

prietors. On the other hand the cheap, prompt, and ready mode of transferring property locally, which is essential for small proprietors, now that Parliament has created some thousands of them, would not be forced upon large proprietors and the legal profession against their wish.

IV.—*Remarks of G. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., and Right Hon. Hugh Law, M.P., on preceding Papers.*

G. SHAW LEFEVRE, M.P., who was received with applause, said he felt very much pleasure at being called on to say a few words on the very able and interesting papers they had just heard read. He felt that he owed that honour to two reasons—first, that he had recently been elected President of the Statistical Society of London, which was engaged, as they were, in investigating the condition and progress of their own and other countries, and in part also to the fact already alluded to by the chairman—that he had ventured last session, as an humble member for an English borough, to handle a purely Irish question, and move for a committee to inquire into the cause of the comparative failure of what were happily called the Bright clauses of the Land Act, and also to report whether any further measures could be taken to facilitate the acquisition of their holdings by the tenant farmers of Ireland. He was glad to say that this proposal had received the most cordial support from all quarters (hear, hear). The Government most readily accepted the proposal for a committee, and the members of that committee included such men as Mr. Bright, Mr. Butt, Captain Nolan, Mr. Law, Mr. Fay, and many other members on one side, and Mr. Plunket, Mr. Verner, Sir W. Bartelott, Mr. Bruen, Mr. Wilson, and others on the other side; and he might take the opportunity of saying that he had received from all quarters the most gratifying support. Further he had every reason to hope that the subject would not run the danger of being split on that most dangerous rock for Irish questions—namely, party politics (applause). For his own part he could only say he had no party object whatever in forwarding this question (hear, hear). He had for a long time past given very full attention to the subject, even more from an English than from an Irish point of view.

He had never been able to subscribe to the doctrine which he heard promulgated in many quarters, that land must, of necessity, in a rich country, be the luxury only for the rich; and still less could he subscribe to that doctrine in a poorer country like Ireland.

He had always believed in the necessity for there being a numerous and a varied proprietary of all classes, and that the economic political and social condition of the country would be greatly enhanced by such a state of things. When they looked at the number of proprietors in this country, as evidenced by the recent Doomsday Book, and compared it with the number in any other country in Europe as well as in the New World, they could not be but greatly startled at the great disproportion. Whether they took the rich countries of

Europe, such as Belgium, or Normandy, or Alsace and Lorraine, or the poorer countries, such as Norway and Sweden, or the lower parts of Austria, they found practically the same condition of things—namely, a very numerous proprietary of land. They did not observe in these countries the conditions which they observed in England and Ireland—a constantly decreasing number of landed proprietors; but they found that the small owners, or would-be small owners, competed successfully with the wealthier classes for the ownership of land, that even in the wealthiest of these districts, land fetched a price from these small owners which would be considered high even in this country.

When they looked to the land laws of these foreign countries they found they had uniformly been passed and amended with the view of increasing the number of landed proprietors. In some countries, such as France and Belgium, the impulse had been given by the French Revolution; but in other countries, such as Germany and Italy, the impulse was given somewhat later, namely, in the great democratic wave of 1848. However, in all Europe, since '48, the tendency of the laws had been in one direction—namely, to increase the number of landed proprietors by every legitimate means, by the assimilation of the laws of property, by simplifying the law of transfer, by getting rid of old feudal doctrines as regarded inheritance and entail, by cheapening the transfer of land, establishing local registries, and so forth.

On the other hand, when they came to this country, they found that the tendency, he would not say had been in an opposite direction, but that it had not been in the direction he spoke of. Their laws were now in the main the same as they were two hundred years ago. The law of transfer was just as complicated. The law of inheritance was the same; and it was admitted, almost unanimously, that the general tendency in England was exactly opposite to what it was in the other countries of Europe—namely, with the view to put the land into fewer hands. The yeomen farmers and the class of small farmers and peasant proprietors had all but disappeared in England; and but for the experiment that was made in Ireland under the Church Act and the Bright clauses of the Land Act, such classes could not be said to exist in this country. When they compared Ireland with England, they found a state of things even much worse as regarded proprietorship of land in Ireland than in England. Statistics showed that the number of proprietors of land proportionately was far less in Ireland than in England. If they compared the rural districts of Ireland with those of England, and took counties which, in every other respect, were as identical as they could be, they would find that, of owners of between one and fifty acres, there was only one in Ireland for every ten in England. Parliament, as he had already said, had made an effort to amend this state of things as regarded Ireland. The first effort that was made was that under the Church Disestablishment Act. Mr. O'Brien had adverted to the operation of this Act. A great deal of evidence had been given before the committee over which he presided during last session upon the subject—evidence of the greatest interest. He might say that the expe-

