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PEASANT PROPRIETARY IN IRELAND:

A Rejoinder.

BY

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PEASANT PROPRIETARY IN IRELAND:

A Rejoinder.

LAST month there appeared in the REVIEW an article condemning the institution of a peasant proprietary in Ireland, and containing arguments so partial and one-sided that if it be not likely that a more competent advocate of 'la petite culture' should enter the lists, I venture, rather than allow Mr. Morice's essay the appearance of being unanswerable because it was unanswered, to say a few words on the other side. As you, Mr. Editor, appear to recognise the justice of the '*audi alteram partem*' doctrine, I look to your indulgence for the insertion of my remarks upon a question the most important that could engage the attention of the thoughtful constituency to which the REVIEW appeals.

Without going into the well-threshed subject of the present relations between landlord and tenant in our country, and the unsatisfactory results of such an artificial arrangement, it occurs to me the better course would be to show the working and effects of a system of peasant proprietary in other countries, for from the proved success of the plan elsewhere, we may, considering the circumstances of Ireland, infer its adaptability to such a state of things as she presents.

The first country that attracts attention as we cast our eyes beyond the limits of the British Isles is probably France, and, accordingly, we shall see what good peasant proprietary has effected there. As they are to-day, as a body, there is no peasantry upon the face of the globe who

enjoy more of the material comforts which go to make up a nation's prosperity than the French. They are, through their agricultural industry, accumulating vast wealth, and when, some sixteen years ago, a ravaging and devastating war seared the fair face of their country, and a victorious conqueror imposed a crushing indemnity upon them, the hoarded resources of the peasant owners almost alone discharged the giant liability, and made up for the losses sustained by war-ruined industry. Twice within this century alone they had to suffer similar disasters, and yet, with a strange power of resilient energy, they threw off the burden. The savings of the small proprietors to-day are invested in the State funds, and by means of such 'rentes' the Government is enabled to embark in enterprises which seem startling even to English speculators. Expensive works for benefitting and developing internal commerce are undertaken through the credit of the vast wealthy proprietary that supports such undertakings, and so readily lends its money to the National Exchequer. Under what other system of land tenure could such security be shown, such unexampled prosperity be seen? Surely not under the sadly precarious and uncertain relations of Irish landlord and tenant—an arrangement certain to keep the bread-winner in a perpetual state of wretched misery. There was a time, not so long ago, when the French peasantry could vie with ours in destitution, unrest and poverty. Before this generous change in their land system, which made France what it is, was effected, the people were described as being 'without cattle to furnish manure, without horses to execute the plans of agriculture, their farm houses mean, their furniture beggarly, themselves and their beasts the images of famine.' What a change has now been brought about, and how different the condition of the peasantry! From being oppressed by feudal exactions they have become the

contented owners of their homesteads, and from that day of fortunate possession they have continued to grow in prosperity year by year, and to settle down, from being a seething mass of dangerous discontent, into undoubtedly the most orderly and peaceable community in Europe. They are thus described by an eminent French economist, M. le Play ('Réforme Sociale en France') :—

'Les familles attachées à la petite industrie se distinguent par leur moralité, par leur sage esprit d'independence, par leur appliciation soutenue au travail. Elles conservent et augmentent sans cesse le bien-être conquis par les aieux sans fournir de recrues au pauperisme . . . Elles aiment la paix et n'inquietent guère leurs voisins par des pretensions à la suprematie.'

In a most interesting and impartial review of the relative merits of 'la petite et la grande industrie,' as affecting agriculture, he says :—

'Plusieurs de ces races frugales et laborieuses constituent des provinces autonomes ou des Etats independants. En Europe les Basques, les petits cantons Allemands ou Italiens de la Suisse, le Tyrol, le Norwège conservent encore ce caractère. Au milieu des societes contemporaines elles leur sont superieures en ce qu'elles font participer tous leurs membres au bien-être materiel et à l'ordre moral.'

