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I.—*Recent Statistics of French Rural Economy.* By Murrough O'Brien, Esq.

[Read Tuesday, 18th December, 1888.]

It is the practice in France to have, in addition to annual returns, a general agricultural enquiry or census every ten years. The last began in 1882, but its results were only published this year. This delay, due to official economy, detracts from the interest of the figures relating to produce and prices ; but the information relating to the more slowly changing facts of rural economy, the distribution of property, the number, size, and method of occupation of farms, the price of land, wages, etc., is of more enduring interest. The more perfect administrative organisation for collecting information, the now almost completed cadastre, and the experience gained in former enquiries, have made this more complete and exhaustive than any previous one.

The general report issued by M. Tisserand, Director of Agriculture, is clear, methodical, and particularly interesting, inasmuch as it is not merely a dry record of the results of his enquiry, but that it compares the French figures with those of previous enquiries, and with the corresponding figures as to produce, areas under different crops, cattle, numbers of farms, numbers of separate properties, etc. in other countries, both of Europe and America. Members of this society will not be misled by such comparisons, in considering which must always be remembered the errors due to different methods of enumeration and classification, nor will they be misled by the mathematical precisions with which results are stated. Harvests figured to a bushel or a ton are at best but remote approximations to the truth. Statistics enable us to obtain a general comprehension of fields of knowledge too vast, of facts too numerous to be otherwise grasped, but the precision of form in which these statements are necessarily presented is fallacious. Official statistics are apt to be unduly flavoured with optimism, and sometimes are entirely misleading.

France has a permanent agricultural department, spending about a million a year on the encouragement of agriculture, but a great deal of the work of this agricultural census was done by unpaid local commissioners, whose only rewards were honorary distinctions distributed to some of the members. The method of enquiry was this: 2,848 cantonal commissions, each of ten members, were appointed; they analysed and summarised the returns from 36,096 communes on synoptic tables furnished by the agricultural department. The communal returns were prepared by persons nominated by the cantonal commissions, on account of their competence and acquaintance with the subjects of enquiry. The first two parts of the report relate to produce, prices, cultivations. The third part deals with rural economy, the constitution of landed property, the proportion of the population employed in agriculture, and their wages, the division and methods of occupation of land, its selling and letting prices. It is this part of the report alone which is the subject of my paper, except that at the end I have given two tables: 1, showing the areas under different crops, etc.; 2, a general estimate of the value of agricultural land, and of its produce in the year 1882.

The soil of France is divided among different classes of owners, thus:—

	Area Statute Acres.	Percentage of Total Area.
1. The State, woods and forests, ...	2,467,169	} 19.91
sundry, ...	30,383	
2. Departments, ...	16,087	0.01
3. Communes, ...	11,414,981	8.74
4. Institutions, Associations, etc. ...	942,547	0.72
5. Private Owners, ...	111,213,227	85.19
Undefined, ...	4,472,885	3.43
	130,557,279.	100.00

The rural part of this total area extends to 124,884,968 acres, including about 22 million acres of wood and forest. The number of agricultural ratings is 12,115,277, comprising 125,214,671 different parcels. A rating is the area in any commune owned by a single individual; but as one person may own several properties, the number of rural owners is very much less than that of the ratings, and is estimated to be 4,835,246. The total number of owners in France, rural and non-rural, is estimated to be 8,454,218—there being 13.37 rural to 10 non-rural owners. To avoid the common error of counting the same person more than once, where farms were occupied or owned in more than one commune, the enumerators were instructed to record such a person only in the commune where he resided.

Size of Farms.

The following table gives the number of farms or holdings classified according to size, and compared with the percentage of similar holdings in Belgium—a holding (*exploitation*) being the entire extent farmed by one person, whether in one lot or in detached portions.

Class.	Number of Holdings.	Area, Statute Acres.	Average Area of Holding.	Percentage of		Percentage in Belgium of Total No of Holdings
				Total No. of Holdings	Total Agricultural Area of France.	
Very small, not exceeding 2½ acres, ..	2,167,667	2,677,067	Acres. 1¼	38.2	2.2	65.4
Small, 2½ to 25 acres, ...	2,635,030	28,074,696	10¾	46.5	22.9	30.1
Medium, 25 to 100 acres, ..	727,222	26,668,665	51	12.8	29.9	4.0
Large, over 100 acres, ..	142,088	54,997,276	390	2.5	45.0	0.5
	5,672,007	122,417,704	—	100.0	100.0	—

The following table, condensed from the census of 1881, shows the distribution of agricultural occupations in Ireland in classes nearly corresponding with those given for France.

