

THE NEW IRELAND.—VII.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

THE forces that I have so far touched upon—the new forces that are gradually shaping what is nothing less than the regeneration of Ireland—have been mainly political, like the Sinn Féin movement, or ethical and linguistic, like the Gaelic League. In this article I propose to deal with an older and in some ways a more fundamental movement, the movement towards agricultural co-operation; and in doing so I shall hope to throw a certain light upon the realities of Irish politics and of Irish economic character.

The chief, almost the sole, credit for introducing agricultural co-operation into Ireland belongs to one man, Sir Horace Plunkett. In the whole area of Irish public life there is no more attractive figure than his. The younger son of Lord Dunsany, with an ancestry that stretches back in an unbroken line for seven centuries to the early days of Anglo-Irish relations, educated at Eton and Oxford, a Protestant and a Unionist, Sir Horace has broken completely loose from the normal prejudices of his class and creed, and has initiated a revolution which, in my judgment, will have a permanent influence on the economic thought and action, and indeed on the whole character, of the Irish farmer. Too big a man to be squeezed within the narrow ferocities of the ordinary Unionist, too practical and clear-sighted to be satisfied with the froth of Nationalism, he has been abused with equal animosity by both parties. But Sir Horace is triply armed in the qualities of mind and temperament without which even the smallest fraction of the Irish question were best left alone. He has an unconquerable faith, and the sanguine perseverance that goes with it; he is compact of tolerance and practicality; almost alone among Irish public men he mixes his

politics with humor; a singular sweetness of disposition, a reflective, philosophical mind, and an utter incapacity and contempt for the dissimulations of the average politician have combined to make his position, his influence and his labors altogether unique. The great trouble with Ireland is that no Irishman will say what he thinks. In all politics one has to allow for a certain difference between private and public utterances, but in no politics is the difference so profound as in Irish. For bodies to pass resolutions to which all present are secretly opposed; for Irish politicians to deride in conversation and in letters pretty nearly everything that they are engaged in upholding in Parliament and on the platform—these are the every-day phenomena of Irish affairs. Make-believe, a conscious insincerity and the miasma of moral cowardice permeate the entire country. A great deal of Sir Horace Plunkett's influence is due to his habit of candor and truthfulness. He is never bitter or personal, but he is always honest. At times, indeed, his honesty seems almost to have the courage of recklessness. But I am not at present concerned with him as a moral force. He has achieved in himself that synthesis of the practical and the ideal towards which all Ireland is slowly moving. There is, of course, no such thing either as the "Celt" or the "Saxon"; but I shall not, I think, be misunderstood if I say that Sir Horace Plunkett has the sensitiveness, the quick-moving mind and the charm of the one, as well as the directness, the courage of word and deed and the invigorating driving-power of the other. Equally strong and sympathetic, a Wyoming ranchman and an Irish aristocrat, he sees Ireland steadily and whole, and has served her with a loyalty and a fruitfulness that will ultimately rank him among the greatest of her sons.

All he has striven for, all he has accomplished, and the reasons why he chose the precise course he did, are to be found set forth in his memorable book, "Ireland in the New Century." Sir Horace was the first to see and to proclaim that the Irish problem at bottom was not a racial, political, economic or religious problem, but a human problem—a problem of the Irish mind and character. He admits altogether—no Nationalist could do so more completely—the results of history, of long centuries of English persecution and misgovernment and of the failure of either people to understand the other. But he holds that "great

as is the responsibility of England for the state of Ireland, still greater is the responsibility of Irishmen"; that the Irish through their absorption in a peculiarly rhetorical form of politics, their habit of living in the past, their overconfidence in legislation as a cure for economic ills and the defects of their character and temperament—their "lack of moral courage, initiative, independence and self-reliance"—have aggravated the results of English misrule; and that their duty now is to overcome these defects, to cultivate a salutary individualism and to turn their thoughts to the ways and means of immediate and practical improvement. To do this what was needed was a positive Irish policy, springing from the people, and dependent for its success upon their own powers of application and energy. The form such a policy should take was prescribed by that characteristic of the Irish people which Sir Horace was the first both to appreciate and to utilize—their clannishness. It is a trait which shows itself not alone in their politics, but in their conception of home—witness the Irish colonies in the American cities—and in their instinctive organization of society. They have pre-eminently the associative qualities; then let them associate. The Irish problem on its economic side is predominantly agricultural; then let them associate in agricultural work. Such was the central idea, simple as all great ideas are, of the Plunkett policy. It suited the national genius; it established a connection between economic fact and inherited instincts; it filled a great material need.

