The Example of Belgium.

A Possible Effect of the War Upon Ireland.

By Charles A. StanueLL, M.A., J.P., President.

[Read November 19, 1915].

I must first thank the Society for the unusual honour it has conferred upon me in electing me for a third term to the office of President of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland. I value the compliment very highly.

I have already in a previous address referred to the effect of the War upon Irish Agriculture, but I propose to notice some features of the Irish problem which I think have become more apparent since last year, and to mention an example brought under our notice by the War itself, which might otherwise have escaped our attention.

Prior to the Irish Famine of 1847-8 Ireland possessed a fair proportion of tillage, but it consisted very largely of potatoes, the same crop repeated year after year, and at the end of forty or fifty years of cultivation, during which the population rose from 5,216,329 in 1801 to 8,287,848 in 1846, a blight or disease attacked the potatoes, and the crop failed completely, all over the country.

The result was that appalling calamity the Irish Famine of 1847-8, which swept away the inhabitants in hundreds and thousands. An interesting account of the measures taken to relieve the sufferers by the Society of Friends will
be found in the Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of that Society, an interesting volume published in the year 1852, to be found in our Library.

Having received such a blow from the failure of the potato crop, the people, perhaps naturally, having regard to the then recent abolition of the Corn Laws (1846), and the consequent fall in the value of grain, threw their land into grazing or pasture. Meat was wanted in Great Britain, high rents for grazing were paid with ease, and landowners and tenants alike were eager to convert tillage into grazing.

This grazing greatly decreased the area of tillage, and the absence of tillage or work drove the labourers from their homes even after the real famine had ceased.

It has been constantly asserted for the last forty years at least, that the troubles of Ireland, including the absence of tillage, were due to the tyranny of the landowners, and to nothing else, and it was argued that if the tenants had security of tenure or owned their land, they would become tillers of the soil and agriculturally prosperous.

"Landlordism is the Upas-tree of Ireland," so said the theorists of this school, with the persuasive Prime Minister among them. This theory was at the back of all the Land Acts; the Act of 1870, the Judicial Rent system of the Act of 1881, and the Purchase Acts of 1903 and 1909.

The decrease in tillage was undoubtedly excessive, but I certainly hold that, like most projects of enthusiasts, the "Upas-tree policy" was incorrect. It attributed too much influence to a single cause. The land-owners were not the only people to blame. The public, with their attention fixed on the high rents obtained by owners of grazing lands, did not notice that the rent-paying farmers, of their own accord, had turned their tillage into grazing, and it was they, far more than the land-owners, who, by abandoning tillage, had left the labourers without work.

The "Upas-tree" policy of tracing all evil to one single cause is as old as the hills, and as inaccurate as all other epigrammatic generalisations.

The real fact was that grazing paid enormous profits in those days to the farmer. The ex-farmers, as graziers, made the greater part of the profits, and could afford to pay high for "grass," for they had no labourers to pay. The land-owners took what was offered to them; any other class would have done the same. They were mortal men. It was the labourers who suffered from absence of work and emigrated.

It is often forgotten that there was then a great demand for labour in America, increased from 1860 to 1865 by the
great Civil War. During this period the Irish crowded to America eagerly, as to a land of promise, and they prospered there exceedingly. We are apt nowa-days to overlook this point.

Years went by, during which the new live-stock trade flourished, graziers and landowners had a time of great prosperity with the price of meat rising and rising, and then came the introduction of chilled meat from abroad. I remember it well: it started about 1877, beginning, I think, with New Zealand mutton, and increased very rapidly. Just as the wheat-growers, on the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, had to face the introduction of foreign corn, so now the cattle-interest had to face the competition of over-seas meat. Graziers found their margin of profit diminished, and very naturally raised the cry that grazing rents were too high. No doubt they were; rent is the handicap which good land allows to bad land, and varies according to circumstances, but the landowners were not really responsible: it was the increase in the supply sent into Great Britain from distant countries which caused the fall in the value of the home grazing-lands. Modern science by producing artificial cold in the tropics, extended indefinitely the supply of fresh meat.

Meanwhile in Ireland the grazing area had increased, leaving less land for tillage; there was a scarcity of work even for the diminished number of labourers who had remained after the great emigration. The public did not pause to consider that many tenants had converted their tillage into grazing of their own accord, and they threw the blame upon the vampire landowners, overlooking the new importation of meat from over-seas.