Size of Holdings	No. of Holdings.	Percentage of Total No. of Holdings.
Not exceeding 1 acre, ..	16,879	3.4
1 to 5 acres, ..	61,751	12.4
5 to 30 acres, .	279,349	54.2
30 to 100 acres, ..	117,275	23.5
Over 100 acres, ..	32,864	6.5
	499,109	100.0

Thus it appears that three-fourths of the area of agricultural France is occupied in medium and large farms. Very large farms are rare, there being only 217 holdings in all France exceeding 1,250 acres. The greatest number of small farms occur where population is dense and cultivation intense: the largest holdings where land is poor and mountainous. It appears from these figures, compared with those of 1862, that in the last twenty years, the number of farms exceeding 100 acres has diminished 7.84 per cent. ; those between 25 and 100 acres have increased 14.28 per cent. ; those under 25 acres have increased 8.19 per cent. ; but the number of holdings between 2½ and 12 acres is nearly stationary.

Proportion of Farming Owners to Tenant Farmers.

There are three distinct modes of occupation in France :—

1. By owners cultivating their own land ;
2. By tenants holding at a money rent ;
3. By metayers.

Many cultivating owners are metayers or tenants of other farms.

Of 5,422,334 holdings (a certain extent of land consisting of forest lots, small plots of pasture, uncultivated land, land let temporarily by parole agreement being excluded),

4,324,917, or 79.76 per cent.,	are cultivated by their owners.
749,559, or 13.82	„ „ „ tenants.
347,858, or 6.42	„ „ „ metayers.

Tenant farming is chiefly prevalent in the pasture lands of central France and in the corn-growing lands of the north. The tenanted holdings are classified according to the terms for which they are let, thus:—

	Number.	Proportion.
From 1 to 3 years,	169,272	22.58
„ 3 to 6 „	163,465	21.81
„ 6 to 9 „	347,625	46.38
For more than 9 years, . . .	69,197	9.23
	<hr/>	
	749,559	100.00

Metayage is most common in south-west and central France.

The following figures are given in this report as to the proportions of tenant-farmers to owners farming in other countries:—

	Per cent.
Belgium, 910,396 holdings.	
Occupiers farming their own land,	23.85
„ farming their own and renting other land,	27.22
„ farming at a money rent,	48.93
Holland, 150,225 holdings.	
Occupiers farming their own land,	60.20
Tenant-farmers,	39.80
Germany, 5,276,344 holdings.	
Occupiers farming their own land,	56.00
„ farming their own and renting other land,	28.30
Tenant-farmers,	15.70
United States, 4,008,907 holdings.	
Farming their own land,	74.50
Tenant-farmers,	8.00
Metayers (farming on shares),	17.50

Division of Population—Urban and Rural.

The area and population of France is thus classified for the purpose of this inquiry.

	No. of Communes.	Area, Statute Acres.	Population.	Percentage of Total Population	Corresponding Figures for Ireland, Census of 1881.		
					Area, Statute Acres	Population.	Percentage of Population.
Urban Population, <i>i.e.</i> , Towns and Villages containing more than 2,000 persons, ...	2,695	7,769,745	13,096,542	34.8	119,792	1,245,503	24
Rural Population, ...	33,402	122,785,534	24,575,506	65.2	20,074,810	3,929,333	76
	—	130,555,279	37,672,048	100.	—	5,174,836	100

But domicile is not an indication of occupation, classified according to which we have the following figures in M. Tisserand's report.

	Population of France.	Per-centage of Total Popula-tion.	Corresponding Percentage, as given by Tisserand in		
			Great Britain.	Ireland	Germany
Agricultural,	18,249,209	48.4	5.4	19.4	42.6
Industrial, ...	9,324,107	24.7	24.7	13.3	35.5
Others, ...	10,098,732	26.9	70.1	67.3	21.9
	37,672,048	100.	100.	100.	100.

M. Tisserand appears to have misapprehended the Irish figures. The proportion of 19.4 comprises the agricultural class (*Census of Ireland, General Report*, p. 22), consisting of persons over fifteen actively engaged in agriculture, but exclusive of members of their households not so engaged, or under fifteen. This agricultural class in Ireland corresponds with a division of the agricultural population in France classified as active workers, and numbering 6,913,504; the numbers of whose households, numbering 11,335,705, make up the total agricultural population. The proportion of active agricultural workers in the two countries would thus be almost the same.

An analysis of the class of active workers divides them thus:—

1. Farming their own land,	2,150,696
2. Farming partly their own land, and partly working as tenants, metayers, and labourers,	1,374,646
3. Working wholly on farms as tenants, labourers, servants,	3,388,162
	<u>6,913,504</u>

The labouring class in France is largely composed of the sons of small proprietors, seeking to save money and set up on their own account. The proportion of agriculturists, who are also proprietors, varies from 78 per cent. in Savoie to 11½ per cent. in Mayenne.

The agricultural population of France has diminished 3.31 per cent. since 1862, but this diminution is not general; population tends to be stationary in some backward and unprogressive districts, also in places where cultivation has become more intense, and it tends even to increase where there has been a development of garden and vegetable culture. Since the same date the class of farm servants and labourers has diminished by about 500,000. Tenants and metayers have also diminished in numbers, while owners cultivating their own land have increased by 338,123, although the total number

of rural owners has diminished by 218,269. Numbers of labourers, tenants, and metayers, are continually passing into the class of cultivating owners, either by inheritance or by the purchase of land. The diminution of farm servants does not, according to M. Tisserand, imply less or worse cultivation; the alleged causes are the increased use of machinery, the necessity for economy in hard times, and the attractions of town life. So far as labour is thus more efficient, the wages and keep of the 500,000 farm servants dispensed with is equivalent to a saving of £10,000,000 a year, an amount equal to the whole land tax in France.