These are but the general opinions held of the French peasantry, and it is believed that the great factor which gives stability to that government is the calm, restful spirit of 'les petits propriétaires,' their resolve to conserve the present order of things, and counterpoise the erratic tendencies of the artisans and the great desire for change which always affects the unprosperous of the cities. It surely were a desirable reformation to create such an improved state in Ireland, to infuse some elements of solidity, strength and stability into the shifting, restless mass that makes up our agrarian population. There was a time when French landlords had much to fear, when boycotting was a pastime and outrage an institution. But all

that is changed under the beneficent policy of peasant proprietary. Eight million thrifty Frenchmen own the best parts of their country, and it is evident from this general distribution that French land is truly the national possession. No agrarian revolution is dreamt of, for it is not a class but the masses who practically are interested in the conservation of the existing order, and in the strict preservation of the rigid rights of property. Of course the system is not ideally perfect. It has its disadvantages and its drawbacks. The subdivision (le partage forcé) incidental to the law of succession often leads to undue parcelling of the patrimony, yet that defect could be easily remedied by legislation, and is not of the essence of the system. But industrially and socially, peasant ownership has proved itself superior to any other system yet devised. Its results are comparatively satisfactory and enduring. It is found most to serve those concerned directly in it, and the general community likewise. M. de Mornay says of it, in his general report on the results of the 'Enquête Agricole':—

'The competition of buyers is active, and sales of small lots take place on excellent terms for the seller.' And as to its universality he adds: 'In the greater number of the departments 75 per cent. are now become the owners of land. Peasant proprietary thus embraces a great part of the soil, and that part increases incessantly.' And speaking of its economic effects in 1871, M. de Lavergne writes: 'The best cultivation in France, on the whole, is that of the peasant proprietors.' And speaking of the condition of affairs before the Prussian war he estimates that five million proprietors owned on an average 3 hectares, or 7½ acres (English), each, showing the extent to which the *morcellement* of land was carried.

Of course this constant interchange of land is a perpetual and a powerful incentive to agricultural industry. It is happily brought about by an easy, intelligible, and inexpensive system of land-transfer and registration. A common objection urged against peasant properties is that the owners of them are usually heavily in debt to the local shopkeeper, the loan banker or the proverbial 'gombeen

man' of Ireland, and that the interest charged by the exacting creditor is more oppressive than any rent. This at one time appeared a very plausible argument against the scheme, but by a very careful examination into the facts of the case in France it is found to be without any foundation in fact. M. de Lavergne estimates 'the amount of debt on these lands at five per cent. on an average of their total value,' and the marked improvement that has taken place in the food, clothing, and habitations of the French people proves that they are neither impecunious nor improvident, but on the contrary, rising rapidly in the social and economic scale. That same eminent economist, from careful inquiry, arrived at the conclusion 'that the great estates of England were more heavily encumbered, acre for acre, than the peasant properties of France.'* And in a more intensified form of obligation, by a more weighty load of mortgage, are the Irish estates held—until positively perhaps not one in 20,000,000 acres that form the area of the country is unmortgaged. France has had for only three-quarters of a century anything like liberty and less than half a century of tranquillity and industrial life, and yet within that relatively brief interval of a nation's life what great material progress she has made, what a triumph of economic truth her prosperous condition presents! To illustrate the character and extent of that progress I shall quote the following passage from a very interesting work on the French people by Mr. Leslie—('Cobden Club Essays,' 1881.) He says:

'Whoever reflects what the French rural population would be on the one hand under a land system like that of Ireland, or even England, and what its town population would be on the other, if instead of being

* In 1885 the mortgages on landed property in France amounted to 770 millions; in England to one billion six hundred million sterling!—*Spectator*, August 21st, '86.

a third it were more than a half of the whole nation, and if instead of having a political counterpoise in the country it found there only greater political ferment and discontent than its own, must surely pronounce that the land system of France is not only the salvation of that country itself, but one of the principal securities for the tranquillity and economic progress of Europe.'

If I turn to the agrarian changes effected in Germany I find the same grand saving principle of universal ownership acknowledged and carried out and the cultivating tenant the owner of his farm. No other system, it would appear, could thrive in these countries, and none other would be tolerated by these peoples.