Then came the dreadful harvest of 1879, and a vast agitation against the landowners who owned the lands now occupied by the graziers. There was an ordinary custom among resident landowners of "letting the grazing" of the family demesnes right up to the hall-door, which increased the confusion as to the actual ownership of the cattle.

I quite admit that the landowners had shared the profits of the grazing in increased rents offered to them, but this grazing system had also enriched the tenants as well. It was the pasture system which was at fault, coupled with the absence of any other form of employment. Both graziers and landowners were sufferers themselves, victims of the cheap meat imported from abroad, which took the place of the more expensive home meat. The cry of "down with the landlords" was raised; they were a small class,
the cry was popular, and this led to the land legislation we now possess in such abounding quantity.

I also quite willingly admit the good intentions of the Government, confronted with a very difficult problem, but personally I do not see that any great change has come over what I may call the "agricultural interest," due to this immense mass of land legislation. The idea was that the fixing of rent for 15 year terms would lead to an immense development of real farming or tillage in place of universal grazing, but we have continued to witness a great development of pasture, and a proportional decrease of tillage, completely unaffected and uninfluenced by the land legislation, which was described by its enthusiastic propounders as an infallible cure for Ireland's misfortunes. So far from the legislation effecting a change, I regret to say that tillage, strictly so-called has hitherto continued to shrink, and the falling-off of the population has continued up to the present, though I believe the latter has at last ceased.

I am very anxious to treat this matter dispassionately, but I fear that the evil was not traced to the right source.

It may be well to explain here, as it affects the question, that the assertion that "the Union ruined Ireland," and caused the falling off in the population from 8,000,000 to less than 5,000,000, is altogether a mistake.

The population of Ireland in 1801, the year of the Union, was 5,216,329. From that time the population increased rapidly and continuously till it reached 8,287,846 in the year 1846, a steady rise of no less than three millions, about 60 per cent. in the forty-six years following the Union.*

Then came, nearly fifty years after the Union, the failure of the potato crop, a matter quite unconnected with politics, and the awful Famine, but the fall in the population was due to the ravages of the famine, starvation, pestilence—in other words, to economic or physical causes, and not to politics.

The mistake is serious, because much argument and even legislation has been based on the erroneous assumption that the effect of the Union was to decrease the population of Ireland.

* The increase in population was constant, but for brevity the decennial periods are given, as follows:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>5,216,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>5,385,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>6,801,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>7,767,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>8,199,453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I can now enter upon the present position of Ireland.

Professor Oldham showed us in a paper he read last year* a table of the proportion of arable land, hay and pasture, forest, vineyard, and unproductive land, in various European countries. I give the figures in a note, so as not to delay the reading of this address. I shall refer to them later on.

Naturally, cattle, sheep and swine grazing do not require agricultural labour. There is no need for ploughing, harrowing, reaping, mowing, harvesting. One man can watch 100 cattle grazing.

The result of the falling-off in tillage has been that the Irish farmer has but little winter feeding or fattening food for his stock; he has converted his cattle trade into a live export of young cattle, etc., sending his live stock to England and Scotland to be fattened, and he alleges that it does not pay to fatten cattle, because the wages swallow up the profits.

Hence, when the war burst upon us last year, the more thoughtful of us saw at once that we should have an enormous demand for eatable stock and grain to feed our armies in the field, which would reduce the portion available for ourselves, and the Irish farmers were urged to prepare for this demand for tillage and eatable stock; I call attention to the word "eatable" because, speaking generally, the Irish export their cattle alive and lean, not fattened for food. Tillage is necessary for fattening food.