For consider what was the position of the Irish farmer twenty years ago. Alone, or all but alone, among European producers, he had made no effort to adjust himself to the changes that had transformed agricultural economics. Within the last half century the whole business of farming has been revolutionized. Competition is no longer local, but world-wide—I am writing, of course, from the European standpoint. Vast tracts of virgin soil have been opened up in the uttermost parts of the earth. Methods of production, of preservation and of carriage have been so marvellously improved that to eat in one hemisphere what has been grown in another is an occurrence too familiar to be even realized as a constant fact. Huge and hungry towns have sprung up, insistently demanding produce in bulk, at regular intervals, in fresh condition and of uniform quality. On the Continent, these new conditions have been met by a free and intelligent use

of co-operation. The farmers—of Denmark, particularly, but to some extent of all European countries—have banded themselves together for the purchase of all the raw materials and mechanical requirements of their industry at the lowest cost and of the best quality. They are thus enabled to produce more abundantly and more cheaply. They have combined for the improvement of all classes of live-stock, for the manufacture of butter, bacon and many other products. They have organized themselves for the purposes of insurance at the lowest rates and for the yet more vital purpose of creating, by mutual support, the credit required to bring in a large and constant flow of capital. Above all, co-operation, besides increasing the volume and lowering the cost of production, has made it possible for them to control the whole process of modern marketing, to collect in bulk, to regularize and standardize their consignments, and to forward them at a minimum expense for transit and distribution. State aid, too, has assisted them, but less by direct subsidies than by providing them with opportunities for scientific and technical instruction. Now, of this great movement, which, as I have said, has literally transformed the practice and possibilities of agriculture in all the chief European countries, there was hardly, twenty years ago, a single trace in Ireland. The Irish farmer remained an isolated unit. While his rivals on the Continent were forming organized, pliant and cohesive trusts, he stuck stolidly to the ancient ways. Paying as an individual the highest price for his seeds, manures and machinery; without capital or credit or any chance of getting any; at the mercy of the railways and the middlemen; unable to profit by improved appliances; wasteful, unscientific and unsystematic—he lost one by one all the advantages that his nearness to the English market should have brought him. There could be but one end to so unequal a struggle. He was fast drifting into a position as helpless as that of a small American refiner in the grip of the Standard Oil Company. The ruin which in the dark days of restrictive legislation England had deliberately wrought for Irish manufactures was now being invoked upon Irish agriculture by the Irish farmers themselves.

It was in 1889 that Sir Horace Plunkett launched his co-operative movement. The press jeered, the politicians swore, the priesthood sat on the fence and the people presented a solid mass

of sceptical, suspicious and hidebound apathy. There were years of thankless and heart-breaking work. Sir Horace addressed fifty meetings before a single society was formed. Gradually, however, economic truth filtered through, a creamery sprang up here, a poultry society there, an agricultural bank somewhere else. By 1894, the movement had got beyond the control of a few individuals, and the Irish Agricultural Organization Society was formed for its further direction and expansion. This society owed nothing to Government support. All the cost of its offices, organizers and lecturers was borne at first by private individuals and by subscriptions from the societies it formed. These societies have multiplied till they now cover Ireland with a network of co-operation. Their number to-day is 953; their turn-over exceeds \$11,500,000; their membership totals 96,500 — representing, I suppose, over 400,000 persons. Their organization is simple and uniform. The basis of membership is the possession of one or more shares; the liability of members is limited to the number of their shares; all members, whatever their holdings, have an equal voting power; an elected committee is responsible for the management of each society; interest is limited to five per cent.; and the remaining profit is distributed among the members in proportion to their trade with the society. Of the 953 societies, 356 are co-operative creameries, the members of which receive the full market price for their milk all the year round, have all the advantages of modern science in dealing with their dairy produce, and themselves pocket all the profits from the output of butter. There are, besides, 172 Agricultural Societies which purchase artificial manures, seeds, feeding stuffs and machinery at wholesale prices and of approved quality. Some of them have bought expensive machinery for joint use; others have rented grass farms which are grazed co-operatively; several have purchased premium sires for the improvement of their live-stock; all are now turning their thoughts to the co-operative sale of produce. There are 270 Credit Societies, whose value to the small farmer may fairly be called incalculable. By joining one he is able to raise money at five per cent. on the joint and several unlimited liability of all the members, so long as he can show to the satisfaction of the managing committee that the money is to be spent on productive purposes. In addition, there are Poultry Societies for