In Prussia the statesmanlike policy of Stein and Hardenberg carried out in the most complete, full and satisfactory manner an agrarian reform of the most important character. The ruling idea of the legislation associated with those illustrious names was to enfranchise the land as well as the owner of it from all restrictions to its free exchange and his sole possession. But the proprietorial rights were handed over to the tenantry at a fair compensatory value. The great historic distinction between 'demesne land' and 'tenant land,' between the 'manor' and the 'allodium,' the 'community,' and the 'immunity' was fought out with varying fortunes, but ultimately, and by the quiet force of the necessity of the situation, to the advantage of the State and that of all parties concerned. The 'Edicts' regulating these reforms were masterly productions—charters of agrarian rights and the exposition of admitted economic principles. As comprehensive in their range as determinate intheir application, they accomplished their purpose in a clear, defined and impartial spirit. From effecting the separation of the conflicting rights of landlord and tenant to the establishment of Land Banks the most perfect and adequate provision for every contingency was made with a foresight remarkable for its keen, intelligent appreciation of the character and stability of the social

factors with which these statutes had to deal. In cutting off the encumbrance of landlord privileges which exasperated the common folk and kept the country in a condition of chronic misery and unrest, the legislation of Prussia is an emphatic protest against the system of double ownership. The sole object sought and effected by the reforms was that every class should participate in the rights, duties and blessings which flow from landed property. Fixity of tenure, a halting device which finds so much favour in Ireland as a patent specific for its agrarian troubles, was in Prussia rejected as an incomplete makeshift, a half-measure settlement, for in such an arrangement it was felt that though, as an economic writer once expressed it, 'the landlord was divorced from the soil, yet the tenant was not married to it.' And antecedently to these beneficial reforms and to relieve the congestion of population on the cultivated lands, Frederick the Great, by organised settlements, colonized the waste lands, fixing upon them in perfect security from disturbance by rack-renting a sturdy population whose sons fought his battles, 'and their sons fought at Leipsic.' In this movement there was an acknowledgment of the great fact that as Mr. Morier expressed it, 'land which it may not pay to reclaim for the immediate object of rent will yield sufficient returns when tilled as property.' The grand principle of this and of all land legislation in Prussia was to secure the comfort of the people and the material prosperity of the State. 'It was felt when that prime object was reached one of the great ends and purposes of Government was attained.' That the results have justified the hope of the reformers and the project succeeded, the independence, the comparative competency, the trained intelligence and international supremacy reached and held by Germany to-day—'Germany, a complex state of small proprietors'—is evidence strong, conclusive and sufficient of

the value of that form of agricultural economy.* The Prussian system is that adopted in all the minor States of the empire with varied degrees of perfection. It affords a great example of the policy of 'thoroughness,' as the laws were originally framed in so entire a spirit that since their passing they have required little modification or supplement, and in this respect present a curious contrast to the imperfect legislation of these countries, where the possibility of annual supplement to our most elaborate statutes is ever within the ken of practical politics. Who of its most ardent admirers and enthusiastic advocates could venture to prophesy finality or promise an enduring settlement from the Irish Land Act, with its present machinery for fixing judicial rents—a system that has no foundation in economic science or history—a plan that is unworkable from the necessary accumulation and uncertainty of its work? Before leaving this branch of the subject I think it well to explain the idea of the institution of local land banks in Prussia and the principle of their operation. In each district local rent banks were established by the State, which advanced to the landlord in rent debentures, paying 4 per cent. interest, a capital sum equal to 20 years purchase of the rent. The peasant on his part paid into the hands of the district

* Mr. Morice states that 80 per cent. of the Prussian peasantry are now exempted from direct taxation on the score of poverty. As the limit of non-taxable income is £45—a much bigger sum in Prussia than here—and as the expenses of agriculture are deducted on the assessment, Mr. Morice's statement by no means implies the desperate state of things for the peasant proprietors he would lead us to imagine.