Comparing the twenty years 1862-1882 with the ten years before 1862, agriculture is said to have vastly improved; and the amount of produce raised has increased. In departments hitherto looked on as backward and unprogressive, the increase in the number of agricultural machines and implements has been far greater than in more civilized and less remote districts, which were perhaps already supplied with machinery.

Compared with the census of 1852, the selling value of rural France has increased 46·80 per cent.; the letting value 45·02 per cent.

The value of domestic animals has increased 103·34 per cent. Taxation on land has increased 29·69 per cent., and the value of the gross produce in 1882 is 59 per cent. more than in 1852.

Value of Land.

For the purpose of estimating the value of land, it is divided into five different classes; but the land assigned to the same class in different communes may be, and no doubt is, of very different qualities and degrees of fertility.

The average departmental prices from which the general prices in the table below are obtained vary enormously, as do also the communal prices, from which the departmental are derived.

The price of land, which had risen largely since 1862, had begun to decline before this enquiry began, for the agricultural depression was already felt and recognised in 1882.

The following table gives the average prices of different kinds of land for all France.

AVERAGE SELLING AND LETTING VALUE OF LAND PER STATUTE ACRE.

Description.	First Class.		Second Class.		Third Class.		Fourth Class.		Fifth Class.	
	Selling Value.	Letting Value.	Selling Value.	Letting Value.	Selling Value.	Letting Value.	Selling Value.	Letting Value.	Selling Value.	Letting Value.
Arable, ...	£ 54	s. d. 33 4	£ 42	s. 26	£ 30	s. 20	£ 21	s. d. 15 0	£ 13	s. d. 11 0
Meadow and Pasture, ...	71	48 4	54	38	40	30	29	22 6	19	16 6
Vineyard, ...	61	50 0	48	38	36	33	26	24 0	18	18 0
Coppice, ...	25	—	19	—	15	—	12	—	8	—
Forest, ...	36	—	29	—	23	—	18	—	12	—

The lowest departmental price for arable land is £3 4s. per acre for fifth class in Haute Marne, and the highest £100 for first class land in Lot.

For pasture land of the first class, the following are the highest departmental prices :—

£140 per acre in	...	...	Lot.
114	„	.	Alpes Maritimes.
115	„	...	Rhone.
104	„	..	Puy de Dome.
95	„	...	Nièvre and Loire.
84	„	...	Seine.

The lowest departmental prices for fifth-class pasture are :—

£ 3 5s. per acre in	...	...	Corsica.
8	„	...	Doubs.
10	„	...	Hautes Alpes.
12	„	...	Basses Pyrenées.

The highest prices for arable lands are found where population is dense and cultivation intense, and in mountainous districts where such land is scarce.*

The highest rent for pasture is £5 10s. in Lot; in eight departments the letting value of first-class pasture exceeds £3 6s. per acre. H. Baudrillart gives instances of farming land selling at £240 per acre at Douarnez, in Brittany, and of prime pasture land at Auge, in Normandy, selling for £192 per acre.†

According to an estimate made in 1881 by the Finance Department the net annual value of farming land in France was equivalent to 2.89 per cent. on its selling value.

Wages.

The average rates of farm wages for all France are of course derived from amounts varying according to the district, and according to the ages of the employed. The following table gives the average daily wages ascertained for all France.

	Summer		Winter.	
	With Food.	Without Food.	With Food.	Without Food.
Men,	s. d. 1 7	s. d. 2 6	s. d. 1 1	s. d. 1 9½
Women,	0 11	1 6	0 8	1 1
Children,	0 7	1 0½	0 5	0 8

*This case is observable in mountainous districts in Ireland, and is one of the many instances showing that the *real* value of land is not dependent on fertility, but on demand.

† *Populations Agricoles de la France.*

The average yearly wages of farm servants lodged and fed by their employers are given thus :—

For foremen,	£18	10	0
„ labourers and carters,	13	0	0
„ herds, over 16 years,	11	12	0
„ female servants,	9	8	0

The wages of foremen vary from £8 8s. in Cotes de Nord, to £33 in Seine and Marne, and of labourers from £6 in Finisterre to £35 in Seine. The classification appears to have been irregular—a single labourer on a farm having been in some places returned as a foreman, and young persons not having as yet attained man's age or wages being included in the return.*

Ireland and France compared.

