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***ABOUT
IRELAND***

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About Ireland

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Nothing dies so hard as prejudice, unless it be sentiment. Indeed, prejudice and sentiment are but different manifestations of the same principle by which men pronounce on things according to individual feeling, independent of facts and free from the restraint of positive knowledge. And on nothing in modern times has so much sentiment been lavished as on the Irish question; nowhere has so much passionately generous, but at the same time so much absolutely ignorant, partisanship been displayed as by English sympathisers with the Irish peasant. This is scarcely to be wondered at. The picture of a gallant nation ground under the heel of an iron despotism—of an industrious and virtuous peasantry rackrented, despoiled, brutalised, and scarce able to live by their labour that they may supply the vicious wants of oppressive landlords—of unarmed men, together with women and little children, ruthlessly bludgeoned by a brutal police, or shot by a bloodthirsty soldiery for no greater offence than verbal protests against illegal evictions—of a handful of ardent patriots ready to undergo imprisonment and contumely in their struggle against one of the strongest nations in the world for only so much political freedom as is granted to-day by despots themselves—such a picture as this is calculated to excite the sympathies of all generous souls. And it has done so in England, where "Home Rule" and "Justice to Ireland" have become the rallying cries of one

section of the Liberal party, to the disruption and political suicide of the whole body; and where the less knowledge imported into the question the more fervid the advocacy and the louder the demand.

It is worth while to state quite quietly and quite plainly how things stand at this present moment. There is no need for hysterics on the one side or the other; and to amend one's views by the testimony of facts is not a dishonest turning of one's coat—if confession of that amendment is a little like the white sheet and lighted taper of a penitent. Things are, or they are not. If they are, as will be set down, the inference is plain to anyone not hopelessly blinded by preconceived prejudice. If they are not, let them be authoritatively contradicted on the basis of fact, not sentiment—demonstration, not assertion. In any case it is a gain to obtain material for a truer judgment than heretofore, and thus to be rid of certain mental films by which colours are blurred and perspective is distorted.

No one wishes to palliate the crimes of which England has been guilty in Ireland. Her hand has been heavy, her whip one of braided scorpions, her rule emphatically of blood and iron. But all this is of the past, and the pendulum, not only of public feeling but of legal enactment, threatens to swing too far on the other side. What has been done cannot be undone, but it will not be repeated. We shall never send over another Cromwell nor yet another Castlereagh; and there is as little good to be got from chafing over past wrongs as there is in lamenting past glories. Malachi and his collar of gold—the ancient kings who led forth the Red Branch Knights—State persecution of

the Catholics—rack-rents and unjust evictions, are all alike swept away into the limbo of things dead and done with. What Ireland has to deal with now are the enactments and facts of the day, and to shake off the incubus of retrospection, as a strong man awaking would get rid of a nightmare.

Nowhere in Europe, nor yet in the United States, are tenant-farmers so well protected by law as in Ireland; nor is it the fault of England if the Acts passed for their benefit have been rendered ineffectual by the agitators who have preferred fighting to orderly development. So long ago as 1860 a Bill was passed providing that no tenant should be evicted for non-payment of rent unless one year's rent in arrear. (Landlord and Tenant Act, 1860, sec. 52.) Even then, when evicted, he could recover possession within six months by payment of the amount due; when the landlord had to pay him the amount of any profit he had made out of the lands in the interim. The landlord had to pay half the poor rate of the Government Valuation if a holding was £4 or upward, and all the poor rate if it was under £4. By the Act of 1870 "a yearly tenant disturbed in his holding by the act of the landlord, for causes other than non-payment of rent, and the Government Valuation of whose holding does not exceed £100 per annum, must be paid by his landlord not only full compensation for all improvements made by himself or his predecessors, such as unexhausted manures, permanent buildings, and reclamation of waste lands, but also as compensation for disturbance, a sum of money which may amount to seven years' rent." (Land Act of 1870, secs. 1, 2, and 3.) Under the Act of 1881 the landlord's

power of disturbance was practically abolished—but I think I have read somewhere that even of late years, and with the ballot, certain landlords in England have threatened their tenants with "disturbance" without compensation if their votes were not given to the right colour—while in Ireland, even when evicted for non-payment of rent, a yearly tenant must be paid by his landlord "compensation for all improvements, such as unexhausted manures, permanent buildings, and reclamation of waste land." (Sec. 4.) And when his rent does not exceed £15 he must be paid in addition "a sum of money which may amount to seven years' rent if the court decides that the rent is exorbitant." (Secs. 3 and 9.) (a) Until the contrary is proved, the improvements are presumed to have been made by the tenants. (Sec. 5.) (b) The tenant can make his claim for compensation immediately on notice to quit being served, and cannot be evicted until the compensation is paid. (Secs. 16 and 21.) A yearly tenant when voluntarily surrendering his farm must either be paid by the landlord (a) compensation for all his improvements, or (b) be permitted to sell his improvements to an incoming tenant. (Sec. 4.) In all new tenancies the landlord must pay half the county or Grand Jury Cess if the valuation is £4 or upward and the whole of the same Cess if the value does not exceed £4. (Secs. 65 and 66.) Thus we have under the Land Act of 1870 (i) Full payment for all improvements; (2) Compensation for disturbance.

The famous Land Act of 1881 gave three additional privileges, (1) Fixity of tenure, by which the tenant remains in possession of the land for ever, subject to periodic