In Prussia, exclusive of the Rhine provinces and Westphalia, there were in 1858 (see Mr. Harris Gastrell's report) 1,300,000 proprietors, of whom only 108 had estates large enough to be rated over £1,500, and only about 16,000 had estates of more than 400 acres, while 350,000 had estates varying from 20 to 400 acres, and the rest, 925,000, owned less than 20 acres. In the Rhine provinces and Westphalia the sub-division of land is carried so far that each proprietor has but 10 acres. The result is, according to Mr. R. D. Morier, that 'the Palatinate peasant cultivates his land with more of the passion of an artist than in the plodding spirit of a mere bread winner.' In Wurtemburg the parcelling of land runs down even to five acres, and there are 280,000 peasants thriving comfortably in that province on even less than five acres a piece.

collector each month one twelfth part of a rent calculated at $4\frac{1}{2}$ or 5 per cent. on this capital sum of purchase according as the tenant elected to free his land from the charge in $41\frac{1}{12}$ or in $56\frac{1}{12}$ years—the respective terms in which at compound interest the 1 or $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. paid in addition to the 4 per cent. interest on the debentures would extinguish the capital. That in general terms was the Prussian land banking system.

The Grand Duchy of Hesse presents so very instructive a case in point, and offers so attractive a picture of peasant proprietary, that it would be impossible in any article which pretended to be a review of the European systems to overlook that district. There, in 1836, 'a great law was passed by which all rent-charges already in existence could be compulsorily redeemable at the instance of the rentee or rentor.' And a very thorough and effective plan of transfer was at the time devised by which transactions could be most economically and expeditiously effected. The general principles involved in that measure were universal truths based upon the two following economic considerations:—*Firstly*, that where the finances are properly administered, the State, representing the total sum of the credit of all its members, can borrow money more cheaply than its individual members can. *Secondly*, that by means of its ordinary administrative machinery, the State can collect rents and enforce their payments more cheaply and effectually than the individual. Acting upon these economic axioms, the Hessian reform was framed, and it has since been most successfully carried out. There also land banks were established upon the plan subsequently adopted by Prussia. Eighteen years' purchase of the rental was allowed—the State paying the landlord a capital sum equivalent to that amount, and charging 3 per cent. on the sum and 1 per cent. interest towards the amortisa-

tion of the capital, which, at compound interest, extinguished the debt in 47 years. So well regulated was the scheme that for that period the new 'graduating proprietor' or farmer tenant was called upon actually to pay less to the State than his rent to the landlord, even charging himself with taxes and cost of collection. The project was so nicely adjusted, and is so intimately applicable to the question, that a brief and bare description of it will not be out of place. Thus, supposing the old rent to be 100 florins, a peasant, under the new arrangement, is called upon only to pay 97, and discharges the debt, interest, &c., in this wise:

	florins.
3 per cent. on 1,800 florins (18 times the rent being allowed landlord)	54
1 per cent. as a sinking fund	18
3 per cent. on rentcharge as cost of collection, bad debts, &c.	3
Add to this the taxes formerly paid by landlord ...	22
Total	97

It therefore will be remembered that while the 100 florins to the landlord would continue for an indefinite period, the reduced rent to the State ceases—the farm becomes a freehold. The latter arrangement is also preferable, as it entirely eliminates the possibility of an increase of the charge under any circumstances. Speaking of the condition of the Hessians and Rhine peasantry generally, M. Morier says:—

'I need hardly observe that an ablebodied pauper is a thing unknown amongst them. . . . The most vivid impression I carried away with me was the equable manner in which the wealth of the place appeared to be divided amongst its inhabitants.'

But in BELGIUM we see perhaps the most astonishingly favourable results arising from the system of peasant proprietary. We find that in Flanders, though the peasant labours under such natural disadvantages that the soil will not produce a single crop without two manurings, yet the land is made fertile by the surprising efforts of his untiring

industry. That the material condition of the Flemings is withal satisfactory M. de Lavergne attests when he says—

'Each of these peasant proprietors manages his own farm, and under the shadow of his fruit trees enjoys in security what he earns by the sweat of his brow. This is a kind of rural opulence due not to the possession of large capital but to the abundance of rural produce. No one is rich enough to live in idleness; no one so poor as to want.'

