

**THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.
WHAT IT INVOLVES, AND HOW
ALONE IT CAN BE SETTLED. AN
APPEAL TO THE LAND LEAGUES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649409648

The Irish Land Question. What It Involves, and How Alone It Can Be Settled. An Appeal to the Land Leagues by Henry George

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

HENRY GEORGE

**THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.
WHAT IT INVOLVES, AND HOW
ALONE IT CAN BE SETTLED. AN
APPEAL TO THE LAND LEAGUES**

18471

8

THE
IRISH LAND QUESTION.

WHAT IT INVOLVES, AND HOW ALONE
IT CAN BE SETTLED.



AN APPEAL TO THE LAND LEAGUES.

BY

HENRY GEORGE,

AUTHOR OF "PROGRESS AND POVERTY."

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it."—DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
1, 3, AND 5 BOND STREET.
1881.

111
525
.G34

CONTENTS.

- I.—Mr. Justice Fitzgerald speaks truth.
- II.—Nothing peculiar in Irish distress.
- III.—The Irish Question much more than an Irish Question.
- IV.—Inadequacy of proposed remedies.
- V.—The first principle to settle: Whose land is it?
- VI.—False position of Irish leaders—landlords' right is labor's wrong.
- VII.—The doctrine of vested rights—The great-great-grandson of Captain Kidd.
- VIII.—Private property in land must be abolished—the only way, the easy way.
- IX.—Political considerations.—A frank avowal of principle the best policy.
- X.—Appeals to national animosities wrong and injurious.
- XI.—How to combine the strongest force against the least resistance.
- XII.—What Americans may learn in the discussion of the Irish Question, and what American experience may teach.
- XIII.—A little island or a little world.
- XIV.—Grandeur of the civilization that is possible.
- XV.—Barbarism of the civilization that is.
- XVI.—True radicalism the true conservatism.
- XVII.—"In hoc Signo Vincas."

© 14 Mar 1925

THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.

I

IN charging the Dublin jury in the Land League cases, Mr. Justice Fitzgerald told them that the land laws of Ireland were more favorable to the tenant than those of Great Britain, Belgium, or the United States.

As a matter of fact, Justice Fitzgerald is right. For in Ireland certain local customs and the provisions of the Bright Land Act mitigate somewhat the power of the landlord in his dealings with the tenant. In Great Britain, save by custom in a few localities, there are no such mitigations. In Belgium I believe there are none. There are certainly none in the United States.

This fact which Justice Fitzgerald cites will be reëchoed by the enemies of the Irish movement. And it is a fact well worth the consideration of its friends. For the Irish movement has passed its first stage, and it is time for a more definite understanding of what is needed and how it is to be got.

It is the fashion of Land League orators and sympathizing newspapers in this country to talk as if the distress and disquiet in Ireland were caused by British oppression, and our National House of Representatives recently passed by unanimous vote a resolution which censured England for her treatment of Ireland. But, while it is true that in the

Recd. 3-16-25 M.F.T.D.

past Ireland has been deeply wronged and bitterly oppressed by England, it is not true that there is—in an economic sense, at least—any peculiar oppression of Ireland by England now. To whatever cause Irish distress may be due, it is certainly not due to any English laws which press on industry more heavily in Ireland than in any other part of the United Kingdom.

And, further than this, the Irish land system, which is so much talked of as though it were some peculiarly atrocious system, is essentially the same land system which prevails in all civilized countries, which we of the United States have accepted unquestioningly, and have extended over the whole temperate zone of a new continent—the same system which all over the civilized world men are accustomed to consider natural and just.

Justice Fitzgerald is unquestionably right.

As to England, it is well known that the English landlords exercise freely all the powers complained of in the Irish landlords, without even the slight restrictions imposed in Ireland.

As to Belgium, let me quote the high authority of the distinguished Belgian publicist, M. Emile de Laveleye, of the University of Liege. He says that the Belgian tenant-farmers—for tenancy largely prevails even where the land is most minutely divided—are rack-rented with a mercilessness unknown in England or even in Ireland, and are compelled to vote as their landlords dictate!

And as to the United States, let me ask the men who to applauding audiences are nightly comparing the freedom of America with the oppression of Ireland—let me ask the Representatives who voted for that resolution of sympathy with Ireland, this simple question: What would the Irish landlords lose, what would the Irish tenants gain, if, to-morrow, Ireland were made a State in the American Union and American law substituted for English law?

