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STATISTICAL AND SOCIAL INQUIRY SOCIETY OF IRELAND.

PART LXXVI.

I.—*Introductory Address.* By the President, Mr. Serjeant Dodd,
Q.C.

[Read Tuesday, 28th January, 1896].

IN the Address which I had the honour to deliver as President of this society, at the opening of the last session, I took occasion to review the history and work of the society during the period, nearly half a century, in which it had been in existence. In his second address the President is expected to confine himself to general observations upon the topics that seem to him to be worthy of the attention of the society at the time. I gladly adhere to the custom. My main duty to-night is to listen not to speak.

There are some facts that seemed to me to stand out clearly in the history of your society. The papers and debates of the forty-seven years of your existence centre round the topic of the responsibility of the community for the social well-being of the individual. The attitude of the society towards this question has changed slowly, almost imperceptibly, from session to session, but at the end of the period it will be found to be almost completely the reverse of what it was at the time the society was started.

Non-interference was the ideal at first: State intervention seems to be the ideal at the last. Freedom of contract was the one desirable thing in 1847; Social Legislation is the watchword of 1896.

The change in the way in which proposals for new methods have been received is scarcely less marked. When the proposals of the Tenant League of 1851, which were really a demand for the three F's—"Fixity of Tenure, Fair Rent, and Free Sale" were formulated, they were resisted in this society as confiscatory, unconstitutional, and opposed to economic science. But proposals of the same kind in 1880 were considered on the merits. The question of compulsory sale would have not been considered as within the scope of reasonable discussion in the fifties. It is a matter that demands very earnest consideration in the nineties.

It is obvious that the State cannot undertake to improve the condition of one class of the subjects of the realm, without having the claims of other classes pressed upon it. It cannot aid either by legislative protection, or by the application of State credit, the farmers of Ireland, without having the claims of the agricultural labourers to State-help pressed upon it.

It is manifest, also, that you cannot provide for the agricultural labourer, without being compelled to at least consider the claims of the labourer in towns.

But, if the State proceeds to help the occupier of land in the country, and the labourer in the country, and the artizan in the town, why should it not intervene to help the occupier of land in towns? Why should the owner of land in the country be obliged to submit his contract with the occupier to revision by a State-appointed tribunal, and the owner of land in a town be at liberty to hinder the prosperity, and hamper the industry of the people, by exacting high rents upon insecure tenures? John Stuart Mill attributes the prosperity of Belfast to the fact that the landlord, at a critical time in its history, was in impoverished circumstances. and gave leases at lengthened tenures. The Kingstown Commissioners, who are not a revolutionary body, seem to think that some proposals to assimilate the law of ownership and occupation of land in towns to that which prevails in the country are within the limits of practical politics.

Disputes arise between the employer and the employed. Strikes and lock-outs affect not only the people engaged in them, but thousands of others who depend for their livelihood on the continuance of peaceful industry. If the State can regulate contracts between landlord and tenant, can it not devise some method of terminating such contentions between labourer and capitalist? If interference, in the one case, is justifiable upon the ground of the general good, is it not in the other also? The government for the time being is supposed to have cast upon it the duty of making an effort to put an end to strikes, and is rebuked in the daily press if it does not make an effort.

Proposals, it would seem, are to be made to provide old-age pensions, to make life sweeter and pleasanter generally throughout the United Kingdom, and light railways and afforesting are specially hinted at as matters that will heal some of the social woes of Ireland. An agricultural department for the State promotion of agriculture in Ireland is also among the remedies promised or demanded.

My object, at present, in drawing attention to these matters is mainly this. It is precisely for the consideration of such subjects that this Society exists, and there never was a time when it could do so much service to the public as at present. For the principles which ought to guide men in dealing with State responsibility and individual liberty are very far from being either clearly or fully enunciated. One man gets rid of such questions by saying "I am not a socialist," or "I am for freedom," or "I am against grandmotherly legislation," or "there is no use in giving the State control of anything, unless you allow it to control the increase of the popu-

lation," others again say "give the Irish people the right of self-government and these questions will settle themselves." But these answers are incomplete and unsatisfactory. When you betake yourself to the philosophers who undertake to lay down general rules, you find that the light and leading are not by any means clear. A haphazard kind of guidance is all that is offered to you.