And the same eminent economist also shows that the obstacles to the well-being of parts of Belgium 'are not the number of small properties, but the number of small tenants.' The condition of the Belgian peasant also proves that this form of agricultural economy favours largely the increase of the elements of agriculture, creates its own capital, does not exclude the employment of machinery, even of the most costly description (such as steam ploughs, &c.), and is not attended with an excessive increase of population. In fact I may remark *en parenthese*, that this stock objection to peasant proprietary is quite exploded—thoroughly contradicted by the experiences of every country.

As to the working of the plan in Norway, where the system is, according to Mr. Mill of oldest date, a few observations from Mr. Laing will sufficiently explain the situation:—

'The extent to which irrigation is carried on in these glens and valleys shows a spirit of exertion and co-operation to which Scotland can show nothing similar. The people feel as proprietors who receive the advantages of their exertions. The excellent style of the roads and bridges is another proof that the country is inhabited by people who have a common interest to keep them under repair. There are no tolls.'

Coming nearer home and taking a look for a moment into the little isle of Guernsey, what do we find? Speaking of it, Sir George Head says:—

'No matter to what point the traveller may choose to bend his way, comfort everywhere prevails.' 'The happiest community,' says Mr. Hill, 'which it has ever been my lot to fall in with is to be found in this little island of Guernsey. Beggars are utterly unknown, pauperism, ablebodied pauperism at least, is nearly as rare as mendicancy.'

The evidence as to Jersey and Alderney is of a similar character. Mr. Thornton, speaking of the Channel Islands says:—

'Thus it appears that in the two principal islands the agricultural population is, in one twice, and in the other three times as dense as in Britain, there being in the latter country only one cultivator to every 22 acres, while in Jersey there is one to 11 acres and in Guernsey one to 7 acres. Yet the agriculture of these islands maintains besides cultivators, non-agricultural populations respectively four and five times as dense as that of Britain. The difference does not arise from any superiority of soil or climate possessed by the Channel Islands, for the former is naturally rather poor and the latter is not better than in the southern counties of England. It is owing to the assiduous care of the farmer and the abundant use of manures. In Jersey the average size of the farms is *sixteen* acres. Thirty shillings an acre would be thought in England a very fair rent for middling land, but in the Channel Islands it is only very inferior land that would not let for at least £4 an acre.'

The Church Act to a small extent encouraged the experiment of peasant ownership in Ireland, and the results of the trial are far from discouraging, although after the arrangement and basis of purchase were decided upon agricultural depression set in so heavily, and prices for all kinds of produce fell so considerably, that unless the land were very low-rented it would be difficult to make its cultivation pay. The tenants under the incentive of security purchased their homesteads at a fancy price, even as things were then, but the subsequent fall in values has made their terms simply extravagant. Yet they have borne up under the crushing weight of such a liability unrelieved by an Arrears Act or those customary annual concessions in rent which even the most exacting and hardfisted landlord was compelled to allow. In the West Mr. Pim tried a similar experiment on a small scale with equally satisfactory results. At Newport near Westport he allowed his tenants to purchase their holdings at about twenty years purchase of their rent. Depression came, yet the peasant owners bore manfully up against the pitiless storm, managing not only to live but to pay up with creditable, if surprising, regularity and

promptitude, the annual repayments of purchase money. Mr. Godley, the efficient and capable secretary of the Irish Church Commission, bore testimony to their conduct for probity, punctuality and industry. Mr. Tuke, whose well-known philanthropy never blinds his keen Yorkshire common sense, visited those struggling communities in the depth of their trouble, and yet was so favourably impressed with the air of comfort displayed, the spirit of exertion manifested, that he contributed to the *Nineteenth Century* for August, 1880, a very interesting article upon them, entitled—'Peasant Proprietors at Home.' From that I take the liberty of collecting the few pregnant passages that follow:—

'These men had good stock and horses. They employed one or two labourers. They were fully determined to have no subdivision, and the air of content and sense of the position obtained was all that could be desired. There I found out that tenants who had risen in the morning Radicals and discontented, went to bed Conservatives and contented, the evening they became landed proprietors. The remarkable result of the Church Act, that 5,000 or 6,000 proprietors, chiefly working their own land, have been added to the 19,547 owners in Ireland, cannot be regarded as otherwise than a great benefit in a country almost wholly agricultural. Multiply these little centres of content and satisfaction, which have been shown to exist, extend throughout the whole of Ireland instances like those recorded at Erganagh, near Omagh, where, by the combined labour of twenty tenants alone, 200 acres of land were in course of reclamation from the mountain, and you will go far to solve the loud and dangerous cry for fixity of tenure and "no landlords," and prevent the distress and destitution from which they spring. The privilege of all others Ireland most desires is that of being permitted to work and cultivate her vast wildernesses.'

