

The above is a brief and imperfect sketch of the views which I desire to submit to your consideration on a subject admittedly of the deepest importance for Ireland—the means necessary for ensuring the prosperity of an Irish peasant proprietary. This problem transcends all party politics. Some are sanguine of its success, others have less confidence. All agree it should have a fair field and a fair trial ; and this it cannot have under our present costly, cumbrous, and dilatory system of conveyancing. Let me conclude by expressing the earnest hope that the sad experience of the last two years will stimulate public opinion in Great Britain and Ireland, and impress the urgent need for the prompt realization of measures which for more than thirty years have been sanctioned and advocated by the highest authorities on social and legal reforms in Great Britain and Ireland. Surely it is time to cast away the unwisdom that deliberately creates a class of peasant proprietors, yet withholds from them the essential conditions of prosperity—nay of existence. It is not thus that nations and statesmen act who know how to take the tide in the affairs of men, which taken at its full leads on to fame and fortune, and to things still better and nobler—to social well-being and political harmony.

III.—*Bimetallism as a Policy for the British Empire.* By Joseph John Murphy, Esq.

In this paper I take as proved the Bullionist theory ; that is to say, the doctrine that the circulating medium ought to possess intrinsic value. All who admit this admit further that the circulating medium—or rather the money of legal tender—must consist either of gold or of silver, or of both together.

One of the properties that make gold and silver suitable for this purpose is that of possessing great value in a small space ; and as gold has this property in a greater degree than silver, an opinion appears to be generally held that with the increasing magnitude of transactions, and the improving organization of commerce, gold ought to be gradually and universally substituted for silver, except as mere token money for small change. This opinion would be well founded if it were necessary that coin should actually pass from hand to hand in making payments ; but the invention of bank notes and cheques has superseded any such necessity.

The monetary history of the past thirty-three years has been, in extreme outline, as follows.

At the beginning of that period, Great Britain used gold as the money of legal tender ; India used silver ; France, Germany, and the United States were legally bimetallic, but practically used silver, in consequence of silver being at a slight depreciation.

Then came the discoveries of gold in California and Australia, which led to a slight depreciation of gold, and the consequent general substitution of gold for silver in the French currency.

The changes due to the opening of the Californian and Australian mines came to an end about fifteen years ago, when the productiveness of those mines began to fall off ; and about the same time the production of silver began greatly to increase, in consequence of the discovery of new mines in North America. The decreased production of gold, and

the increased production of silver, have led to a great depreciation of silver as compared with gold.

This depreciation has been increased by the action of governments. France and the United States have really, though not nominally, demonetised silver by restricting its coinage. Germany has substituted gold for silver, and Italy is making arrangements to resume cash payments in gold. All these acts on the prices of gold and silver under the law of supply and demand, by increasing the demand for gold and diminishing that for silver.

As a consequence of these changes, the money of the civilized world, with the exception of India, from being a money of mixed gold and silver, has come to be a money of gold alone.

While these changes have occurred in the relation between the values of gold and silver, other changes have occurred at the same time in the relation between the values of money and commodities. The effect of the gold discoveries was to increase the prices of commodities; this increase went on progressively until about the year 1873, when a reaction began, due to the falling off in the supply of gold; and by this time prices have returned to what they were before the effect of the new gold began to be felt.

It is impossible to doubt that the influx of gold between (approximately) the years 1850 and 1870, had a most beneficial effect in promoting and facilitating the vast extension of commerce that took place between those years; and, conversely, economists are rapidly coming to believe that the decrease in the supply of gold is a main cause of the commercial depression which began in 1873, and has equalled in intensity, and surpassed in duration, any other commercial depression on record.

The effect of an increasing scarcity of gold on commerce is twofold. It acts by a constant tendency to a fall in prices; and under our system of credit, or deferred payments, it acts by a constantly-increasing difficulty in procuring the money wherewith payment is to be made.

At the same time that Europe and America, or the gold-using countries, have been suffering from the scarcity of gold, India, the silver-using country, has been suffering in consequence of the abundance of silver. It is only through a set of historical accidents that the two chief parts of the British Empire—Great Britain and India—use different metals as their legal tender money. Great Britain, the wealthier, uses gold; India, the poorer, uses silver. The poorer country is really and commercially, though not nominally and legally, tributary to the wealthier, in consequence of the remittances that have to be made on government and other accounts. These debts are mostly payable in gold, while the Indian government receives its revenues in silver; and consequently India suffers a loss on the exchange equivalent to the depreciation of the silver.

It has been said that what the Indian Government loses by the depreciation of the silver which it receives, is gained by the people of India who have to pay it; and that India, as a community, is consequently no loser. This is a kind of saying which is true only in tendency and approximately, and is misleading if stated absolutely. We have no evidence to show that the depreciation of silver makes it easier for the people of India to pay their very heavy taxes.

Thus the scarcity and consequent appreciation of gold, and the abundance and consequent depreciation of silver, are injurious to Great Britain and India, though in different ways.

The remedy is at hand. *Let the Imperial Parliament remonetise silver for the whole empire, permitting the unrestricted coinage of silver, and*

making it legal tender at the ratio of 15½ ounces of silver equal in value to one of gold, being nearly the ratio maintained until the recent events which have deranged the market for silver, and the ratio needed to restore the rupee to par.