Unfortunately, any attempts made at planting root-crops or grain were very small. I know a man who took great credit for adding two statute acres of tillage in a farm of about five hundred acres. The result has been an immense rise in food-stuffs of all kinds. Cattle which had been selling for £18 and £20 have risen to £30 and more. With very few exceptions, the farmers made no preparations for an increased demand for cattle fattened in Ireland, and lost the chance of large profits. Indeed, I am not sure that they have not sent their cows, ewes and sows to market in

* The following figures, except the last column, are quoted from Professor Oldham's paper on "The Incidence of Emigration on Town and Country Life in Ireland," read 12th June, 1914:—

| Arable Land, | 42.5 | 27.7 | 16.5 | 52.4 | 11.1 | 48.0 |
| Hay, Pasture, | 28.2 | 34.7 | 35.9 | 11.3 | 64.1 | 16.0 |
| Forest, | 4.6 | 6.9 | 18.4 | 18.3 | 1.5 | 17.0 |
| Vineyards, | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 3.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Unproductive, | 24.7 | 30.7 | 28.4 | 14.3 | 23.3 | 19.0 |

† I have added Mr. Rowntree's areas for Belgium; they were not included in Professor Oldham's figures. In the case of Belgium, and no doubt in the other cases also, the "unproductive land" includes the cities, towns, villages, lakes, rivers, railways and roads.
a rush to obtain the present prices, which were in their opinion momentary.

It remains to be seen whether the Irish will change their methods, and introduce more tillage into their farming system.

Now comes the remarkable instance to which the War has called attention, and which, so far as I know, has attracted little if any notice up to the present.

Among the nations engaged in the War is one that has been practically unknown to Ireland. I allude to the hitherto highly prosperous but now oppressed country of Belgium.

The story of the treatment of Belgium by the Germans in the face of a solemn treaty is very dreadful, but one effect of it has been to attract our attention to the unhappy land so distinguished by its bravely-borne misfortunes. I was fairly well acquainted with its history from the time when it flourished as part of Flanders during the time of our Plantagenet Kings, to its fall in the time of our Queen Elizabeth, and its subsequent misfortunes when the country was the "cock-pit of Europe," but I confess that, beyond a casual visit or two passing through it, a good many years ago, I knew very little of its manners and customs, its habits, modes of life and economic history. My interest in her misfortunes led me to inquire into her economic history, as distinguished from her political record, and it proved to be extremely interesting.

I found, very much to my astonishment, that this little kingdom, formerly Flanders, or rather a part of Flanders, which had only been created as an independent kingdom in 1831, was full of economic surprises.

I learned that it contained about 11,373 square miles, as compared with the 32,531 of Ireland, roughly only one-third of the size; that it had in 1900 almost seven millions of inhabitants, two and a half more millions than Ireland, the densest to the square mile in all Europe, for it had 589 inhabitants to the square mile, while the next in density was England and Wales with 558, Great Britain 420. As to Ireland, it had only 135 to the square mile, taking the Irish population as 4,390,219 (1911).

It may give a clearer idea of the difference between the two countries if I state that there were only as many people to the square mile in Belgium as there are in Ireland, the population of Belgium would be little more than a million and a half (1,5535,355) instead of seven millions.

I should, perhaps, add that the population of Belgium is steadily increasing. In 1876 it was 5,386,185; in 1880, 5,520,009; in 1886, 5,909,975, and in 1910, 7,516,780.
At the same time I discovered that Belgium was self-supporting, without importing food from other countries, thus differing immensely from the United Kingdom, including Ireland, and yet, notwithstanding this, the Belgians contrived to export a considerable quantity of choice fruit and vegetables into England, while they also exported to other countries all manner of products, cloth, cotton, ironwork, machinery, glass, and other manufactures too numerous to mention.

This was a complete contrast to Ireland, and it then occurred to me to try and discover where the difference lay. You will observe that Belgium was supporting 589 people to every square mile without foreign importations, while Ireland was not supporting 135 to the square mile, as the Irish notoriously import great quantities of bread-stuffs, though they export live stock in enormous numbers.

My first theory was that the variation in climate and soil was the cause of the difference in circumstances, but I found that except that Belgium had a certain amount of coal, in which Ireland was deficient, the climate, soil, and circumstances were not much unlike, and then I turned to the economic question, the manners and customs of the two nations, how they lived their lives, cultivated their soil, developed their resources, and practised their industries.

As I have already mentioned, the Irish have by far the greater portion of their available land in pasture and hay, sixty-four acres out of every hundred in the country, the largest proportion in all Europe. They import very much of their food stuffs, while they export the great bulk of their cattle, sheep and swine alive and thin—the last word is important.

