

THE LAND QUESTION IN SCOTLAND.

(Correspondence of the *Nation*, August 4)

A LAND League meeting in Scotland very much resembles a religious service. The almost invariable practice since the inauguration of the movement has been to appoint a chairman—generally a layman. The chairman solemnly names some minister or “elder” to offer up prayer; this done, a hymn or psalm, specially selected, containing denunciations of oppression, is sung by the assembly, and a chapter of the Bible, (in Gaelic) is read. The portion of Scripture usually selected is the fifth chapter of Isaiah, which contains the following strong passage:—“Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.” This is taken to be a direct condemnation of landlordism and land-grabbing. After the delivery of speeches detailing their grievances, and the adoption of resolutions, the meetings are concluded with prayer.

A meeting of this character, presided over by Mr. John Mackay, C.E., of Hereford—a man who by dint of Celtic energy has attained a distinguished place in his profession, and who has been indefatigable in advocating the grievances of the class from which he sprang—was held in Bettyhill previous to the arrival of the commission. Mr. Mackay read a number of extracts from the recently published attempt of Mr. Thomas Sellars to vindicate the memory of his father, from the charges of cruelty in carrying out the Sutherland evictions between fifty and sixty years ago. Mr. Sellars writes that only one house had been burned. In answer to this several old men stepped forward to refute the statement. Hugh Macdonald, Strathnaver, saw a number of houses burning. Roderick Macleod, Skerray, gave similar testimony. William Macleod, of Bettyhill, referred at considerable length to the “scenes of atrocious cruelty and brutality” which he had witnessed in Strathnaver, and said:—“There was one old man, said to be about 100 years of age, whose house was set on fire in two or three places. The old man was unable to move, and the men who set the house on fire went away and left him there.” A voice in the meeting called out: “What was the old man’s name?” To which Macleod replied, “His name was Donald M’William.” Robert M’Kay, of Strathy, saw several houses in flames. Another old man, George Mackey, of Aird, “saw ten houses burned at Strathnaver. He was at the time going up the Strath with two horses, and was nearly blinded by the smoke.” The testimony borne by these old men created a profound sensation in the meeting, and if permitted to reach the public would doubtless produce a similar effect. No newspaper in Glasgow or Edinburgh, or any of our centres of industry, has so much as intimated that the meeting at which these statements were made had taken place.

The special correspondents accompanying the commission are very indignant with many of the witnesses, who insist in giving their evidence in Gaelic. These important gentlemen affirm that the preference of the people for their mother tongue is an evidence of “Celtic contrariness.” They tell us “the people can speak English well enough,” but somehow they won’t. The “discreet silence” preserved by our “impartial” Press is occasionally broken by turbulent pro-landlord mutterings.

The tremendous indictment of landlordism made day after day by the people is thus spoken of by the *Glasgow News*:—“With reference to all the evidence adduced up to this time, it may at once be said that it is practically impossible to find out how much, or if any, reliance can be placed upon all, or any of the charges made.

The “death tax” statement made by one of the clergymen who gave evidence drew out the foregoing: When a crofter dies the Duke of Sutherland compels his son or successor to pay all arrears of rent and a permanent increase of 10s. “If the death premium were removed,” said the rev. gentleman, “and the crofters got a reduction of 10s on their rents when a proprietor died, how soon would the landlords cry out that they would be ruined! Then, again, proprietors with the assistance of the law officers had thrown down hundreds of crofters’ houses, and left the people homeless on the hillside. Supposing the crofters, with the aid of the law officials, threw down the houses of the proprietors, what a cry would the whole land raise over such cruelty and wickedness.” According to Lord Napier, “of course the duke is master of his own property.”

“THE LAZY IRISH.”

(From the *Brisbane Australian*.)

Genus supra modum superstitioni dedita, is the character given by the greatest of Roman historians to the children of Israel. Looking back from this two thousand years’ distance we cannot but see the injustice and absurdity of such words in the mouth of Tacitus.

Rome afforded perchance to a thousand ridiculous forms of worship. The fetishism of Mauritania, the grovelling fables of Isis and Anubis, the indecencies of Olympus, and the inhumanities of the Tauris,—all had their sacred fanes within the walls of the Imperial City. The one Diety excluded was the God of Israel. He whose great works are so simply chronicled in the first chapters of Genesis, who is prayed to in the Psalms, and who from Mount Sinai issues, in the Ten Commandments, that code to which man owes so much, was not recognised on the banks of the Tiber; nay, His cultus is stigmatised by the Pagan indweller as a superstition, and His worshippers as the most superstitious of all the subjects of the Cæsars. We wonder what any philosopher of the present day thinks of the great annalist’s judgment between the paganism thick in all the streets about him, and the pure doctrine of Sinai’s Ten Commandments? How indignantly does the history of to-day strike out the phrase *Genus præ cæteris superstitioni dedita*.

