

APPEAL TO THE IRISH IN AMERICA AND ELSEWHERE.

By Charles Stewart Parnell.

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The land and rent agitation which has originated in the West of Ireland, and is rapidly spreading throughout the country, has now assumed such national proportions that it becomes a question of first importance to all who sympathise with its legitimate objects how best to guide the popular movement to the attainment of those ends. Temporary abatements of excessive rents are being and may continue to be obtained through the various agencies of a sympathetic but unorganised advocacy, which the existing widespread and alarming distress elicits from the press and bodies of the community; but without the creation of some constituted guide or directing influence the primary, if not the sole, cause of the existing poverty of the agricultural classes will not be removed.

Independent of the effect which the produce of the vast free lands of America and other favoured countries must have in competition with the produce created under rent-tied and paralysing conditions in Ireland, almost all the evils under which her people suffer are referable to a land system glaringly antagonistic to the first principles of justice and fair government, which place the good of the greatest number above the privileged gratification of the few. Landlordism, founded as an institution of systematic partiality, has proved itself but too true to the spirit of its origin by reducing all who are dependent on, but unprotected by ownership of, the soil, to a degraded, semi-mendicant existence, and in addition induces the loss of that independent character which arises from an independence of position.

The duties which feudal laws and customs exacted in return from those in whom they recognised certain arbitrary rights, have been ignored by Irish landlordism in its relations to the soil and those dependent upon the fruits of its cultivation; thus adding to the other

indictments against the system a non-fulfilment of essential obligations.

Any land system which does not tend to improve the value of land and enable cultivation to meet the exigencies of those dependent upon its produce stands self-condemned as barbarous, unjust, and reprehensible.

The diminished population of our country, the millions of our race who perished in or fled from a land in which God intended they should not die by hunger; the continued struggle with poverty which those have to maintain who yet cling to their native soil; and the periodic climaxation of the impoverishing influences which landlordism exercises upon the social life of Ireland, demand at last, in face of yet another impending national calamity, the application of a remedy which can no longer be denied the salvation of a people. In contrast to the social wretchedness to which a barbarous land system has reduced our country is the rapidly progressing prosperity of those people at whose demand or for whose benefit such a system has been swept away, and the cultivator of the soil has replaced the landlord as its proprietor. The surplus produce of lands thus freed and agricultural industry thus relieved from its rent-taxation, is now placed, by easy transit over sea and land, in competition, with what is produced under conditions of land tenure the most unfavourable, and incentives to toil the least encouraging, that ever regulated the chief industry of any civilised country. When to this is added the adverse influences of successive bad seasons, on the point of culminating in what threatens to be the worst yet experienced since famine years, the position of the Irish farmer and those depending upon the fruits of his enterprise and labour assumes an aspect of menacing ruin, which to consider as transient or accidental, would be a criminal disregard of the vital existence of a people.

Impelled by the desperate circumstances of their situation, the farming and other classes concerned have proclaimed their grievances in public meetings and by the press, demanding the remedies which alone can redress them. A consensus of opinion apart from immediate interestedness has declared that the remedy put forward by the present agitation is founded on justice, reason, and expediency, and

that its application is absolutely essential to meet the evils complained of, and ensure the prosperity and contentment of Ireland. In formulating a demand for ownership of the soil by the occupiers in substitution for that of the landlords, the people of Ireland neither contemplate nor ask for the confiscation of those proprietary rights which existing laws must necessarily recognise and protect; but that for the transfer of those rights to an industrial ownership a fair compensation may be given to those who shall be called upon to agree to such transfer for the settlement of the agrarian strife of the country and the supreme good of its people.

To carry out a project as vast as that which we contemplate must require means in proportion to the difficulties that must be encountered in the undertaking. Tenants' Defence Associations must be organised in every county, and assistance be rendered to farmers who may be called upon to defend themselves against an unjust or capricious exercise of landlord power. The wealth of Ireland is almost entirely in the hands of that class which we propose for the good of the country to deprive of the absolute possession of the soil, and it is but natural to expect that strong and influential opposition will be offered by those who will be called upon to surrender the privileges they have so long enjoyed – even in virtue of compensation and expediency.

To meet this opposition, and guide the National movement for freeing the land of Ireland, assistance of two kinds must be forthcoming; the one, and most essential kind, is an organised development of earnestness and a resolute attitude on the part of the six hundred thousand landless farmers of Ireland, as well as those whose daily bread depends upon the prosperity of their fatherland, in demanding their just rights as guaranteed in the settlement we propose. The second aid required is money. Neither has ever been wanting when the national spirit of our country and the patriotism of her exiled sons have been appealed to in a patriotic cause, and we are confident they will not be withheld now when the very soil of Ireland is the object we desire to free, and the land-slavery of our people the thing we are resolved shall be abolished for ever. None of our race have had such bitter experience of the wrongs of landlordism as those

who have been compelled to seek abroad the food denied them at home, and none should more readily and generously sympathise with those who are resolved to retain a firm grip of their Irish homesteads than the exiled who were forced by iniquitous laws to leave them.

In the great Shelter Land of Peoples ten millions of the Irish race have found a home. The system we aspire to abolish has banished them from Ireland. Benefiting by laws which afford equal protection and encouragement to all citizens of the great republic of America, they can appreciate the efforts which aim at affording equal incentives to progress to their crushed and persecuted kindred here.

Not alone to our fellow-countrymen in America, but to all whom evil laws have scattered the world over, as well as to all other nationalities who sympathise with a wronged and impoverished people, who at last are resolved upon a remedy for the evils afflicting them, do we call for an advocacy of our cause, and support in our efforts to achieve its success.

In constituting ourselves a committee for the purpose of carrying out this work, we are animated but with one desire – to aid the tenant-farmers and those depending upon the soil of Ireland, to lift themselves from the misery and social degradation in which they are plunged, into a position where the notice to quit and the rack-rent will not operate against their industry, security, and contentment. We are influenced by no party spirit in making this appeal, nor do we in any way purpose to place this committee in antagonism with existing bodies or organisations employed in other departments of national labour. To free the land of Ireland from the unwise and unjust restrictions which militate against its proper cultivation, and prevent the development of its full resources, should be a labour above the customary influences of party or sectional strife, and be guided alone by motives of disinterested effort for the benefit of our common country, and the improvement, contentment, and prosperity of the greatest number of our fellow-countrymen.

The grounds upon which we feel authorised to issue this appeal, are the fact of our being directly or indirectly connected with the agitation which has sprung from the distress that has evoked a national condemnation of the present land system. As this land

movement has won an endorsement from public opinion of an occupier proprietary settlement of the Land Question, those who have advocated such a remedy prior to and in conjunction with the national demand now made for it, feel themselves justified in taking such steps as may be best calculated to ensure its application to the existing land evils of our country.

In pursuance of this intention we issue this Appeal to Irishmen the world over, and to those who sympathise with the object in view, to aid us in our efforts to obtain for our people the possession of an unfettered soil, and for Ireland the benefits which must result from an unrestricted development of its products and resources.