Speaking generally, the Irish have very few industries and manufactures, none of them, except linen, of any distinguished importance. One can hardly call the porter and whiskey of Dublin a "manufacture" in the ordinary sense of the word, and much of the grain used in the distilleries is imported.

What is the position of Belgium?

I found, as I have already said, that the Belgians produced their own food, grew their own corn, reared and fattened their own meat, and—most important of all—utilised the so-called "offal" in numerous factories.

Really, I think it is a great pity that this contemptuous and somewhat offensive word "offal" has been allowed to creep into general talk. The word really means "waste"; the husks of corn are "milling offals" to the miller, and are sold by this name.
Unfortunately, "offal" is a term of contempt: people speak of "offal" as if it were rather a merit than otherwise to neglect it, or even to get rid of it. Radium itself was "offal" in the eyes of the miner seeking for metals; "basic slag" was "offal" in the opinion of the ironmasters, till a chemist showed that the worthless refuse of the blast furnaces was rich in the very best constituents of manure, the phosphates and nitrates.

Further, I found that the Belgians had a wonderful system of co-operation, by which the farmers bought their seed, manures, their magnificent agricultural machinery, at low prices without middle-men, thus producing their crops cheaply.

Again I discovered that so early as 1906, in addition to 2,859 miles of railway, as against 3,172 miles in Ireland, the Belgians had no less than 2,586 miles of narrow-gauge light railways, more than half of them laid on the ordinary roads of the country, thus carrying their produce to market cheaply and expeditiously. Most of us know from experience how slow and unsatisfactory a country cart is on an Irish country road.

Finally, I found that they had a system of state education in agriculture. There were "Agronomes" or special advisers in agriculture scattered over each province or county, twenty-seven chiefs for the whole country, to give free advice to the farmers as to the proper mode of cultivating different varieties of soil, or meeting some threatened difficulty, such as disease or blight. Also there was state cultivation of woods and forests, which gave four months' work in the winter to the farm labourers, just at a time when there is no farm work.

It will thus be seen that the mode of life of the Belgians differs very much from that of the Irish. They have an immense agriculture carried out in the best manner, with the best agricultural machinery, and they utilise every scrap of material. On the other hand, I greatly fear that the Irish during the long interval since 1846 have forgotten and neglected agriculture as a whole.

A proportion of only eleven acres in each hundred in tillage, as against no less than sixty-four out of each hundred in hay and pasture, cannot be easily explained away. It shows that the Irish have become, very largely, breeders and rearers of young stock of all kinds, which live on the untilled pasture of the country, and which are sent away to Great Britain to be fattened. The edible parts are there consumed as food, and the uneatable portions, the hides, horns, hoofs, hair, wool, bones, blood are converted
into leather cloth, felt, glue, candles, manure, and fifty other products. Some, for instance the leather, is kindly sold back by the Scots and English at ten times the price given for the raw hide.

I think that one great difficulty in inducing the Irish farmers to change their system is that hitherto all comparisons with their own agriculture have been with the systems practised in England and Scotland, and hence my previous remark that the unhappy prominence given to Belgium by the War, may lead the Irish to learn from her. She gives a better illustration of what can be done by new methods, energy, industry, and perseverance in a small nation than can be got from a large and powerful Empire.

I fear that in Ireland there is a settled conviction that it is hopeless to emulate Great Britain with its iron and coal, its immense trade, commerce and resources. It appears to be a forlorn hope for the Irish to try and rival her machinery, works and manufactures, with their own limited area and small population. They have a kind of conviction that England is independent of Agriculture, and that her prosperity follows from her trade, commerce and manufactures, and hence they make no effort to copy her ways.

If, however, we can show, as I think I can, that another country, much inferior in size, can support a dense population, the densest in Europe, by adopting methods differing from those hitherto used over here, it may encourage the Irish to endeavour to improve the condition of their own country by the same means which have been successful in Belgium.

These methods are:—To increase the tillage. To provide modern machinery by co-operation. To convert live cattle export into a dead fat-meat trade, and to utilise the offal in factories at home. The last will give employment to our urban populations, who are now in want of work.

In connection with this, it may be well to trace the course adopted long before by England, which led to that country's advancement. We have two sketches of it in Green's "Short History of the English People."