the disposal of eggs and chickens; Bee-keepers' Societies; Flax Societies for the cultivation of the raw material of the great Belfast factories; and a crowd of miscellaneous societies for the promotion of home and cottage industries. Indeed, the co-operative movement has found in Ireland a soil so congenial that it has already begun to pass into the second—the federating—stage of its growth. In this stage the societies themselves, to prevent them from cutting one another's throats, and to promote their economic efficiency, are banded together into Federations. Three such Federations already exist, one for the combined sale of the butter produced by the co-operative creameries, the second for the joint purchase of seeds, manures, machinery, etc., on behalf of the Agricultural Societies and for the sale of their products, and the third for the disposal of the eggs and chickens of all the co-operative Poultry Societies. But the field is not yet by any means filled up. A splendid and inspiring beginning, but still a beginning only, has been made; and it may need another twenty years of unremitting effort before Ireland becomes, like Denmark, a vast national trust for the production and sale of all agricultural produce.

But the beneficence of Sir Horace Plunkett's work is not to be estimated in numbers and money alone. The increase in the farmers' revenue, and especially the increase in its stability, have, of course, been very great; and it is an immense achievement that the aggregate turn-over of the movement from its beginning should have amounted to well over \$60,000,000. But, in the peculiar circumstances of Ireland, the merely material benefits conferred by co-operation are far from being the most important. It is a great thing that co-operation should now be accepted as a fixed part of Ireland's rural economy. But it is a greater thing that it should have been the means of bringing together men who had either never been united before or were united only for purposes of political agitation. It has given the Irish peasant almost the only business training he has ever received. It has taught him responsibility and self-confidence; it has conquered his distrust of himself and his neighbors; it has both brightened and enlarged his horizon. To a very real extent it may be said to have filled the gap so scandalously neglected by a system of education that is still far from acknowledging Ireland to be, above all things, an agricultural country. Moreover,

the thousands of meetings that have been held in connection with it, meetings attended by men of all classes, creeds and parties, have mitigated the asperity of social, political and sectarian strife, have made for comradeship, mutual understanding and tolerance, and have opened up a new and non-contentious sphere for united, constructive effort. It was the first movement that suggested to the Irish mind that work could achieve what agitation and politics could not. Its success and the spirit of self-help it was founded on and fostered led directly to the formation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, the youngest and by far the most useful of all official institutions in Ireland. All the movements, indeed, that are to-day seeking constructive ends by non-political and non-sectarian routes derive the impulse that alone made them possible from the gospel of self-reliance preached by the co-operators. It is the solitary public enterprise in Ireland that foreigners study, not as a warning, but as a fruitful guide and example.

There are two reasons why the development of co-operation is to-day more than ever necessary to the greatest of all Irish industries. One is that the Department of Agriculture can only achieve its best results if it is enabled to work with farmers, not as isolated individuals, but as organized bodies. The other and far more momentous reason is that Parliament has decreed that Ireland is to be a land of peasant proprietors and must ultimately pledge the Imperial credit to the extent of about \$750,000,000 in order to transfer the title-deeds in the soil from the landlord to the tenant. Now, the ultimate security for the repayment of this colossal loan is the capacity of the Irish farmer and the Irish peasant to make agriculture pay. The whole success of the Land-purchase Acts rests fundamentally on that. If the new owners cannot derive sufficient profit from the soil and from the farm to provide for the punctual remittance of the instalment-money, bankruptcy and chaos are the inevitable results. For the first time, Ireland is brought face to face with the realities of a competitive agricultural existence. For the first time, the question for her is not who is to own the soil, and how little he is to pay for it, but how much can he get out of it. Throughout most of the country, the struggle over the rent and ownership of the land has ceased or is ceasing. The infinitely more momentous struggle for a living on the land has just be-

