

**A visit to Ireland : a re-print of a lecture delivered in the Town Hall,  
Wellington, Somerset, June 29th, 1888 / by Joseph H. Fox.**

**Contributors**

Fox, Joseph Hoyland.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
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(10.)  
A VISIT TO IRELAND.

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A RE-PRINT OF A  
LECTURE

DELIVERED IN THE  
TOWN HALL, WELLINGTON, SOMERSET.

JUNE 29<sup>TH</sup>, 1888,

BY

JOSEPH H. FOX.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

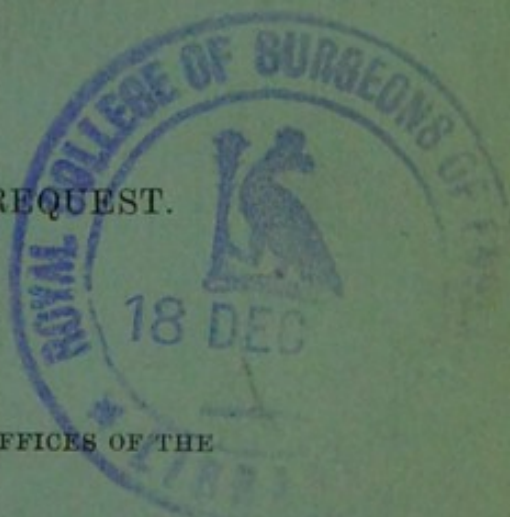
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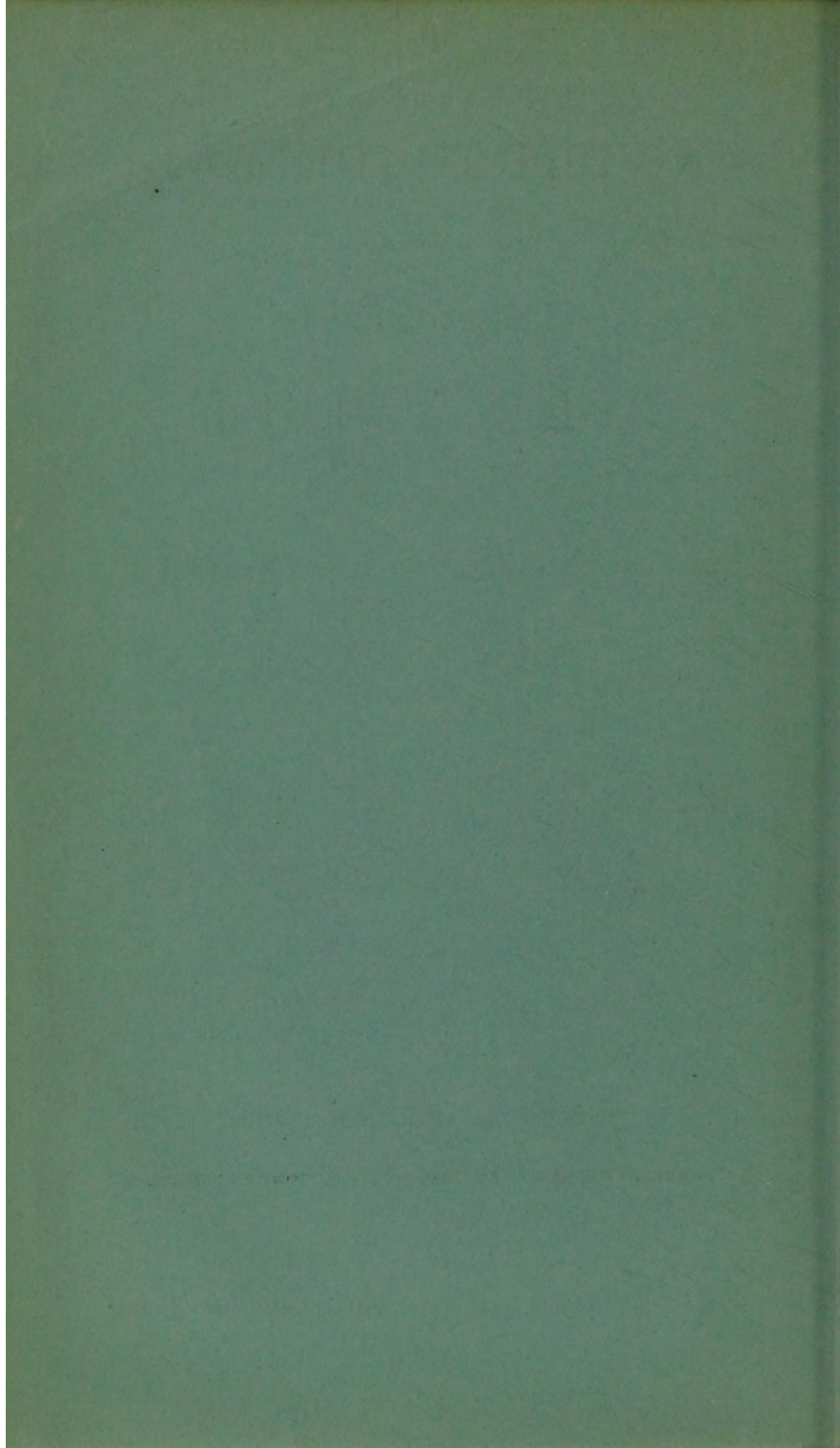
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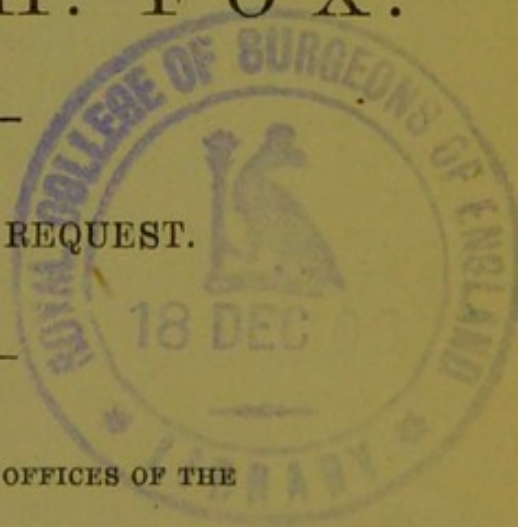
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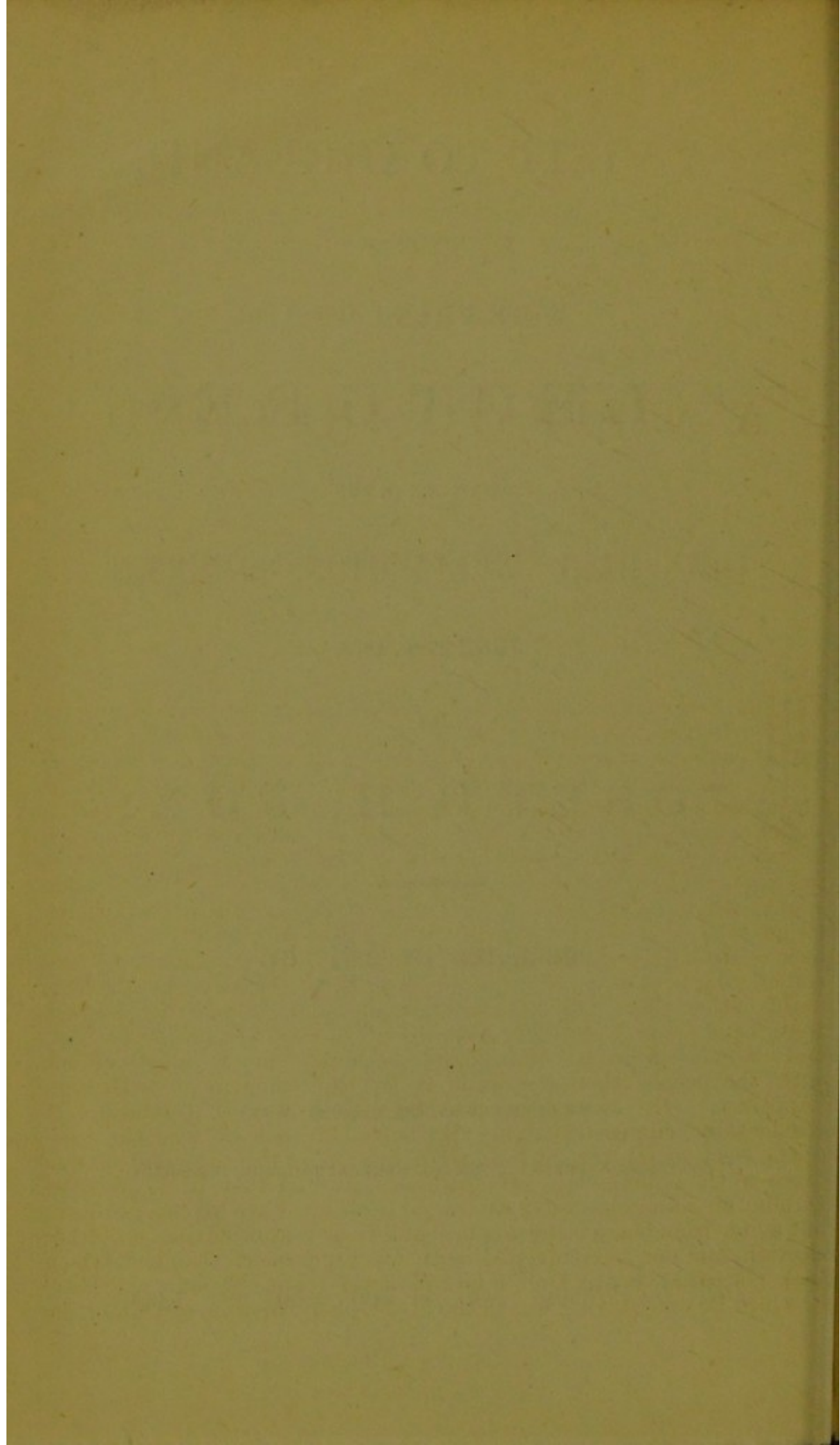
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**M**R. Fox said he had, personally, no desire to deliver a lecture on Ireland, because he had felt the very great difficulty of the subject, and also because his visit was so short, and it was so difficult in the very short time he stayed there really to learn very much about the country, that he felt he could only give his audience impressions, and the results he could gather from conversations he had in Ireland with people of different parties and different views; but still he had been asked by so many to give a lecture on the subject that he did not feel that he could decline those invitations. (Applause.) For many months past he had had a great desire to go over to Ireland and try to see something of the country, and he had only been waiting a favourable opportunity. He only spent a fortnight in the country. He purposely went alone, because he thought that, being alone, he would be thrown more among the people he met, and would probably see more and get more into contact with the people, than he would if he had companions with him. (Applause.) He crossed over to Dublin, by way of Holyhead. It accidentally happened that his visit to Dublin took place at the time of the election for the St. Stephen's division of the city, and he was there on the polling day. He had been warned that if he went to Dublin on an election day he would probably have his head broken, but so far from there being any probability of that occurring, a quieter election, and one accompanied with less excitement, than that which took place that day at Dublin he had never seen. Though the hotel in which he was staying was in the St. Stephen's division of Dublin, he