rience of the committee, so far as they had been able to test it, was extremely satisfactory. Mr. O'Brien had adverted to many of those points. They had also been laid before the country in the evidence already published.

Some of the points he had heard that night were new to him, and he hoped he should be able to bring Mr. O'Brien before the committee, and hear in detail from him those points which he had alluded to (hear, hear). He had shown that in respect of the Irish Church property no less than five or six thousand small tenants had been able to purchase their farms, and the result of that had been to induce habits of industry and thrift to a degree which had even exceeded the expectations of those who framed the measure (hear, hear). As an illustration of this, he might mention an instance laid before the committee by Mr. Godley, where a small tenant, who held between six and seven acres of land, was able to purchase his farm; but in order to do so he was compelled to sell every single thing he possessed, and to shut up his house and let the land for a few years while he went to England and took service. Having saved up for a few years he returned and took possession of the farm, and when last seen by the surveyor of the Church Commissioners he found that the man was carrying on the farm again, having saved money in service sufficient to stock the farm (hear). Mr. O'Brien had laid before them a table which appeared to him to present some points of great interest. He stated that in one glebe alone there were twenty-one tenants who had been able to purchase their farms at a cost of £3,500, which gave an average of £170 to each purchaser. He observed, on looking at the table, that out of these twenty-one tenants eight had been able to provide the whole purchase-money (hear, hear); three had obtained money from their friends in America; three others had been able to provide money from their relatives in service; and one got the money from a neighbour who had bought the farm for him, and gave him a lease for ninety-nine years.

These were good illustrations of the beneficial effects of the working of the Act—namely, that it acted as an incentive to industry and thrift to a degree that could hardly have been anticipated. Everywhere they found that tenants were putting together as much money as they could to effect a purchase, and it was most gratifying to find that it completely bore out what had been written and said of it in other countries of the great stimulus to industry and thrift by small proprietors (hear, hear). As a further proof of this, he would venture to quote from the reports laid before Parliament six or seven years ago from her Majesty's representatives abroad, as to the state of the land ownership in various countries of Europe, and also as to the changes in the laws of these countries, during the last few years. Mr. Sackville West reported:—

“The small proprietor is seen under more advantageous circumstances in France than in any other country in Europe, for he has, in fact, been creator of a system which, whatever may be urged against it, has reconstituted the rural economy of the nation, and more than doubled the produce of the soil. His mode of life presents a striking and instructive illustration of the system, for it is based upon the proceeds of the land in which he has a direct personal interest, and he lives, therefore, as an independent mem-

ber of society according to his means in the social scale. The condition of the small proprietor varies very much in different departments, as also does the mode of cultivation; but they will generally be found in easy circumstances, and living always in the hope of bettering them, and it is this hope which absolute possession engenders that stimulates them to fresh exertions, beneficial not only to themselves but to the community in general."

Mr. Harriss Gastrell, reporting in Germany, quotes from the work of Dr. Meitzen to this effect.

"The inclination of the German to establish his family upon its own plot is a blessed trait of the greatest moral advantage. It has been sufficiently shown that the possibility of acquiring land fosters hope, encourages energy, and never lets useful activity flag. Many of these small occupiers, from love of property and family, raise themselves above the rank of day labourers. The greatest facility exists for a day labourer to become a land occupier, either by purchase or lease."

He quoted these two reports because they appeared to him to bear out most completely the experience that had been obtained of the result of the experiment made in this country under their more recent legislation (hear, hear). The working of this scheme under the Irish Church Act had been most satisfactory; and he must bear this testimony to the very able manner in which the intentions of Parliament had been carried out by the Church Commissioners. They might very easily have burked the scheme by letting little petty difficulties stand in the way; but it appeared to him that they had done their best to make the scheme work (hear, hear).

