

Chief Secretaries, began with a speech babbly undertaking "to wipe out the very recollection of Gladstone's Home Rule or of Parnell's Suspension of Evictions Bill from the Irish mind."

The first of the "Low-Rent Offices" was held by Mr. Dillon and myself at Portuanna early in November, and it was a portent the amazing character of which those of a later generation can little realise. "The November rent-office" of my first experiences in the West was for the Irish peasant a tribunal as full of dread as was the torture chamber of the Three Inquisitors for the prisoners of the Venetian *Pazzi*. The famished wretches stood shivering for hours in the winter blast, waiting their turn to be admitted one by one to the place of agony, where the agent sat awaiting them at his table with a loaded revolver beside him, and "the rent-warner's" sinister figure, more menacing than the revolver, loomed up Abhorson-like out of the gloom. There was not the mere question of rent to be settled, but the tenant's soul to be laid bare and subjected to unimaginable torments and humiliations. Even if he could wring out of the twisted handkerchief which answered him for a purse the last crown of a rack-rent which the law courts have since pronounced to be the meanest form of thievery, he had still to answer the cross-examination of the rent-warner as to how much he had received for the little yearling at the last fair, how many bonhams had come with the last litter, how much the first out-crop of the reclaimed strip of mountain had fetched, in order to decide whether an increase of rent might not be judiciously clapped on. Did he contemplate marriage, he had to petition for the consent of the agent by a trembling disclosure of the name of the girl of his choice, the amount of her "fortune," the value of the beds or household furniture she would bring to the cabin. Was it his son he was going to settle down, the inquisitors were more merciless still in cutting off the most precious pound of flesh for the profit of the estate in the transaction. Had he forgotten the rent-warner's "duty" goose at Michaelmas, or awakened his greed for the reclaimed patch of land, or had his son ruffled the august man's dignity by a saucy answer to some insolent order for "duty-work" (that is to say, unpaid slave labor), or was it a widow who hesitated at the order to send her fair-haired child out to service at "the big house"—the rent-warner's power of life and death was no less deadly effective than the agent's. A scowl on the brow of the one or the other might mean a doubled rent, or a six months' ejection notice, at the expiration of which, even without a farthing of rent unpaid, a man might be evicted from the home of his fathers and of his children, the fields his own labor and money had fertilised torn from him to become the prey of some landgrabber or "big bullock-man," and he and his swept out of sight into the workhouse or the hold of an emigrant ship. They toiled, they starved, they cringed, with as little thought of resistance as their asses had of holding out for the principles of the French Revolution. How often have I seen every act of the tragedy with aching eyes! And how lightly the free children of such bondsmen now estimate the revolution which has struck off their chains!

(To be continued.)

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Cannibalism and Chivalry

(By G. K. CHESTERTON, in the *New Witness*.)

A distinguished lady has just returned from a visit to a very interesting community, such as the most enlightened and experimental sociologists love to study. It has already experimented in many of the innovations still only tentatively advocated in the newspapers; for instance, it is a society in which women propose. Nearly everything about it strikes the same modern note; we are told that the flappers, or very young women, have a considerable emotional experience, and that degree of progress which some call precocity. It is true that when the precocious lady has proposed to the more or less complacent gentleman, other things sometimes follow. Sometimes the gentleman hits the lady on the head with a club. Sometimes he even eats her. But from an enlarged point of view, I am not sure that this last detail ought to militate against the claim of the society to be truly modern. We know that the mark of modern emancipation is the climination of artificial boundaries; why not the artificial boundary between one kind of cold meat and another? We know it means the enlarging of our Bibles and prayer books till they contain all the Scriptures and litanies of all the religions of the world. Why not the enlargement of our cookery books and bills of fare, until they cover all the varied customs of the various tribes of the world? We know it specialises in the idea of assimilation, or the digestion of different systems into a substantial unity; and where could there be a more perfect example of assimilation than anthropophagy? The very word contains the Green substance of the word philanthropy. Indeed the word philanthropy, by a slight extension of its meaning, might be used as a euphemism for cannibalism. I once saw an ethical hymn book, full of religious poems purged of the irrelevant expletive "God." In this an old and familiar hymn reappeared in the form, "Nearer, mankind, to thee, nearer to thee." It always suggested to me the conditions of a suffocating crush in the Tube. But I am not sure that the expedient of cannibalism does not more aptly represent the idea of the hymn, or even solve the problem of the Tube. It seems to be the most effective and economical way in which many could be combined in one; and we could unite the assimilation of substance with the amplification of space. Nothing stands in the way of this reform except one of these sentimental prejudices or superstitious fears, which we are more and more shedding in every other department of life.

Anyhow, what interests me at the moment about the account of the Cannibal Islands given by the intrepid lady explorer is not the second point about cannibalism but the first point about courtship. It is perhaps the more practical and immediately relevant of the two. Progress goes step by step; and we shall probably see ladies obtain the privilege of proposing before they obtain the further privilege of being eaten. And the fact that the women who asked the men to marry them are also the women who allow the men to brain them interests me very much in a larger connection. It interests me very much; but it does not surprise me at all. The two things seem to me to go together quite naturally and even inevitably. I think I should always have argued in the abstract that it must be so. Describe to me some remote or imaginary Utopia in which a man has a harem so literally like a herd of cattle that he can even knock a wife on the head and eat her; and I think I could have deduced from that fact alone that the woman proposed to the man as in the most advanced novels of the Suffragettes.

In those novels and the newspapers that review them it always seems to be assumed that the custom of letting the proposal come from the man indicates in some way the greater despotism, or at least the greater dignity of the man. In itself it obviously indicates the exact opposite. The despot does not crave an audience with his subject, or beg a boon of his subject. The subject craves the audience from the despot, and begs the boon of the despot. The King does not petition the people; the people petition the King. In short, it is certain that the custom, as it has existed in moderately recent European history at least, is a part of the chivalric idea of a certain kind of dignity belonging to the woman which does not belong to the man. Now it is perfectly consistent to say that the chivalric

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