To deal directly with some of Mr. Morice's arguments, it may be noted that, with regard to Count Jacini's report on the condition of the agricultural classes in Italy, of which Mr. Morice makes such a strong point, that in Tuscany and about Florence there prevails a tenure almost peculiar to Italy, known as the 'métayer' system, and frequently, though incorrectly, represented as peasant proprietary. The principle is, that the labourer or peasant

makes his engagement directly with the landowner, and pays, not a fixed rent either in money or in time, but a certain proportion of the produce, after deducting what is considered necessary to keep up the stock. It is usually two-thirds. Its social effect is generally the repression of population, and it is not calculated to raise the comforts of the people, for over every exertion looms the dark and baneful figure of the landlord. Throughout Italy in general the laws tend to favour the dispersion of land, and equal division, without regard to sex, is the rule of inheritance on intestacy. A landowner may leave half his property by will, but the other half—*legitima portio*—he cannot burden with any conditions. With the political union of Italy will come about an assimilation of its various provincial land systems; and it is but a question of time when the healthy peasant tenure of Lombardy will replace the old territorial economy of Sicily.

In Portugal there are in the large farming district of Alemtego but 329,277 inhabitants on an area of 2,454,062 hectares, with an annual production, exclusive of cattle, worth 54,762,500 francs, or 22·72 francs per hectare. On the other hand, in the province of Minho there are, on an area of 749,994 hectares, 914,400 inhabitants, producing, exclusive of cattle, 37,756,250 francs per annum, or 50·34 francs per hectare, being more than twice the production of Alemtego, which was once, before it got into the big farmers' hands, the granary of Portugal. In the south of Portugal misery followed in the wake of consolidation, and of it it may well be said, as Pliny of old wrote of Italy, '*Latefundia perdidere Lusitaniam.*' In Spain, one has only to compare Estremadura, the Castilles, or even Andalusia, with the kingdom of Valencia and with Lower Catalonia. 'Where,' says Lavaleye, 'small farming prevails, the land is a garden, where the estates are large,

a desert.' The condition of these provinces to-day attests the axiomatic truth.

In Belgium, the 'small-farm provinces' own more cattle, yield more produce, are more carefully cultivated, and have more agricultural capital than those in which the large estates are predominant. The Fleming has a saying which is worthy of note—*De spa is de goudmyn der boeren* (the spade is a gold mine of the farmer), and in Lombardy they have a cognate proverb, which their industry illustrates—*se l'aratro ha il fomero di ferro, la vanga ha la punta d'oro* (if the plough has a ploughshare of iron, the spade has a point of gold).

Nor does it seem to the present writer that agricultural life, the inclination for which, says Mr. Morice, 'seems everywhere to be co-existent with ignorance,' is really at all deserving of the contempt which he appears to entertain for it, a contempt which is certainly not shared by the great poets and thinkers of all ages. The colossal development of manufacturing industry in England has produced a state of things there which, even from the mere material point of view, is already seen to be dangerous, and which a certain easily conceivable set of circumstances may yet make disastrous; while the moral, not to mention the closely-allied æsthetic results, have been still more palpably unfortunate. Mr. Froude is well worth listening to on this subject. In his last work, *Oceana*, occurs the following notable passage—one which the rulers of a young State would do well to lay to heart:—

> 'The wealth of a nation depends in the long run upon the conditions, mental and bodily, of the people of whom it consists; and the experience of all mankind declares that a race of men sound in soul and limb can be bred and reared only in the exercise of plough and spade, in the free air and sunshine, with country enjoyments and amusements, never amidst foul drains and smoke-blacks and the eternal clank of machinery.'