As between Great Britain and India the effect of this would be that the richer and tribute-receiving community would consent to receive rupees from the poorer and tribute-paying community at par, instead of at the present depreciated value.

This would relieve the finances of India to the extent of nearly three millions a year, which would really, though not visibly, be borne by ourselves. But if we do not help India in this way, we may have to do so in another and much more objectionable way. India will bear no sudden increase of taxation. The opium revenue may be lost before many years are over. The ordinary budgets leave no sufficient margin for wars and famines, and yet we cannot—dare not—and will not—permit India to become insolvent. There are very strong political objections to our giving assistance to the Indian revenues in the form of a subsidy—though we have found ourselves compelled to do this—but to assistance in the form of a restoration of the value of the Indian currency, there are no political objections whatever.

At the same time, our commerce would be relieved by the introduction of silver into our legal tender money, remedying the present dearth of gold.

It has been urged as an objection to bimetalism, that if gold and silver were alike legal tender, the money market would be exposed to a double chance of disturbance, from possible fluctuations in the supply of both metals. This is as reasonable as if it were to be said that if beef and mutton are both to be recognised as meat, we are subject to a double chance of failure in the supply, from a murrain among either cattle or sheep. If bimetalism were established, a fluctuation in the supply of gold would have less effect than if the currency were of gold alone, and the same of silver; because a fluctuation in the supply of only one metal would act on a stock consisting of the stocks of both metals. There would, no doubt, be a double chance of fluctuation, but the effect of a fluctuation would be only half as great as at present; and the evil of such fluctuations consists not in their frequency, but in their magnitude. An infinite number of infinitely small fluctuations would be equivalent to perfect steadiness.

Another objection to bimetalism, and the most obvious of all, is that the ratio between the values of gold and silver is a mere question of price, to be settled, like any other price, in the market; and that prices are a matter with which the law cannot successfully interfere, and ought not to make the attempt.

It is quite true that the law cannot in general successfully interfere with the working of the principle of supply and demand. But the re-monetisation of silver as proposed would not be an interference by the law with supply and demand; it would be something quite different—namely, the creation of a demand by law. The declaration by Parliament that debts should be payable throughout the British Empire in silver at the price of 15½ ounces to one ounce of gold, would create the demand for silver at that price.

But, it will be said, within what limits is this true? If true at all, it must be true only within limits; for no one will maintain that an Act of Parliament could raise the price, let us say, of 15½ ounces of copper to an equality with the price of an ounce of gold.

This is quite true; the limits between which it is possible for legislation to fix the relative values of gold and silver, are the ratio which would

subsist in the market between their values if gold were demonetised, and that which would subsist if silver were demonetised. If this ratio were in the former case 14, and in the latter case 17, it is clearly in the power of legislation to fix the ratio at $15\frac{1}{2}$.

But it may be said, that the union of all nations would be necessary for such legislation to succeed. I reply that the British Empire is a sufficiently large concern to act alone in the matter. I admit that the union of all nations would be desirable, and I believe that if we were to set the example it would be generally followed.

In order to avoid any interference with the letter of contracts, it would be necessary to provide that all debts now payable in gold should continue to be so. This would include the interest on the whole of our national debt, and on a great part of that of India.

In this paper, as its title indicates, I have given most prominence to that argument for bimetallism which is drawn from the peculiar relation between Great Britain and India. I have done so because it has not been dwelt on as it deserves. But there are equally strong arguments of a more general nature. The common example and experience of mankind are in favour of accepting gold and silver on an equality. I believe that bimetallism was the universal practice of the world until silver was demonetised by an Act of the British Parliament near the end of the last century.

Further, if gold money alone is right, it ought to be universal over the world, in Asia as well as Europe and North America. But the introduction of exclusively gold money into India—and still more, into both India and China—is impossible, for the reason that the world is not able to find gold enough to replace the silver money of India alone. Unless new sources of gold are discovered to an extent which we have no reason whatever to expect, the supply, so far from being sufficient for Asia, will be insufficient for the wants of Europe and America, unless they return to the ancient, natural, rational, and safe system of accepting both the precious metals alike.

IV.—*On the Anomalous Differences in the Poor-laws of Ireland and of England with reference to Outdoor Relief, Area of Taxation, &c.* By Abraham Shackleton, J.P., T.C.

The paper I am about to read possesses no claim to originality. I have merely put together the conclusions arrived at by a few gentlemen interested in the question of poor relief, who met and considered some points connected therewith, with a view to their being discussed at this Congress. The views which I now bring before you, have already on many previous occasions been more comprehensively placed before my fellow-citizens.

As long ago as 1863, by Professor Ingram, who in his Address to the Statistical Society, recommended that Irish Boards of Guardians and the Irish Local Government Board should be armed with the same powers, and charged with the same duties as the English authorities.

In 1873, by Mr. William Graham Brooke who pointed out the defects of the Irish Poor-law, as compared with the English, as affecting the protection of women and children, and recommended the complete assimilation of the Irish and English Poor-laws.