gun. Hitherto, the Irish agrarian problem has been mainly social and political. Henceforward, it will be mainly technical and economic. The prosperity of the peasant proprietors, on which everything, literally everything, depends, cannot be secured by agitation, or by politics of any kind, but simply and solely by work. The difficulties are immense. The Irish, as I have before insisted, have never been an agricultural, but always by instinct and tradition a pastoral people. Their bent is not towards farming and tillage, but towards stock-raising. The new proprietors, taken as a whole, have neither the technical skill nor the education nor the capital nor the business experience to equip them for their responsibilities. Large numbers of them, too, are in debt to the local "gombeen-man"—the Irish rural money-lender,—and the great peril of the future is that, after exhausting the soil by inefficient tillage and after dabbling unsuccessfully with stock-raising, they will be forced out of an independent existence, and their lands will pass into the hands of the money-lender and the publican. "And if that happens," said to me an experienced land-agent, who firmly believed it would happen, "God help Ireland! Talk of the cruelty of the English to the Irish—it is nothing compared with the cruelty of the Irish to one another. The gombeen-man, turned landlord, will be ten times more avaricious and mean and tyrannical than the worst member of the old type of English absentee. He will wring the very vitals out of any man he has in his power. Let me tell you frankly, there is still a chance that the tragedy of Ireland's future may equal the tragedy of her past."

One thing, and one alone, can avert so hideous a disaster and can establish the new order in the prosperity which is the condition of agrarian peace—co-operation. Without co-operation other agencies must inevitably fail. As a community of small stock-raisers the peasant proprietors are doomed. As a community of small isolated farmers, vainly struggling against Transatlantic competition and the highly organized societies in which the producers of the Continent have enrolled themselves, their fate is not less certain. Ireland ought to be, and might be, a second and more prosperous Denmark. She can only become so if the new owners are taught to organize every detail of their business along co-operative lines. Co-operation in Ireland, however, has to encounter obstacles such as nowhere else exist. In particular, it has to face

the hostility of the political machine which elects four-fifths of the representatives of the country. The Irish Nationalists have a trade, a personal and a political objection to agricultural co-operation. The personal objection is simply that Sir Horace Plunkett originated the movement and still guides it. Sir Horace is obnoxious to the Nationalists on several grounds. He is a Unionist who has often with playful satire pricked the bubble of Nationalist rhetoric. He is the author of many books and pamphlets on Irish affairs, in some of which he has disputed the favorite Nationalist contention that British misgovernment alone is responsible for Irish ills, and that to lay even a fraction of the blame upon the Irish themselves is little less than treason. Finally, his outspokenness shames their plausibilities; and, by the side of his reasoned and constructive achievements, the scum and fury of their rhetoric seem like the ineffectual beating of a tom-tom. Then, again, the Nationalists resent the building up of an organization of nearly 100,000 farmers on a non-partisan basis and for other than political ends. It looks suspiciously like an attempt to regenerate Ireland from within, and their case has always been that Home Rule alone can effect that miracle. It looks like an attempt to substitute practical work by Irishmen in Ireland for the magic properties of political agitation, constitutional readjustment and English-made laws. It looks even like an attempt to maintain that the agrarian question at bottom is a question of productivity and not, as the Nationalists have declared it to be, of rent and ownership. Moreover, when nearly 100,000 farmers, practically all of whom are Unionists, organize themselves to promote their material well-being in spite of the opposition of their political leaders and on the advice and persuasion of a Unionist, the inference to the Nationalist type of mind is clear, that the whole movement is a subtle attack upon the Irish party. These co-operative societies, that pass no resolutions against the "Saxon tyrant" and offer up no addresses to the champions of "a noble but oppressed race," but quietly attend to business, are a new and disturbing phenomenon. They hint at limits to the influence of "politics," at a reaction against the policy of postponing everything to the constitutional issue, at the possibility even of revolt from the cause and its leaders.