As to the social effects of a system of peasant owner-

ship, a few extracts from M. de Lavaleye's very interesting work may not be out of place :—

'The larger (he says), the number of landowners in a country the more free and independent citizens there are concerned in the maintenance of public order. Property is the essential complement of liberty. Whatever rights the political constitution may confer upon him, so long as a man is a tenant he remains a dependent being—politically a man he is socially a bondsman. . . . Peasant property may be called the lightning conductor that averts from society dangers which might otherwise lead to violent catastrophes.'

Further on in the same work he lays down these self-evident truths agreed in by every economist who studies the question :—

'There are no measures more Conservative or more conducive to the maintenance of order in society than those which facilitate the acquirement of property in land by those who cultivate it; there are none fraught with more danger for the future than those which concentrate the ownership of the soil in the hands of a small number of families.*

I do not consider it necessary here to more than notice the palpably prejudiced accounts lately published by Lady Verney in the *Contemporary Review* of some peasant properties she happened, while on a holiday excursion in France, to visit. She saw in these few places what she considered, to her ideal, were uncleanliness, evidences of thriftlessness and misery, and thereupon, with truly feminine logic, 'with inductive impetuosity,' she frames an indictment against a system she was by training, by association, and by class-sympathy, entirely unfitted to examine and judge impartially of. How anyone could seriously and soberly regard such rambling utterances and 'wayside jottings' as of any economic value puzzles me. Every schoolboy knows, to quote a famous Macaulayan phrase, that in portions of France, through the operations of the law known as *le partage forcé*, the peasant properties were indefinitely sub-divided, and the tendency of course resulted in economic evils. With an ingenuity of enter-

* *Lavaleye : Land System of Belgium and Holland.*

prise worthy of a better cause, Lady Verney looked up these victims and has given the world an account of her interview. But from the days of Mill to Le Play every European economist knew of the existence of those creatures of legislation 'les enclaves de petite dimension.' In Normandy this indefinite sub-division brought about the most disastrous effects, and a district known as 'pays de Cana,' was completely transformed by reason of the working out of that pernicious principle of parcelling. But all these ill effects are owing to a law which could easily be repealed or amended, and all these instances of so called failure of peasant proprietary, are not at all justly and fairly due to the principle. Every human policy is capable of abuse, and the most perfect of human institutions, if allowed to indulge itself in excesses, will undoubtedly fail. It was so in northern France, and would be so in every country where such a law as that of *le partage forcé* or indefinite sub-division exists.

My remarks must now be brought to a close, as I fear I have already outrun the reasonable limits allowed me. It were impossible, therefore, under such exacting space conditions to go into the general question of the suitability of such a system of ownership to Ireland, and of the great crying want felt in our midst for some such agrarian settlement as will transfer to the tillers of the soil that interest in it which will alone serve to make them contented and their country prosperous. To my mind, and it is the settled conviction of years, the only solution of the economic problem presented by the existing state of affairs here to-day, lies in the establishment of a peasant proprietary. In this regard I cannot better conclude than by quoting the memorable words of the two leading politicians of the present moment. Some years ago Lord Salisbury, with that clear foresight into things he often displays but rarely follows up in action, declared that 'to establish peace and

contentment in Ireland you must do your best to bring the ownership of the land again into single hands.' And side by side with that weighty and significant statement may well be placed the opinion of Mr. Parnell who said, speaking at Limerick in the April of 1880, 'I have long abandoned the principle of fixity of tenure at periodic revaluation of tenants' holdings. There must be as in France, as in Prussia, as in Belgium, established a peasant proprietary by aid of the State.' Events and the trial of another method have strangely and in a short time approved the wisdom of that declaration, and what was six year ago regarded as a reform savouring of communism, is to-day the policy of every man who thinks out the Irish social problem. Peasant proprietary is now a question of bargain and a matter of detail, and the difficulty seems to be how best and quickest to bring about so desirable a settlement. How wonderfully is Mr. Parnell justified in this change of public opinion! for it was for such a solution he from the first fought and spoke with characteristic consistency and courage.

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