Now in this society we have men fresh from the universities, who have knowledge of the most recent teachings of economists on such matters. We have men of most diverse views in practical politics. We have relations as corresponding societies with the Trades' Council and the University Societies, whose delegates can take part in our debates. It is subjects upon which men differ in opinion that we desire to discuss, though we do not reject non-contentious matter. If any man has an opinion that he wishes to ventilate, here he will have audience "fit though few." His paper will be printed, and if he desires to circulate it, he can easily, and at small expense, get copies struck off. If one desires to show that Mr. Morley's Land Bill of 1895 is confiscatory, we will hear him. He will probably find some one in the society who will meet him in debate, and say that it contains the minimum of the tenants' right. If one desires to show that the compulsory purchase of land is the natural sequence of recent legislation, he will get a hearing, and he will probably find not a few among us who will contend that all the past land legislation in Ireland is a mistake. If one contends that native manufactures should be protected, he will be heard. If one suggests that the hours of labour should and can be abridged, we will hear him. If, on the other hand, any one suggests that the workingman is most in need of one thing, that is being left alone, we shall hear him also. If any man thinks that combination amongst small producers will protect them against the growing monopolies of big undertakings, and will show in what wise way it can be accomplished, he will be welcome to us all. There is absolutely no subject that can be brought into anything like direct connection with the social well-being of the community that is excluded. The claims of the Christian Brothers in the matter of education, the establishment of a Catholic University, all pending subjects upon which there are conflicting opinions—are matters for discussion and debate here. Even such a burning topic as the establishment of Local Self-Government in Ireland is not excluded. We do not encourage or invite discussion on matters in an acute stage of political controversy. There is a time in the discussion of such social matters as spring out of politics, when the platform is the more fitting place for promulgating opinions. But there is a time when the discussion of arguments for or against a measure with something of the philosophic calm which we affect in this society may tend to allay asperities. What we mainly desire is facts and arguments.

We invite assistance and co-operation. We invite the workingmen, to send representatives and assist at our debates. We invite the advocates of the policy that seems to be passing away the policy of *laissez-faire*, to come and make a stand for their old friend.

We invite the advocates of the new policy to come and put it on some firm and definite foundation. We desire to enlist the young men of the time in the study of such subjects as are germane to this society. The Barrington Lectures Trust has been of great service in promoting such studies. The trustees have been fortunate in selecting Mr. Oldham as Barrington Lecturer. His lectures have already done much to stimulate intelligent thought on social matters in the places where he lectured. But the number of other gentlemen who competed for the place he holds, about 70 in all, shows that there are many young men who give economic questions a place in their studies, and the papers read by the other competitors were of marked ability. I take the liberty of saying I hope much from the accession of Mr. Oldham, and the other men of a younger generation to this society. It will be for them to widen its doors, to extend its influence, and make this floor an attractive place for the discussion of the topics of the day. If we could succeed in getting representatives from every class interested in the work of this society, there is no reason why we should not make a parliament for ourselves where we might discuss together all social questions in which Irishmen have any interest.

II.—*The Fluctuating Character of Modern Employment.* By
C. H. Oldham, B.L.

[Read Tuesday, 28th January, 1896].

WHEN I was asked to write a paper for this meeting of the Society it happened that I was myself engaged upon the study of the economics of machine production. I could not but feel, while thus occupied, how much Political Economy is unfairly discredited by the fact that the authoritative text-books within the reach of the ordinary reader are quite out-of-date upon many modern problems of great urgency and interest. Rightly viewed, the discovery by later writers that doctrines of older authorities are untenable is encouraging evidence that an advance has been made in the direction of Truth. The refuse-heaps left behind as the work of gold-mining goes forward happen to shut out from the view of the onlooker the true ore at which the gold-diggers are working; but the poor quality of the refuse should not be taken as a measure of the value of the rich ore now in process of extraction.

There is a noticeable change of tone in the modern writers. The optimistic, doctrinaire manner of the superior person who condescended to explain the Laws of Progress to former generations has been superseded by the earnest, student-like, rather pessimistic attitude of the modern inquirer who is conscious of the extreme complexity of his problems, and diffident in giving dogmatic assertions.

The fluctuating character of modern employment is one of the