I think it will puzzle them to reply. The truth is that the gain would be to the landlords, the loss to the tenants. The simple truth is, that, under our laws, the Irish land-

lords could rack-rent, distrain, evict, or absent themselves, as they pleased, and without any restriction from Ulster tenant-right or legal requirement of compensation for improvements. Under our laws they could, just as freely as they can now, impose whatever terms they pleased upon their tenants—whether as to cultivation, as to improvements, as to game, as to marriages, as to voting, or as to anything else. For these powers do not spring from special laws. They are merely incident to the right of property; they result simply from the acknowledgment of the right of the owner of land to do as he pleases with his own—to let it, or not let it. So far as law can give them to him, every American landlord has these powers as fully as any Irish landlord. Can not the American owner of land make, in letting it, any stipulation he pleases as to how it shall be used, or improved, or cultivated? Can he not reserve any of his own rights upon it, such as the right of entry, or of cutting wood, or shooting game, or catching fish? And, in the absence of special agreement, does not American law give him, what, as I understand it, the law of Ireland does not now give him, the ownership at the expiration of the lease of all the improvements made by the tenant?

What single power has the Irish landowner that the American landowner has not as fully? Is not the American landlord just as free as is the Irish landlord to refuse to rent his lands or his houses to any one who does not attend a certain church or vote a certain ticket? Is he not quite as free to do this as he is free to refuse his contributions to all but one particular benevolent society or political committee? Or, if, not liking a certain newspaper, he chooses to give notice to quit to any tenant whom he finds taking that newspaper, what law can be invoked to prevent him? There is none. The property is his, and he can let it or not let it, as he wills. And, having this power to let or not let, he has power to demand any terms he pleases.

That Ireland is a conquered country; that centuries ago her soil was taken from its native possessors and parceled

out among aliens, and that it has been confiscated again and again, has nothing to do with the real question of to-day—no more to do with it than have the confiscations of Marius and Sylla. England, too, is a conquered country; her soil has been confiscated again and again; and, spite of all talk about the Saxon oppressor and the down-trodden Celt, it is not probable that, after the admixture of generations, the division of landholder and non-landholder any more coincides with distinction of race in the one country than in the other. That Irish land titles rest on force and fraud is true; but so do land titles in every country—even to a large extent in our own peacefully settled country. Even in our most recently settled States, how much land is there to which title has been got by fraud and perjury and bribery—by the arts of the lobbyist or the cunning tricks of hired lawyers, by double-barreled shotguns and repeating rifles!

The truth is that the Irish land system is simply the general system of modern civilization. In no essential feature does it differ from the system that obtains here—in what we are accustomed to consider the freest land under the sun. Entails and primogeniture and family settlements may be in themselves bad things, and may sometimes interfere with putting the land to its best use, but their effects upon the relations of landlord and tenant are not worth talking about. As for rack-rent, which is simply a rent fixed at short intervals by competition, that is in the United States even a more common way of letting land than in Ireland. In our cities the majority of our people live in houses rented from month to month or year to year for the highest price the landlord thinks he can get. The usual term, in the newer States, at least, for the letting of agricultural land is from season to season. And that the rent of land in the United States comes, on the whole, more closely to the standard of rack, or full competition rent, there can be, I think, little doubt. That the land of Ireland is, as the apologists for landlordism say, largely under-rented (that is, not rented for the full amount the landlord

might get with free competition) is probably true. Miss C. G. O'Brien, in a recent article in the "Nineteenth Century," states that the tenant-farmers generally get for such patches as they sublet to their laborers twice the rent they pay the landlords. And we hear incidentally of many "good landlords," i. e., landlords not in the habit of pushing their tenants for as much as they might get by rigorously demanding all that any one would give.

These things, as well as the peculiar bitterness of complaints against middle-men and the speculators who have purchased encumbered estates and manage them solely with a view to profit, go to show the truth of the statement that the land of Ireland has been, by its present owners, largely underlet, when considered from what we would deem a business point of view. And this is but what might be expected. Human nature is about the same the world over, and the Irish landlords as a class are no better nor worse than would be other men under like conditions. An aristocracy such as that of Ireland has its virtues as well as its vices, and is influenced by sentiments which do not enter into mere business transactions—sentiments which must often modify and soften the calculations of cold self-interest. But with us the letting of land is as much a business matter as the buying or selling of pig-iron or of stocks. An American would not think he was showing his goodness by renting his land for low rates, any more than he would think he was showing his goodness by selling pig-iron for less than the market price, or stocks for less than the quotations. So in those districts of France and Belgium where the land is most subdivided, the peasant proprietors, says M. de Laveleye, boast to one another of the high rents they get, just as they boast of the high prices they get for pigs or for poultry.

The best measure of rent is, of course, its proportion to the produce. The only estimate of Irish rent as a proportion of which I know is that of Buckle, who puts it at one fourth of the produce. In this country I am inclined to think one fourth would generally be considered a moderate rent.