And, besides all this, there is the trade objection, or the ob-

jection, to put it more accurately, of the small country trader. It is easy enough to understand why he is opposed to co-operation. As middleman, he buys the farmers' produce at the cheapest rate and supplies them with their agricultural requirements at the dearest. As money-lender, he advances them loans on more than Asiatic terms. As publican, he scores again by sealing every transaction with a drink. The only form of rural prosperity he is able to conceive is that of isolated, inefficient, unorganized farmers, living from hand to mouth under a perpetual load of debt, and lorded over by himself as gombeen-man and middleman. He is the instinctive enemy of co-operation, because co-operation releases the farmers from his grip, enables them to raise money through their own societies on easy terms, to purchase cheap and to sell dear. Co-operation, in fact, eliminates the country trader in his capacity of agricultural middleman and money-lender, and reduces him to his legitimate business of domestic shopkeeper and publican. And even here it threatens to invade his province. It is as easy to deal in tea, tobacco, clothing, groceries and furniture on the co-operative system as in seeds and manures; and the village trader conceives himself threatened with ultimate ruin by the spread of the movement. The experience of all countries that practise agricultural co-operation is there to prove that his fears are baseless, that you cannot increase the farmer's power of production without also increasing his power of consumption and that whatever benefits the farmer must in the end benefit the shopkeeper also. But the small village trader in Ireland sees the immediate loss, but cannot see the ultimate and much larger gain; and being, in addition to his other activities, the political boss of his neighborhood, controlling the local press, overrunning all the local elective bodies and acting as local treasurer for the United Irish League, he is able to bring to bear upon the Parliamentary representatives an amount of pressure that they have neither the ability nor the inclination to resist. The consequence is that the Irish party has from the first fought co-operation and done its utmost to thwart and cripple it.

Nor has its animosity been without effect. The co-operative movement has had its ups and downs, as any movement must have that is dependent upon private generosity and enthusiasm. The expenses incurred by the Irish Agricultural Organization Society in

carrying the gospel of co-operation through remote and backward districts and among a lethargic, uneducated and distrustful people, have been very heavy. The society has had to shoulder all the preparatory work that in other countries is done by the State through the medium of technical instruction. It has not received the support it should have received from the societies it formed, those farmers whom it had not organized being unwilling to contribute towards the cost of being experimented on, and those farmers whom it had organized being equally unwilling to furnish the funds for organizing others. This may be human nature; it is, at any rate, human nature as one encounters it in Ireland. Moreover, when the Department of Agriculture came into existence, it took over a portion of the society's work, annexed some of its officers—there being none others to be had who at once knew Ireland and knew agriculture—and granted it a subsidy. Official financial assistance always and everywhere kills private generosity, and for the last few years the Irish Agricultural Organization Society has only been able to extend its beneficent work by the help of the subsidy. With the close of the current year, the subsidy comes to an end. The Nationalists, after attacking it for years, have recently succeeded in getting it withdrawn. That does not, however, mean the demise either of the society or of co-operation. The assaults upon it have rallied all its friends to its support. The enthusiasm of the early days of the movement is stirring again, and the farmers, who are at last realizing that if they want organization they must pay for it, are subscribing to the society's exchequer as they never subscribed before. I have myself no doubt whatever that if it is enabled by the generosity of its friends to tide over the next few years, the society will find itself presiding over and developing a self-supporting movement. Its work is the best that is now being done in Ireland and deserves and should receive the backing of all who wish well for the prosperity of the island.*

SYDNEY BROOKS.

(To be continued.)

* In the hope that some reader of this article may feel inclined to forward the work described in it, I add that the President of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society is Sir Horace Plunkett, and that its address is 84 Merrion Square, Dublin.

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY CLAYTON HAMILTON AND CHRISTIAN GAUSS.

"THE GOLDEN HYNDE."*

THE main difficulty in attempting to estimate the value of the work of Mr. Alfred Noyes is that we are likely to be bewildered by his manifold and eager productivity. "The Golden Hynde and Other Poems," though it is only the third volume of his verse to be published in America, is the sixth of his volumes to appear in England; and Mr. Noyes is at present only twenty-seven years of age. His fecundity is amazing, and his variety is even more so. He has written poems in innumerable measures that have heretofore been used in English verse, and has invented many measures of his own. He has sung to the tune of masters as diverse as Swinburne, Blake, Rossetti, Tennyson and Heine, with a reckless facility and joyous grace, and has informed all his work with an individuality of charm. He can write a ballad or a lullaby, a song or a symphony, a light lyric or an ode; and he writes them all with the same extraordinary technical accomplishment and dauntless ease. He has not yet developed a blank verse of his own that is completely organized, and his spontaneity of rhythmic variation seems as yet inconsonant with the restrictions of the sonnet form; but he has written no verse that is bad, and much that is very, very good. Perhaps he is most at home in the triple measures which Mr. Swinburne has taught him how to wield.

It is safe to say that even the master himself has seldom surpassed the fluent melody of such lines as these, from "Orpheus and Eurydice":

* "The Golden Hynde and Other Poems." By Alfred Noyes. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1908.