would not have known from the aspect of the city that any election was proceeding. He was told that in Ulster, where the people were more equally divided in opinions on political and other matters, an election was conducted more like an English election in regard to excitement and displays of feeling, but that in those parts of Ireland where all, or nearly all, the people were of one way of thinking, the elections were absolutely quiet, and attended with hardly any excitement. So far as he observed, he saw in Dublin no carriages that he knew had any connection with the election which was taking place. He was taken round to the polling-booths, and went inside one, and saw that the voting was going on very quietly. This division of Dublin was the only division of the city which was contested ; it was what might be called the West End of Dublin. From Dublin he went to Westport, and afterwards followed pretty much the western coast until he came to Cork, so that his visit was to the worst and most disturbed districts in Ireland. He was sorry that he had not time to visit Ulster, because he knew that in seeing the South and West of Ireland alone, and not visiting Ulster, he did not see really the whole condition and circumstances of the country. What struck him most in travelling through Ireland, and that which grew upon him the longer he remained in the country, in the parts he visited, was the sense of poverty, and the want of enterprise of every kind. One could see the prevalence of poverty even in the railways, the accommodation provided by the Irish lines being very inferior to what was seen on any English railway. At every station at which a train stopped, two members of the Constabulary could be discovered walking side by side up and down the platform ; that police surveillance would, he thought, be seen on every railway platform in Ireland. Another thing which struck a visitor to the parts he passed through was the small number of towns, the small size of those towns, and the few buildings of any considerable size contained in them. There were two classes of large buildings in most towns in Ireland—the workhouse and the convent. At Westport he went through the park of the Marquis of Sligo. The house was shut up, the Marquis being one of those landlords who favoured Ireland by their absence and who spent all their money out of the country. The beautiful house and park were, he (Mr. Fox) thought, there to show what a good thing it would have been for the district if the Marquis of Sligo, who had very large estates in the neighbourhood of Westport, lived on his estates instead of living away. One of the difficulties of the Irish Question, and one of the evils of Ireland, was that many of the landlords lived out of the country and spent their money away. The Marquis of Sligo had, to a very large extent, depopulated his Westport estates, and as he drove along he saw what was one of the most remarkable sights in many parts of