Very much akin to the dogmatizing language used by Agricola’s father-in-law, in regard to the “superstition” of the Israelites, is that used by nineteenth century historians when speaking of the “laziness of the Irish.” You find the latter in their own country

doing the work of beasts of burden on the most miserable potato diet. The farms, in hundreds of thousands of cases, are too small, and the farmers too poor to allow of agricultural engines or of horse assistance. The work is done by the manual labour of the household. Outside of Ireland the evidences of their *bona fide* desire for work are still more visible. Every hive of industry in England and Scotland is thick with Irish. In the Mersey cities, or those of the Clyde, we do not find them keeping cafés or restaurants, they are not amongst the trim clerks, the cheery bus-conductors, the sweet-tongued book agents; no, the Irishman is found in Liverpool and Glasgow on the wharves, stooping over the crane-handle, or sweating in the stuffy hold of some outward-bound ship, ever with his body bent, his guernsey saturated with sweat, his horny hand clenched on some heavy weight,—a being recognised as devoted to hard work almost as the great wheel that drives the mill. Yet writers of to-day call the Irish “lazy,” just as Tacitus called the children of Jerusalem “*superstitiosi dediti*.” These Irish, almost alone, reap the harvest in Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex. They cut open the hills and fill up the valleys, from Cape Race to the Golden Gates, for the American railways. They take the enemy’s first bullets at Ferozapore and Meane. In Australia,—whoever may be the shepherd, or overseer, or ration-carrier,—the Irishman generally is not. His lot is to burst heavy logs for fencing, to sink post-holes in unbroken ground under a pitiless sun. In the shearing shed his sweat runs fastest. In the deep mine his is the arm that drives the most advanced of the line of picks. Still to the on-lookers of the English-speaking world the Irish are “lazy,” just as to the Romans of the first centuries the children of the Twelve Tribes were superstitious.

THESE FIGURES TELL THE STORY.

ON Friday last the following cablegram was received:—

London, Aug. 10.—The *Standard* this morning says that the Government has decided to provide an additional £100,000 to aid Irish emigration, the money to be taken from the British exchequer instead of from the Church Surplus Fund.

Another and later report states that 200,000 Irish emigrants are to be “assisted” to Canada, and “settled” there on free land.

To the outside world, ignorant of the facts, these reports suggest benevolence. To those who see below the surface, they mean murder—murder as deliberate and cowardly as if a strong man seized and held a weak woman by the throat in the darkness of night.

Another half million dollars to get rid of the natives of a rich country, the fertile fields of which are allowed to fall back into waste, bog, and desert! It is a story incredible in modern times—impossible if reported of any country but one steeped in national robbery and crime.

The official statistics of agriculture in Ireland, just published from the English Press (though professedly of only part of Ireland), show that bog, waste and water have increased by nearly 80,000 acres in Ireland last year, and the area under crops, including meadow and clover, has decreased by not less than 114,039 acres. Take the single item of potatoes. There was an increase of area under potatoes in 1881 of close upon 35,000 acres. In 1882 there was a decrease of more than 17,000 acres. Flax shows a decrease of about 34,000 acres, meadow and clover of about 39,000 acres, and, in fact, green crops all round have decreased in an almost unaccountable manner.

The Dublin *Freeman’s Journal* calls special attention to an extraordinary and still more dreadful feature of this state of things, namely, that in the counties in which it is said there is the greatest “congestion” of population there is also the greatest absolute return to waste and bog.

The bishops of Ireland in their recent resolutions declared that “in every county in which this state of congestion prevails, there are large tracts of land once cultivated by the people, but from which they were driven in recent times, and which are now in grass, and in many cases deteriorating, while there are also in the same counties extensive tracts of other lands capable of improvement. These lands would maintain in comfort and happiness the surplus population of the congested districts.” The bishops also declared

“That State-aided emigration, as a means of curing this evil, is unwise and impolitic, and tends only to promote disaffection amongst the Irish race at home and abroad.”

The bishops had not these official figures now to hand when they spoke; but their clear knowledge of the country is illustrated by the report.

What intelligent man, reading these facts, will refuse a verdict of “guilty” against the Government that emigrates the Irish people? —*Pilot*.

The *Lancet* writes:—“Whatever the antagonism of the present rulers of France to the national religion of that country, the abolition of the hospital chaplains must be regarded as a most extreme and cruel measure. It is not a question of creeds. It is the deeper question of religion, and of provision for the consolation of sick or dying persons. Violently to withdraw such a provision from the thousands who fill the hospitals of Paris is an outrage on the religious sentiment of the people immediately affected, and of the nation itself. We shall not be suspected of any undue respect for Catholic priests or their ministrations, but we know what are the susceptibilities and the wants of the sick and of the dying—whether Catholic or Protestant. We know how resolutions for a better life, or considerations favourable to a happier death, may be fostered. In Paris, where the hospital system is so highly organised the withdrawal of such a provision is more than usually offensive to all good taste and feeling; and we venture to believe that it will be reconsidered. The hospital is not the place to fight the battle of reason *versus* faith, and those who force such a fight in such a field will have the worst of it.