There are not, I believe, any trustworthy statistics as to the number of landowners in the United Kingdom. The *Domesday Book* of 1872 is well known to be most misleading. It gives the total number of landowners in the United Kingdom as 1,153,816 ; but unofficial examinations of this return have shown that the real number is probably less than 200,000. A vast number of leaseholders had been reckoned as owners, and in numbers of cases the same individual had been counted as a different owner for every separate property he owned. With this as the only official return it is impossible to institute any close comparison between the distribution of property in France and in the United Kingdom ; but some general idea may be gained of the difference between the two countries in this respect. In Ireland, with a population of nearly 5 million persons, it appears probable that there are less than 20,000 owners of land ; half the entire area of the country belonging to 900 or 1,000 persons. This practical exclusion of the people from the ownership

*The value of these average prices should not be misunderstood. The following extract from an American paper bears upon the subject :—“ In order to give any satisfactory answer to any question, we must first know what is the basis of the inquiry, and what the answer signifies. ‘The rate of wages.’ What wages? Wages are of every kind and degree, from those of the street scavenger to those of the skilled weaver who can produce the Lord's Prayer on a silk handkerchief ; from the stone-breaker on the public highway to the electrical engineer ; from the boy who carries sheaves in the wheat field to the gold-beater who produces leaves of metal the 367,000th of an inch in thickness. . . . There is no average rate of wages. Professor Richmond Smith, without any party bias, and with only a scientific intent, has proved, in a series of articles in the *Political Science Quarterly*, that the current tables, compiled and published by the grandmothers of statistics in this country as average rates of wages, are quite delusive. What is the average rate of wages of three boys, four girls, twenty-five women, and seventy-five men, one foreman, and two assistant foremen, all working at different trades? The usual way to determine the average rate is to add up the total weekly wages of all and divide the sum by the number of persons. But what does this tell us? Merely that if the whole sum were thus divided, each person would get a wage quite different from what he does get. But when we have reached this useless result, we need to know how many hours the wage-earners work, and how steady their employment is, and whether the unsteadiness of employment is due to their own choice or to the slackness of trade.”—*New York Nation*, 4th October, 1888.

of the soil of their country has led to the cry of "the land for the people," a principle which is embodied in the French Constitution, and maintained by their system of law. In France one person in $4\frac{1}{2}$ is a landowner; in Ireland the probable proportion seems to be about 1 in 250.

The wide diffusion of landownership in France is partly a survival from the middle ages, partly a result of the Revolution, and partly the result of the law of inheritance, which prevails also in Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, and part of Germany.

Before the Revolution, when the population of France was about 27 millions, there are said to have been over 4 million proprietors in France; the sale of the Church lands and forfeited estates added about half a million to this number. Arthur Young, imbued with English prejudices, and generalising from observation of a few districts, thought the division of property in France was excessive in 1789, and thirty years later McCulloch said:—

"In half a century France will have become the greatest nest of paupers in Europe, and will share with Ireland the honour of furnishing every country in the world with servants and hand-to-mouth labourers."*

At present, however, not only is the general well-being of the French immeasurably greater than that of the Irish peasant, but the annual emigration from the Irish population of 5 million is about 80,000 while from France, with its 37 millions, it seldom exceeds 5,000 in a year.

The law of compulsory division on death has not led to any such excessive division of land as to make cultivation unprofitable. Division ceases, as Benjamin Constant predicted in 1824, at that point where it ceases to be profitable.

The increase during the last fifty years of landowners in France is conclusively shown to be due, not to the pulverisation of small holdings, but to the breaking up of large estates and farms, which the owners find more profitable to sell in small lots than to cultivate or let to tenants.

The result of "the land for the people," as it exists in France, may be summed up in the words of H. Baudrillart, the most recent unofficial investigator of the condition of the French farmer:—

"A grave social question exists in the towns, but, thank Heaven, there is no land question in France."†

Agriculture in France has suffered even more than in the United Kingdom since 1880; for besides the depression in prices, disease has ravaged and destroyed vast tracts of valuable vineyard land. But the small French peasant proprietor working for himself by increased exertion and economy, both lives and thrives. Speaking of Touraine, in his second volume, published this year, Baudrillart says:—

"Everywhere you may assure yourself of the truth of this formula. The large proprietor gets little from his property; the medium proprietor manages to live; the small proprietor lives and saves."‡

* As quoted by Tisserand.

† H. Baudrillart, *Populations Agricoles de la France.*

‡ *Ib.* vii. p. 137.

Tisserand, in his official report, says :—

“The prevalence of cultivating owners explains the resistance and endurance of French agriculture in the face of the present crisis.”*

Where no land question exists, where an intelligent, educated, and civilized nation are content with their system of land tenure on the whole, it may be presumed to be a good system, and if not exactly applicable to Ireland, useful hints for reconstruction may be obtained from it.

Peasant Tenures in France and Ireland.