There had been another experiment in the same direction—the Bright clauses of the Land Act. In the Landed Estates Court, under the Land Act, there had been sold during the past six years more than six millions' worth of property, in respect of which there had been only six hundred tenant purchasers: while, on the other hand, under the Church Act, on a sale of only two millions' worth of property there were nearly six thousand tenant purchasers. He hoped that next session his committee would be able to express an opinion about this; but it certainly would be wrong of him to give his opinion at this moment as to why these clauses had been unsuccessful. All he could say was that the evidence given before the committee might be summed up in these conclusions—first, that the Irish tenants as a rule were most anxious to become purchasers of their holdings, and more especially at that time, when there was about to be a change in the ownership of their lands; secondly, that they were prepared to give a price which, on an average, was higher than the average value given for land by other persons; and thirdly, that they were, as a rule, able to pay the difference of the purchase-money between the actual price and what the state would advance. There was also a further conclusion, namely, the result of such purchases had been eminently satisfactory. When they found, on the one hand, a large body of tenants prepared to buy, and on the other hand, a large quantity of land coming into the market, he did not think it was beyond the power of statesmanship to arrange that these two should combine together; and he had his hopes, either by the result of the committee of which he was chairman, or by some other way,

that a very considerable extension might be given to the operation of the Bright clauses.

With regard to Dr. Hancock's paper, it was a little beyond the scope of his committee; but having called into existence a body of small proprietors they must contrive that the laws should be such that they might continue to exist. He believed under the present state of their laws of transfer it was almost impossible for small proprietors to exist. It appeared to him Ireland had peculiar advantages for a system of registration like that of Belgium, owing to her system of maps. Unless some such system was adopted, it would be impossible for the body of small proprietors to exist. He did not hope or expect to see Ireland, and still less his own country, reduced to a dead level of peasant proprietors. On the contrary, he had a great belief, personally, in variety, and that it would be well for both countries that there should be a numerous body of landed proprietors of all classes, and he was disposed to agree with those German writers, thinkers, and statesmen, who had come to the conclusion, after mature deliberation and long experience, that those states were best off in this respect which had a numerous and varied class of landed proprietors. There was room for all, and to use the words of Pope, that country was in the best condition.

“Where jarring interests themselves create
The according music of a well-mixed state.”

The chords they heard sometimes from Ireland in England were not very harmonious; and if they could increase that harmony by adding to the choir of small farmers in Ireland, he hoped his committee would have conferred some benefit upon this country (hear, and loud applause).

The Right Hon. HUGH LAW, M.P., referred to the peasant proprietorship of the Channel Islands, and compared these with the Isle of Wight, where the ordinary English system of land-tenure prevailed. The largest estate in the Channel Islands was said to be about one hundred acres, and the average size of an estate to be about five acres, whilst by far the greater number of proprietors owned less than two. Here, then, we had the means of testing the relative advantages of the two systems, and what was the result of the comparison? It was this—that the Channel Islands, with less than one-half of the arable acreage of the Isle of Wight, maintained a population of nearly 90,000, as against some 66,000 which was the number in the latter—but part even of that was attributable, according to the Registrar General, to the influx of strangers, and not to any material increase of the native population. It might, however, be asked, what is the condition of this large population in the Channel islands? Well, the answer was that there was almost no pauperism; that, generally speaking, every cottage, even to the smallest, exhibited a neatness and appearance of comfort hardly to be found elsewhere—all having their fruit-trees, which indeed were to be found also bordering and beautifying the public roads—all their vegetable gardens, and most their flowers also; that education was universal; and finally that no police force was required in any of the

