxious to restrain eviction, and that the whole policy of the State in recognising the undis-

turbed tenure of peasant-fiefs for revenue purposes, tended to keep the people on the soil. The great evil was, not uncertainty of tenure, but the heavy burdens upon industry on account of the exemption of nobles from taxation, and on account of the feudal services arbitrarily exacted by the nobles, the grinding personal bondage, and forced labour." The first step taken by the Minister was to issue an edict by which all land was rendered purchaseable by all classes alike, and personal bondage was totally abolished. His successor, Count Hardenberg, adopted his policy, and by a second edict of land reform it was decreed that all exemptions from land-tax should cease. "This was a great step. Land was now a transferable commodity, without distinction of peasant and noble, and was alike subject to public burdens. Here at once was created a motive to industry and frugality; and if the land reforms had even stopped here, there would have been, in the course of a generation, a vast improvement in the condition of Prussian farmers. But Hardenberg was no partial and timid reformer; neither could the State of Prussia wait for the growing up of a new generation to save it. Therefore, in the September of the next year, forth came two more edicts, both dated the same day. The first, accompanied by a declaration in the nature of a schedule' enacted that all the peasant-fiefs of five several sorts should from thenceforth become the absolute property of their then occupants. This included not merely the *bauer-hofe*, or fiscal-fiefs, which were entered on the provincial tax-rolls, but also the farms in possession of four other classes of peasant-farmers, as the free boors and the 'hereditary tenants' on the waste lands. And 'it was stretched so far as to include the serfs located on the outskirts of the baronies,' who had been originally intended as mere cottier labourers, and paid their rent in work, but who had in fact occupied their farms without disturbance for generations, according to that universal tenant right held sacred all over the Continent. It must be observed that cultivators of the land who were neither free *bauern*, nor held fiscal fiefs, nor had hereditary interest in their cottage holdings, but who farmed land by any other kind of agreements under any of these classes, or under the lords, were not interfered with by the new laws at all. This class, however, must have been very small, and was likely every year to grow smaller. But the second edict of 1811 crowns the land reforms of Prussia. It enacts as follows:—'That all impediments to the free disposal of land, by sale, gift, or will, arising out of the constitution as it heretofore existed, be hereby abolished. This power of sale over portions of the land is to enable it to get into the hands of men of capital, and thus clear it of encumbrances. From the greater subdivision of the soil a considerable advantage, and one dear to our paternal heart, will arise. It will give people in a small way (as they are termed)—gardeners, labourers, and the like—an opportunity of acquiring landed property and gradually increasing it.' The intention of this last edict, as you may observe, was to promote, not subletting (a pernicious and impoverishing system), but sale of land in small portions in absolute ownership, free of rent; and, of course, to ensure high cultivation and create a vast number of humble but independent land-owners." The landlords, at the same time, were not injured; they were amply compensated. Still there was a great outcry: "Some years were occupied in making all these valuations and transfers; and there was much discontent and outcry amongst the proprietors—the 'rights of property' were invaded; the state and dignity of a feudal baron, the game privileges, the insolent command, the territorial high mightiness—none of these things was valued by Hardenberg's inexorable commissioners; it was only the just and substantial interest the lords derived from their possessions that he would pay them for, and that on a moderate scale—not at all the price they might choose to demand, but the fair price, and they might take it or leave it. One could not do what he liked with his own! Even a bargain was a bargain no longer. The truth is, the Government of Prussia was in the hands of a man who was determined to make all 'rights of property' and all individual rights whatsoever subservient to the welfare of the community. Bargains about the holding of land are like no other contracts; and good Governments will always control them, or void them, if need be. Happy it was for Prussia that her Government was a despotism, not an oligarchy. If it had been in the hands of these very nobles, nothing but a bloody revolution could have accomplished what Hardenberg did with his peaceful edicts." From this there followed the resurrection of Prussia; it has been the true cause of her prosperity. "The present condition of Prussia is very fortunate. The style of living, the clothing, the dwelling-houses of the people, all bespeak comfort and independence. So quickly did the liberation of the land market operate, and so eagerly was the ownership of the soil sought after, that far the greater part of Prussia is now in the hands of peasant proprietors." What Ireland prays for, then, is not unprecedented. It has already been granted in a country long regarded as the pattern of all that is progressive and enlightened by those very people who are now loudly expressing their astonishment at the extravagance of the Irish desire. Nevertheless we hardly expect that so good an example will in the present instance be followed. "Italy for the Italians," and Prussia for the Prussians; but Ireland for the Irish,—by no means.