There is a great resemblance between France and Ireland in the distribution of the use of land, and in the proportions of the population engaged in agriculture ; but an enormous difference in respect of the distribution of ownership. This difference has been insisted on for a century by persons who wished to lay the foundations of social happiness and civil order in Ireland. I don't want, however, to labour that well-worn aspect of the question ; but to remark that these statistics of French economy supply an answer to the statement so often made nowadays, that the Irish land-laws are more favourable to the tenant than those of any other country. The statement is true ; but a false inference is suggested. The answer to which is, that there is not another civilized country in the world where agriculture is the chief industry, in which so small a proportion of the peasantry are owners of their farms ; that the Irish peasantry have occupied, cultivated, improved, built and reclaimed, on a tenure more hazardous and uncertain, under conditions more paralysing and deterring to improvement than those in which any other peasantry in the world have lived and thriven ; and that even the tenure created by the Act of 1881 is surrounded with so much uncertainty, with so many legal perplexities, and with such liability to law-suits, and invested with such elements of insecurity, that no rational being could be expected, relying on the tenure alone, to embark capital in permanent improvement of a farm held under it.

Nationalisation v. Small Properties.

For this reason one of the most urgent political questions in Ireland at present is, What system of tenure is to replace the old one now in process of dissolution ? Legislation tending to establish widely-distributed individual ownership is objected to by a school of reformers represented by Henry George and A. R. Wallace, who wish to put an end, in name at least, to all private ownership of land. Their theories have lately been put forward again as arguments against a further grant under the Purchase Acts. These nationalisers of land are as much opposed to the old regime of “landlordism” as other reformers, and yet such a division of forces in face of the common enemy, now on the point of surrendering, may lead to the postponement of any radical reform.

Cobden said that the landlord spirit dominant in political and social life was the great obstacle to all progress. It is this spirit

* *Report*, p. 332.

I refer to as the common enemy of both schools of reformers. The question between the advocates of individual ownership and nationalisers is, Where, in what features of our land system, does this spirit reside? Is it in individual ownership, or in the existence of large estates? Both schools of reformers seek to realise the formula of "the land for the people," but they differ as to the means by which this is to be done. The example of France and other European countries is continually referred to by both schools of reformers in their arguments.

It is alleged by the nationalisers that the establishment of a peasant proprietary in Ireland would be the substitution of a number of petty landlords for a few large ones; that there should be no legislation which does not give every citizen equal rights to the use of a portion of his native land; that it is unjust to give the future unearned increment of land to a class; that there is no permanence in peasant proprietary schemes, for land accumulation will take place again, *as in France*.*

The statistics I have referred to in my paper answer the last objection. Mr. Wallace is mistaken: the very reverse of accumulation is going on in France, and land tends more and more to be bought for use and occupation, not for investment or letting. The number of persons owning and occupying land has steadily increased since the Revolution of 1789, when such landlordism as existed in France, consisting largely of oppressive manorial rights and class privileges, was abolished, with the best possible results for the peasantry and for all other classes.

As to conferring the use of land on every citizen: many persons don't want land. In France, numbers of owners sell their land and migrate to cities to escape from the monotony of country life, or to seek prizes in the lotteries of commerce and professional life. This is the chief cause of the diminution in the agricultural population that appears to have taken place since 1862.

The "unearned increment" objection loses most of its weight in a country where land is so distributed that one person in every five is an owner. An equitable system of taxation would give the community as much of this increment as it would be beneficial for it to have, and, perhaps, more than it would be just to take from individuals if taxed at once on their improvements. Unearned increment is a quantity as difficult to ascertain as the value of the "original and inherent qualities of the soil" which it has been proposed to give Irish landlords as their share of the land. The man who embarks his capital and skill in industrial enterprise, or intensive cultivation, is the cause of increase in the value of land around the seat of that industry. How is the increase due to his enterprise to be discerned from that due to the population attracted by his enterprise? The proper mode of asserting national property in land is by taxation.

The objection to the creation of a multitude of petty landlords is fallacious. An owner of land is not necessarily a landlord. A landlord is a person who by his ownership of a vast extent of the earth's

* A. R. Wallace, in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19th October, 1888.

surface, by his monopoly of land in any district, has dominion over all who live on his estate. He can dictate the terms of existence to those who live "under him;" can appropriate the value of their expenditure embodied in improvement of or in buildings on the land; can confiscate their earnings and savings invested in business or industries. The conditions of life under such a tenure are detrimental to independence of character, to the development of thrift, prohibitive, to a great extent, of the outlay of capital on the land, and of the accumulation in permanent homes of those material objects of luxury and comfort which are the accompaniment of civilized life. The peasant proprietor—the man who lives under his own roof-tree, on his own rood of land—is in no sense a landlord, nor is he dependent on another for leave to live and thrive. The objection of nationalisers to the creation of a number of petty landlords seems to me to be based on an equivocal and incorrect use of the term landlord.

One object in the abolition of the old landlordism is to permit the growth of independence, foresight, thrift—universal characteristics of a freeholding peasantry, but which can scarcely exist amongst tenantry managed and interfered with by landlords, agents, solicitors, and bailiffs; but the retention of control over the land, and of its management, as desired by nationalisers, would be adverse to this independence. The ownership and management to be vested in the state by nationalizers is to be such as to "secure the proper use of land, to decide on all applications for sub-division, sub-letting, amalgamation of holdings, new tenancies, etc.,"* Clothed with such duties, the little finger of the state, which could only act through agents, surveyors, and bailiffs, would be thicker than the loins of the old landlordism.