The first sketch deals with the period when Edward III. claimed the throne of France. The commerce of England was then limited to the export of wool, of which in those days England possessed a jealously-guarded monopoly, till the Spaniards, it is said, became possessed of a flock smuggled from England, from which came the celebrated "Merino."

This wool was eagerly sought for by the Flemings, the ancestors of the present Belgians, then the great weavers
of Europe. In connection with this, we may notice the splendid cloth-market of Ypres—"Wipers," as our soldiers call it—which has figured so unhappily in the present War.

King Edward, with the ability of his dynasty, had noticed the fact that we exported wool to Flanders, and bought back cloth from the Flemings, a few of whom had actually come over to Norwich, and at the commencement of his reign, 1327, he invited more of them to come over to England, where they settled, principally in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, the nearest counties to Flanders, and he took the immigrants under his special protection.

That was the beginning of the great English trade in cloth. It moved north gradually, probably as coal came into use, and Bradford and Leeds now represent the centre of the industry.

The next incident is also from Green's History, but two hundred years later.

The religious wars of Philip II. of Spain, who was in possession of the Netherlands, including Flanders, during the days of our Queen Elizabeth, destroyed that country, and the ruin of Antwerp at the time of its siege and capture by his General, the Duke of Parma in 1585, established the commercial supremacy of London, and a third of the merchants and manufacturers of Antwerp are said to have found refuge on the banks of the Thames. The export trade of Flanders died away as London developed into the general mart of Europe.

I am quoting, almost verbatim, from Green's "Short History of the English People."

Years, two centuries, were to pass from 1585, while Flanders was the battlefield of Europe, and it was not till sixteen years after Waterloo that Belgium, which had been allotted to Holland by the arbitrary Allies in the general peace, became independent.

The two countries, Holland and Belgium, separated in 1831, when Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg became King, but a number of questions remained unsettled; indeed, Holland declared war against Belgium in 1831—a war stopped by France and the United Kingdom—and it was only on the 19th April, 1839, that there was signed the now famous treaty, so contemptuously referred to lately as "a Scrap of Paper"—but bearing the British signature on it—guaranteeing the continuous existence of the little kingdom.

This fixes the date of modern Belgium, and it shows how comparatively quickly a country can rise, and further that it must begin by developing its resources. The first necessity is, of course, food of all kinds, not only meat, but
grain, and that demands tillage. This is the history of our own Colonies; they are not only self-governing but self-supporting, at all events in food, and in many other respects as well.

I have no intention of going at length into the system pursued by Belgium. Mr. Rowntree's book ("Land and Labour, Lessons from Belgium"), my principal source of information, fills 500 pages.

Early in the work we are introduced to the peculiar subdivision of land in Belgium. In Ireland we talk of a farm being "in a ring fence." In Belgium a farm of 35 acres may be in 20 patches; this is not an extreme case, and I cannot help thinking, with Mr. Rowntree, that the Belgian law of the compulsory division of a man's property equally among all his children at his death is a mistake. The result is a series of patches of land often very widely scattered. Another curious result is the absence of boundary fences as taking up too much room in such small divisions; boundary stones at the corners are often the only marks of divisions.

In the management of their land the Belgians use only a moderate amount of pasture. The absence of fences, just alluded to, may be a secondary and perhaps unrecognized cause of this. It would be hard to keep the corn crops safe from grazing animals. Taking the land as a whole, forty-eight acres out of every hundred are arable, sixteen are under hay or pasture, nineteen out of every hundred are "unproductive," but this includes the sites of cities, towns, villages, water, railways, roads, and the remaining seventeen of each hundred acres are under forest.

Now for Ireland. The contrast is complete. We have only eleven acres out of every hundred in tillage—the lowest proportion in all Europe, as against the Belgian forty-eight, while no less than sixty-four out of every hundred, instead of sixteen as in Belgium, are in hay and pasture, the highest proportion of pasture in all Europe.

Twenty-three acres out of every hundred in Ireland are unproductive, as against nineteen in Belgium. The cities and towns are fewer and smaller, but there is far more "land covered with water," i.e., lakes. Lough Neagh alone contains 90,000 acres, over 150 square miles, and it is by no means the only one in the country, as we all know well.

This leaves only two acres out of every hundred for timber or forest, as against seventeen acres in Belgium. Ireland imports coal, and pays for it.