Islands. In short here was a community of peasant proprietors, who exhibited a wealth and prosperity not to be found in any other part of Her Majesty's dominions. It was plain, therefore, that there was, at least, nothing in the system of small estates that was incompatible with the highest progress. He (Mr. Law) thought everyone must be fully impressed by some of the cases mentioned by Mr. O'Brien, as showing the efforts and sacrifices which even the poorest Irish peasants will make, to become absolute owners of their homes. Take the instance of children saving up their wages for twenty-five years, and then purchasing the holding for their father, or even the less touching case of the tenant buying with his own savings, with or without the aid of a loan from the Church Commissioners—and did not each evince an amount of self-denial and self-control, which deserve all possible encouragement. Mr. Lefevre had shown that in every country the desire by people to own the land they live on was so strong, as to constitute the greatest of all incentives to industry and frugality. And so it would be here also, if it were not practically forbidden by the law. There could indeed be no true family life without a home; and there could not be a home in its truest and highest sense if the owner was not assured in its possession for himself and his family (hear, hear). It was a vicious state of the law which did not leave every peasant the power of becoming a proprietor, if he had only money to purchase the land. Nor could he see how local government could obtain its full development without that varied proprietorship of which Mr. Lefevre had spoken. Moreover, they were now, probably, on the eve of having a wide extension of the franchise among the rural population; and this seemed to him to be an additional reason why they should favour so eminently a conservative policy as the creation of peasant proprietors (hear, hear). He (Mr. Law) would close his remarks by reading a passage from the Chairman's (Mr. Pim's) pamphlet published thirty years ago, as mentioned by Dr. Hancock, and in which he (Mr. Pim) forcibly pointed out some of the advantages of a peasant proprietary. "Nothing," he says, "gives a man a stronger feeling of loyalty, of conservatism, of determination to uphold the institutions of the country he lives in, than the possession of property in land—the possession of a spot, however small, which is *his own*. He feels himself a part of the state; he looks upon offences against the laws as aggressions against himself and his own rights; and these he is ever ready to maintain. His home possesses a real value. It is not merely his dwelling hired for the occasion, but his own unquestionable property. If he spends his labour or his money in improving it, he knows that he works for himself and his family; and his industry is encouraged and his energy prompted by the consideration. He respects himself; he values his independent position, and is careful not to lose it by improvidence. His children are brought up in habits of industry and self-respect, and are thus enabled to work for themselves, and strengthened to withstand many of the dangerous temptations of life. They hesitate long before they incur the danger of lowering their position, or losing their independence by an imprudent marriage. Such were

the yeomanry of England; such are the peasantry of many parts of Switzerland. Wherever this class of men exists, the beneficial effects are felt by the state in the industry and frugality of the people, and in increased respect for the laws and institutions of the country."

V.—*Notes of a Visit to some Church lands, where tenants have bought their holdings, and also to other Church lands where tenants have not yet bought their holdings.* By G. Shaw Lefevre, M.P.

[22nd December, 1877.]

TO THE SECRETARIES OF THE STATISTICAL AND SOCIAL INQUIRY SOCIETY OF IRELAND.

Dear Sirs,

It has been suggested to me by Dr. Hancock that it may not be without value to the Statistical Society, that I should put on record the notes of a visit which I have paid during my short stay in Ireland to two of the properties of the Church Temporalities Commission, subject to the clause of the Church Disestablishment Act giving a right of pre-emption to the tenants.

My object was that I might personally judge of the motives which the tenants had in view in effecting the purchase, and of the results, so far as they could be ascertained by ocular proof and by conversation with the new owners.

By the advice of Mr. Murrough O'Brien, I selected for my visit two properties in the neighbourhood of Newry, one of which was sold four years ago to the tenants, and the other which, owing to some technical difficulties, is only now about to be offered to its tenants.

I. The first consisted of about 250 statute acres, distributed in twenty-one small farms, with an average rent of £1 4s. per acre. All the tenants of this property bought at rates of about twenty-four years' purchase of the rental. The property is in a purely agricultural district; the land light and undulating; the tenants are small farmers of about average condition.

The following are the notes of my conversations with the new owners.

(1) A. B. farms twenty acres, for which he paid the Church Commissioners £516, the whole of which he paid down. He spent some years of his life as an engineer in the merchant service; later at Liverpool as a marine store dealer. A few years ago he inherited the tenant's interest of a small farm of eight acres, and subsequently bought the tenant's interest of an adjoining farm of twelve acres, for which he paid £350, or thirty times the rent. Since his purchase of the fee from the Commissioners, he has built a range of superior farm buildings, at a cost of £500, tiled the floor of his house, put