A great deal of the difference between the two schools of land reformers appear to arise from the use of the same word in different senses. Nationalisers say they seek to abolish individual ownership; but wherever there is exclusive occupation of land, the occupier enjoying the highest estate permitted by the law, *i.e.*, the occupier under Wallace's and George's schemes, whether he pays a rent or a tax to the state, is in common parlance an owner. A tenant who has the security nationalisers propose to give him is in fact an owner. Municipal management is beneficially exercised over lands which cannot be divided or are most profitably used in common, as the communal woods and forests in Switzerland. But even here individual ownership exists; the owners are a group of citizens, who commit the management of land which it is inconvenient to divide to a council, which must conform to general laws enacted by the Canton. What we call the legal estate, an idea that has no existence in Swiss law, may be in the commune; but the beneficial estate is in the individual citizens. Land is not in any sense "nationalised" in Switzerland, although there is a large extent of common-land.

The state must always be the supreme owner of land, in the sense of having full power to make general laws as to its inheritance, trans-

* *Unionist Policy for Ireland.*

fer, taxation, methods of occupation, and to resume possession for public purposes; but it would, I believe, be impossible for it to retain the ownership and power of control contemplated by nationalisers, except by reserving to itself the full rack-rent value. For, where land has been improved, developed, built upon, the addition to its value from these works is inextricably mixed up with the original material, and the state's control over this could not be exercised without extending also to the tenants' property in the improvements. The dilemma is this—if the state does not reserve the rack-rent it is not owner with full power of control; if it does reserve a rack-rent, its yoke would be intolerable, paralysing to enterprise, destructive of independence. Such an arrangement would have no permanency, for the owners of land would not submit to provide the greater part of the revenue of the country, and would require other property to be equally taxed. That would involve the abolition of the nationalized-land rent, and the substitution of a small land tax, unless the constituencies chose to give their government a revenue in excess of its requirements for the ordinary purposes of administration.

The idea of nationalisation is wholly unfamiliar to farmers in this country, and so far as legislation is to depend on the will of Irish constituencies such a tenure is out of the question, unless insidiously introduced in the form proposed in Unionist policy for Ireland, by the reservation of a rent, and power of management to the state.

Other objections made by nationalisers to a system of occupying ownership are that small landowners are likely to sublet their land at rackrents, or to load their properties with debt. These evils are very commonly, though erroneously, supposed to be peculiar to small landowners; and many persons who favour the conversion of Irish tenants into owners think it will be necessary to provide elaborate safeguards against these possible dangers. The French figures show that under a system of perfect freedom and of absolute ownership, which cannot be carved into a number of lesser estates, the tendency is for tenancy tenures to diminish. Where properties are small, it is more convenient for those who do not need land for use to sell it than to keep it as an investment, and economic causes induce owners of large estates to break them up and sell them. The evil absenteeism of old days was a characteristic of large properties; the small owner cannot afford to let any of the profits from land go to another, so he cultivates himself, or sells.*

The Mortgage Debt in France.

M. Tisserand's report does not refer to the amount of mortgages on land, but the opinions of others on this subject may be referred to. A paragraph appeared in many English papers not long ago, saying that the mortgage debt of the French peasantry amounted to 360 million pounds, and that this crushing debt was an illustration of the evils of French peasant proprietorship. The sum named is possibly less than the real amount, which cannot be precisely ascer-

* *Les Populations Agricoles*, vol. i. p. 291.

tained ; but if correct, it would only be ten per cent. on the value of the agricultural area of France, which is estimated at 3,660 millions.

De Foville, in *La France Economique*, says the mortgage debt on French real estate is 13 per cent. of its capital value ; and he gives on the authority of the statistician, Sbrojavacca, the following estimate of the proportion of the mortgage debts in other countries :—

Italy,	...	...	14 per cent.
Holland,	...	...	20 „
Austria,	...	...	25 „
Germany,	...	...	30 „
Ireland,	...	...	40 „

Arthur Arnold, in *The Times*, estimated the mortgage debt on agricultural land in the United Kingdom at 400 millions, of which 80 millions were on Irish land ; but it is less easy to obtain a good estimate on this matter in the United Kingdom than in other countries, where the simple tenure of absolute ownership is the rule, and where a special register of mortgages is kept indexed against the land.

Imaginary Dangers.

The idea that an elaborate system of safeguards should be provided against dangers which peasant owners are less prone than large owners to fall into, seems born of that idea innate in landlordism and officialism, that unless the masses are managed by the classes they will go to the bad. These apprehended dangers are, I believe, illusory. Under a system of large estates in Ireland we have had to the fullest extent the evils of absenteeism, letting at rack-rents, extravagance, and mortgaging, practised by the owners. Land is now passing into the ownership of a class which in other countries has not shown the same tendencies to misuse the privileges of ownership. Peasants have not the same inducements to part with the use while they retain the ownership of their land ; they have not the same facilities for borrowing money as large owners ; thrift is a characteristic of the peasant owner in every country. To legislate beforehand for apprehended and imaginary dangers is to go half way to meet the devil.—

“Striving to better, oft' we mar what's well.”