It is only fair to say that these percentages are taken
from different works, the Irish from Professor Oldham's paper and the Belgian from Mr. Rowntree's book, but I see no reason to think that they are inaccurate. For instance, the areas under tillage and forest in Belgium, large as they seem, are rather less in proportion than the areas assigned to these headings in France, which are given in Professor Oldham's figures in the note.

Continuing our survey, it would appear that the women do a good deal of the work, dairy, poultry, calf-feeding, and a certain amount of weeding and hoeing. In market gardening, which is very much practised, they clean the vegetables, make them up into bundles, take them to market and sell them. Two-thirds of the work on the farm is done by the farmers and his own family, and labourers have some advantage in being able to live in villages, going to their work by the narrow gauge railways.

I have already referred to the agricultural experts or agronomes, and the work provided in the forests during the winter, the forests which we need so much for shelter from the winds blowing in from the Atlantic. In Belgium these forests are under State control and management, and afford shelter and in some cases fuel, besides work in the four winter months, when agricultural work is at a standstill. In fact, the Belgians use up the idle time of the agricultural labourers in this most ingenious and useful way, while we, with the wintry Atlantic storms sweeping unchecked across the country, have really far more need of forest shelter on our western coast in Connaught and Donegal, than Belgium requires against the North Sea. It would be a magnificent improvement for the country to plant belts of timber in Connaught. It would provide shelter and labour, and be a source of revenue, instead of loss and expense to the nation.

Again the Belgians, through their numerous co-operative societies, unite to get the best machinery by purchasing it by co-operation, and so spreading the cost among a number of persons. By the same system they buy the best seeds and manures—when large quantities are purchased it pays to get the seeds and manure analysed and tested. It is a remarkable fact, and worth noting, that the Belgians use more artificial manure in proportion to the size of their country than any other in the world, but they are careful to use ordinary manure as well, and they are most ingenious and careful in collecting it.

I will give some particulars of the history of this co-operative movement.
In Belgium the State in 1848 started "Comices," roughly "Agricultural County Councils," to assist agriculture. They were not remarkably successful in this form, but in 1886 free associations were introduced using the old officials as staff, and now there are 500 of them in Belgium, gathered into seven large federations. The largest of them, the "Boerenbond," or Peasants' League, has its headquarters in Louvain, which we all know now as a great religious centre, and the connection is natural, for the institution is greatly assisted by the clergy, and the parish priest is often the local secretary or accountant.

I will take this large one as a specimen.

This Boerenbond, founded in 1890, had in 1896, 41,701 members. Its aims were:

1. The defence of the religious, moral and material interests of the peasants.
2. The improvement of agricultural legislation.
3. The co-operative organisation of agriculture.

In 1908 it bought 27,000 tons of chemical manure, 33,400 tons of food-stuffs for cattle, 95 tons weight of seeds, £5,000 worth of agricultural machinery. It had also 70 co-operative dairies, auditing the accounts, and did a considerable general merchant business, including purchasing 24,500 tons of food-stuffs. This is the result of organisation, which I consider is badly wanted in our agricultural system.

In 1907 there were 1,103 Agricultural Associations in the nine provinces of Belgium for improving cattle, pigs, goats, even rabbits. Those for cattle contained 17,125 members.

In Ireland, to some extent, the Board of Works and Board of Agriculture resemble the Agronomes. The former advances money for tenants' improvements, and takes care that the work, such as hay-barns, pumps, etc., is of standard quality; the latter deals with agricultural questions. Both are excellent institutions, so far as they go, and I give the Boards credit for their work, but they seem to me to have the defects of the Belgian "Comices" already referred to as only partially successful, and not to reach the farmers personally. All such state institutions seem to me to come to regard mainly the security for the advance and the collections of the repayment instalments—in fact, the formalities and machinery of their own offices, and to lose sight altogether of the all important question of organisation among the peasantry, which organisation, I much regret to say, is, in my judgment, sadly wanting among Irish farmers in general.
It would be flagrantly unfair to say that co-operation is unknown in Ireland. The work of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society under Sir Horace Plunkett, the pioneer of the movement, is making good progress. It numbers 1,000 societies of various kinds, with 100,000 members, and the turnover in 1913 was £3,333,189, and in 1914, £3,732,818.