Decrease of Population in France and Ireland.

The enormous, continuous, and continuing decrease in the agricultural population of Ireland, to which the President drew our attention in his interesting address,* is of a very different character and degree from that observed in the agricultural population of France during the same period. In the latter country the facts are evident ; cause and effect are clear—diminished profits from agriculture during the latter years of the period ; wholesale destruction of vineyards ; increased cost of labour in rural districts ; concurrently a still greater increase in urban and industrial wages ; a vast extension of industry ; a great increase in the attractions of city life.

* *Statistical Survey of Ireland from 1840 to 1888*, by Dr. Grimshaw, Registrar-General for Ireland.

In Ireland the facts are not so easy of interpretation, and I find it difficult to assimilate that given by the President, or to accept his conclusion as to our rapid return to prosperity. The causes of Ireland's depopulation cannot properly be called economic or natural, but are distinctly due to that system of large estates and tenancy tenures in which Ireland so strikingly contrasts with France.

There is no reason why potatoes should be the chief article of subsistence except that the burden of keeping up the large estate system absorbs the better class of products. Ireland is not as well suited to potato growing as France, and at the time of the famine it is well known corn and cattle were exported in quantities which would have been far more than sufficient to feed the population.

In 1844, Mr. Senior, a most competent authority, and corroborated by many others, said :—"I take it that a smaller portion of the produce remains with the tenant in Ireland than in Scotland or England."*

The failure of a single crop could not desolate, as in 1847, any country, except one where the people lived from hand to mouth, cultivating on the frailest tenure, and consequently devoid of any accumulated savings and capital. Other European peasantry suffered from the potato failure, but were not swept away wholesale as in Ireland. In 1848, and before it, many Irish owners had spent the estates of which they were the nominal owners, and the seizure of the occupation interests of the peasantry was an incident in the struggle for existence.

The payment of an absentee rental, which with interest on charges raised in England, but not spent in increasing the productiveness of Irish soil, amounted to seven or eight millions a year, continued with but little interruption. There never has been a time when the population of Ireland was not considered excessive by some persons; and never a time when it has not been confidently and truly asserted that more labour and capital, wisely applied to the soil, would double and treble the produce. Population diminishes in Ireland in periods of agricultural prosperity as well as of adversity; and prosperity, increased profits from the use of land, have often led to the depopulation of whole districts.

Let me illustrate by some examples. In 1802 the Secretary of the Irish Society remarked that an increase of rent on one of the London Companies' estates "had led to an almost total emigration to America."† Land had become more valuable; but it does not follow from economic laws, nor does it occur elsewhere, that the population therefore diminishes. When forty-six families were removed from Glenveagh in 1867, no economic cause operated. It was the caprice of one individual exercising the power of a landlord. When in 1880 one owner cleared fifty families off 2,000 acres of fertile land in Meath, no economic law operated. The rapidly increasing value of land would more naturally have led to an increase of the population, or to increased comfort, or to both. After the famine an

* Committee on Valuation, Q. 982.

† Slade's *Narrative of a Journey in the North of Ireland.*

lishman bought estates in Connaught for nearly half a million pounds. *The Times* correspondent* says they were occupied by "a peasantry of small farmers," and that the purchaser made forthwith a *tabula rasa* of the land "by a process not ungentle, indeed, but rather painful." The statistics of this *tabula rasa* may be interpreted to mean progress; and are one of the factors of the supposed prosperity of Ireland.

An owner and "meat manufacturer" adopts for years the policy of extruding every small occupier near him, and becomes at last the occupier of 3,000 acres. He conscientiously thinks the way to improve the country is to get rid of all the small farmers, many of whom appear to him "hopeless paupers, living on potatoes, poteen, and idleness." † He is a terror to every small holder near him.

What is the result in such districts? There are more acres and more £ s. d. valuation per head of the population, more miles of railway, more cattle, more capital per head. But towns and villages decay; mills fall into ruin; there are schools without scholars, roads without traffic, posts without letters, tradesmen and shopkeepers without customers, for "bullocks wear no breeches."

This is not progress, but it is a true description of fertile districts where population has most diminished. I cannot see how the less remunerativeness of agriculture and potato culture can be the *causa causans* of the population of Meath having diminished 57 per cent. since 1841, while that of the parish of Achill, with a population more dependent on the potato, has increased 36 per cent. since 1851, and is still increasing, as is the whole population of Co. Mayo. I attribute it to the existence of great estates, the owners of which had power to remove as many of the population as they pleased, or to make the conditions of existence such that the people fled. The more fertile the land, the more capital sunk in it by the occupiers, the greater was the inducement to exercise the full powers of the owner.

Economic laws have no operation under our land system; if they had, such monopolisers of land as I have referred to would have to compete for every acre with a class content with the very lowest returns for an investment in land, often content with no money return where possession gave them daily pleasure and occupation.