I am not in a position to say how far the success of the movement is recognised. The number of members in each society seems small, but whether the 100,000 members of 1,000 societies seem large or small, it is pleasant to find this progress in co-operation, and the fact that my predecessor in the office of President of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, the Rev. T. A. Finlay, M.A., is the Vice-President of the Irish Agricultural Society, gives it a claim upon our notice.

My reason for calling attention to him is a very simple one. In Belgium the co-operative system has the cordial and energetic support of the clergy, the parish priest is often the local accountant and representative of the co-operative society, thus supplying a local head and organiser of united efforts, the absence of which, as I have just said, I consider to be a defect among us.

The Irish peasantry know and trust their clergy, and if Father Finlay could secure their support as the Belgian clergy have given theirs, I see no reason to doubt that it would be as powerful in promoting the success of the co-operative movement in Ireland as in Belgium. I do not see why the clergy of the Irish Church should not join in the movement. We all wish to see the country prosperous and contented.

Brevity forbids me to dilate upon this very important point; it would require another paper to develop it. I pass to the next branch of my subject.

The Belgian system of Light Railways gives the means of cheap transit for the farmers and their farm produce and crops. They have no less than 2,586 miles of these lines. The gauge is, roughly, a yard (one metre), the speed runs up to 18½ miles an hour, and the cost of construction, including the rolling stock, works out at an average of £3,755 per mile. The dividend is limited to 3½ per cent., and any surplus over this is applied in reduction of fares and rates. The trains are run without signals, like our tramways, and more than half of them on the ordinary highways. In all Ireland, our light railways at present total up to 231 miles, not one-tenth of the Belgian mileage in a country three times the size. I admit that the density
of the Belgian population gives more chances of traffic, but the difference in tramway mileage is far greater than the difference in comparative population.

I may mention finally that, so far as I can gather, the people are extremely thrifty. As a specimen, the Savings Banks of the United Kingdom show an average of £4 16s. 5d. per head; the average in Belgium is £7 6s. 6d.

The real difference between Belgium and Ireland lies in the fact that the former practices agriculture and manufactures; in the latter, pasture predominates enormously. Two-thirds of Ireland are in hay and pasture; the Belgian proportion is one-sixth. The Belgians fatten their own stock, cattle, sheep and swine—they use the last in great numbers. They obtain the best machinery for ploughing, harrowing, reaping, and threshing by co-operative purchase, and they use up every particle of "offal" in their factories, the very point in which Ireland is so weak.

However, it would require a separate paper to deal with Belgium adequately, and, though it would be a very interesting subject, my object has merely been to draw attention to her system and its success, in the hope that Ireland will increase her tillage and factory works.

There are two points which I wish to mention in regard to this:

I have no wish to see all the grass land in Ireland suddenly broken up by farmers who know nothing whatever of tillage. That would be disastrous, the process must be gradual, a few acres at a time on each farm. We all know, or ought to know, that some land will not suit tillage, though this is comparatively rare, if there be manure, but the land cannot be suddenly changed from grass to tillage in large areas. For one thing, there are a number of seeds in pasture lands which, if the land be broken up in large quantities, would require too much weeding, and the tillage crop would be smothered for the first season.

In addition, modern labour-saving machinery is expensive in first cost, and the farmers will have to unite to purchase machinery, and each will only have the machine for a short time, and indeed they will have to experiment a little on a small scale at first.

In fact the improvement must be gradual, but the sooner it is begun the better.

The real cause of the Irish famine of 1847 was simply ignorance. The unfortunate creatures knew just enough to plant potatoes year after year, without rotation of crops or fresh seed, and without manure.

I confess that, like King Edward III., I should like to
see colonies of Belgium in this country, bringing with them their farming, forest management, trades, manufactures and industries. They would be an example in the West and South of Ireland, and they have the advantage of being of the same religion as the southern and western provinces. Example is a better teacher than tuition.

In making this suggestion, I am not original. We all know that three hundred years ago a number of French Huguenots settled in Dublin, and a modern writer, Mr. J. J. Webb, in his "Industrial Dublin," published in 1913, writes:—

"The Huguenots have left their mark upon Dublin in many ways. They inspired new life and vigour into many of the industries they found in existence there; they introduced a wholly new industry, the silk manufacture, which was destined to give employment to thousands in the city; many of them rose to the highest eminence in the commercial life of Dublin."