A stationary or diminishing population is quite consistent with prosperity; but I cannot see that examination of the districts in which population is least and most dense, or that historical enquiry into the causes of the decrease lead to the conclusions suggested by Irish official statistics. A tract of country containing 30,000 acres, in the occupation of one person, but all through which there are extensive traces of a former population and of evictions, ‡ may be statistically prosperous but is not really so.

The external appearance of some parts of Ireland as compared with those of other agricultural countries in Europe recalls a letter written

* W. O'C. Morris.

† Letter to *The Times* of an Irish landlord, September, 1880.

‡ *Bessborough Commission* Evidence of S. J. Allen, Q. 1861.

in 1843 by an Irish member, a landlord, and till then a conservative.

“After visiting Belgium and all the principal capitals in Germany, I return impressed with the sad conviction, that there is more human misery in one county in Ireland than in all the populous cities and districts which I had visited.”

The student of rural economy is under greater difficulties than the observer of industrial and city life. His field of observation is more extensive, the habits and conditions of agricultural life are more varied; it is more difficult to generalise. The extent of any one man's observations are necessarily limited; but he may extend his experience by conversation with others, by study of laws, institutions, statistics, official reports, and other works relating to the field of his observation. I have never returned from visiting agricultural districts in France, Switzerland, or Belgium, without the same conviction as that expressed in the above letter. I can see in a day's drive through the most fertile parts of Ireland a sparser population, infinitely worse houses, more ruined cottages, more ill-dressed and underfed men, women, and children; more decay, discomfort, and squalor; more signs of confirmed pauperism, and in towns and villages more idleness—labourers willing to work, but not finding the opportunity, than I ever saw in the districts I have visited abroad. It is the natural result of the burden of the large estate system, which imposes on the Irish agricultural population a direct tax in rent of about ten millions a year, for which they get a very small return in services rendered. The indirect charges cannot be estimated; they consist of a large part of the civil and military expenditure incurred in maintaining and administering this system, a large part of the taxes for the relief of the poor, and an incalculable amount of law costs paid for the adjustment of differences between the rent-paying and rent-receiving classes. No other Western European peasantry cultivates under such a burden, or lives under conditions so adverse to thrift and the accumulation of capital. The supposed progress of this class, as exhibited by the general results of Irish statistics, is not confirmed by examination of the statistically prosperous districts, where these results mean simply its partial, and in some cases, complete extermination.

NOTE.

The marriage and birth rates in Ireland are remarkably lower than those of any European country of which we have trustworthy statistics. The Census commissioners of 1881 say in their report (p. 19)—“Early marriages are excessively rare in Ireland. The relative number of married persons of reproductive age is under the low proportion for 1871.” Again (p. 76)—“The average annual marriage rate for the decade was only 4·7 per 1,000, which is much under the corresponding rates for other parts of the United Kingdom.” (P. 17.)—“The figures prove the infrequency of early marriages in Ireland.”

The following table for the year 1882, taken from Bodio, a well-known Italian statistician, shows the position Ireland occupies among other European countries as to its vital statistics.

MARRIAGE, BIRTH, AND DEATH RATE PER THOUSAND IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR BODIO.

Country.	Birth Rate, 1882.	Marriage Rate, 1882.	Death Rate, 1882.
Hungary,	43.9	10.2	36.6
Austria,	38.2	7.8	30.1
Italy,	36.9	7.5	27.4
Prussia,	36.3	7.9	25.1
Bavaria,	36.2	6.6	28.5
Netherlands,	35.1	7.5	20.6
England,	33.7	7.7	19.6
Switzerland,	32.5	6.8	20.3
Norway,	30.8	6.6	17.0
Belgium,	30.5	6.7	20.8
Sweden,	29.3	6.3	17.3
Scotland,	24.9	7.0	20.1
France,	24.7	7.5	22.2
Ireland,	23.6	4.3	19.2

II.—*A Suggestion on Coinage.* By Joseph John Murphy, Esq.

[Read 18th December, 1888.]

THE work of the British Mint is done gratuitously; the expense of coining gold into sovereigns is borne, not by the merchant or banker, or other person who sends the gold to the mint, but by the payers of taxes. It is difficult to see the justice of this. No doubt it is a matter of national concern that sovereigns should have a national stamp which guarantees their purity and their weight. But it is no part of the functions of a government to supply the country with its currency; trade must supply the currency by means of which it is to be carried on; the legitimate function of government in the matter is limited to authenticating the coinage. Another closely kindred function of government consists in enforcing the accuracy of weights and measures. This ought to be done, so far as possible, at the expense of those who use the weights and measures; and it would be equally reasonable to require that those who take gold to the mint for coinage should be charged with the expense of its coinage.

But besides the expense of coinage, it would be legitimate and reasonable to make a further charge for coining, in order to form a fund out of which to provide against the wear and tear of the gold coinage. Were such a fund provided, the way of using it would probably be this: all gold coins not depreciated by wear to a greater extent than a certain proportion of their full weight should be received by government, and consequently would be received by the