Even the names La Touche, O'Olier, Du Bedat, Arlington, D'Arcy, survive after three hundred years.

There is one point which I wish to mention, but I do it with some reluctance, as I do not wish to make it unduly prominent, although I think it is necessary to refer to it.

In the course of my life I have found a section of the people of this country, not the majority, prone to invoke "the Government" to do things for them. Even those who revile "the Government" are constantly invoking it to do work which they are perfectly competent to do better themselves, but they want to save themselves trouble.

It is by no means universal, but it prevails sufficiently to be marked. It is what a school-master would call "a tendency to shirk."

I fear this is to some extent at the back of the pasture system. The cattle grow till the time comes to fatten them, then the farmer leaves this work to the Englishman and Scot, and complains that he cannot find work in Ireland.

I allude to this defect with much reluctance, but I do not think that it would be right to pass it by and suppress any allusion to it. I fear that there is in Ireland among some of the inhabitants a "tendency to shirk."

However, my object has been to call attention to the example set by Belgium.

I am quite aware of the stereotyped reply. I shall first be informed of the singular fact that "Ireland is not Belgium." I shall then hear the other old story. I have heard it reiterated like a proverb:—"Tillage does not pay in Ireland: the wages run away with the profits."
My first answer is that the practical English and the canny Scot do not purchase our thin live stock out of benevolence for us, but because they have found that it pays them to do so. In other words, they turn a profit by it, a very considerable profit. The Irish do not directly supply any butcher in England or Scotland with meat ready for market. They meekly surrender this process and its profits to Great Britain, and rest content with the prices paid to them for their unfinished stock. That is my first reply. The second is: That old-fashioned spade husbandry may not pay, but it is different with modern farming machinery. It is idle to expect a stage-coach to compete with an express locomotive, or a Liffey ferryboat to carry the load of a Lusitania, but there is nothing to prevent us from getting an express locomotive of our own by co-operation, and that is what the Belgians have done. They have got the best methods from their agronomes or farming experts. They have obtained the best transit from their 2,586 miles of narrow gauge railways or tramways. They have acquired the best agricultural machinery by their system of co-operative purchase, and they have utilised all their waste products, which we so contemptuously term "offal," by starting factories for turning them to use. I say we want these methods, but particularly the last, as that will give work to the urban or town population, who have not work enough to keep them employed—a fact which we all feel in our poor-rates.

The War may not be an unmixed evil, terrible as it is, if it lead to a revolution in Irish farming methods.

As to the future. Before all other things we have to finish the War, but then as soon as possible we ought to turn our attention to replenishing our exhausted resources. This will take several years.

It is true that we have not had our homes destroyed, our families broken up, our factories burnt, and our lands devastated like the brave Belgians, but still our losses in lives and material have been gigantic. When the lavish expenditure of the War has ceased, and we have to replace our reserve supplies, we shall need every effort to make good our losses, and need them for years.

I believe that the true course lies along the line I have indicated, the improvement of our agriculture, co-operation, and the introduction of factories for dealing with the by-products, but I can quite understand that the change must be gradual.

Finally, I do not wish to discourage other methods, such as starting other manufactures at once. There are several
which could be commenced now—for instance, glass-making. An effort in this direction is at present being made and steps are being taken to form a company for the manufacture of sheet glass. Sand suitable for making glass has been found in the neighbourhood of Dublin, and a convenient site has been secured. The chief promoter is one of our Belgian refugees, who has been extensively engaged in the manufacture of glass in Belgium. If sufficient capital is forthcoming, I understand that a company will be started.

I am quite aware that this regeneration of Ireland is a very difficult problem, beyond my power and ability. But, after having called attention to the gallant resistance of the Belgians against the overwhelming forces of Germany, when they did their best in fighting hopeless odds—and, without knowing it, gained time for France and Britain to gather their forces—I felt that I should apply the same line of conduct to myself, and not shirk the burden.

There are many of far greater knowledge, ability and standing who are taking up the work, and who intend to carry it to victory, but that would not excuse me to myself, if I were to shrink from taking my share in the struggle, no matter how small and insignificant it may be.