Ireland—roofless houses, homes from which the tenants had been evicted. As an instance of the value of land in Ireland, some 1,500 acres in the island of Achill belonging to the late Earl of Cavan sold some little time ago for about £500 and that land was considered by a gentleman whom he (Mr. Fox) spoke to at Westport on the subject, and who knew the property, dear at that price. If it were dear to give £500 for 1,500 acres of land, how could you expect tenants living on such a property to pay anything but nominal rents? (Hear, hear.) He visited the house of a boatman, which was typical of the homes of the peasantry in that part of Ireland. The house appeared to consist of one large room, though he believed that opening out of this there was another which he did not see. The first inhabitants he met on going in were two ducks coming out—(laughter)—and he saw the man's wife feeding some chickens in the room; the house was black with smoke. The mother and daughters were barelegged, as is the common custom in that part of the country. He next visited Connemara, a part of county Galway, and a district well-known in Irish history as that part of the island which suffered so terribly at the time of the famine. He was told—and from what he saw of the country he should think it was quite true—that if there were another scarcity of potatoes there would be another famine. The district of Connemara was probably the worst district on the mainland of Ireland in regard to the extreme poverty of the inhabitants. Although he had travelled a good deal on the Continent of Europe, and seen the state of the country in many parts of Europe, and had studied, as far as he was able, the condition of the inhabitants of the rural districts, he had never anywhere seen anything approaching to the poverty of the people of Connemara. Nevertheless the peasantry of Connemara were a fine race. He thought they were physically superior to the people of some parts of Ireland, but they were, he must say, very much to be pitied. Their poverty was extreme; their houses could only be described as hovels. They had, unfortunately, owing to circumstances, very small holdings to cultivate, and the produce that they raised was so exceedingly small in quantity, that it was a marvel how they managed to live. The greater part of the land in the portion of Connemara he was speaking of—called the highlands of Connemara—consisted of bog land, and that land could only be brought into cultivation by a great deal of labour. If the people living in this part of Ireland had anything to sell, it was exceedingly difficult to get it to any market. He himself met carts which contained boxes filled with eggs, and those eggs were being carried to the nearest railway station, which was forty miles off. The Connemara people had not only to cultivate their land but to drain and manure it, and he met, on the road, a cart filled with seaweed, which the driver told him had come twenty-six miles from the



shore ; the man who rented the land was sending that distance for a load of seaweed to put upon it. The peasants of Galway—and he wished to say the same thing of the peasantry throughout Ireland—were men of great intelligence. There were schools everywhere, and he was told that it was the universal custom for the children to attend school. The men were all politicians ; it was very difficult in Ireland to meet with a man who was not a politician, and it was remarkable to hear the men talk, and to observe how much they knew, not only about the condition of the country, but also about what was going on in the political world. One thing that struck him in this district of Connemara was the great absence of population, and from what he saw of certain patches of land that had been brought into cultivation at the expense of capital and labour, and which looked like little oases in the desert, he was satisfied that land in this district, if labour and capital were expended upon its cultivation, would support a far larger population than was living on it to-day. He believed that almost all the difficulty we had in Ireland arose from the Irish land customs, which customs had existed for a very long time, and particularly from two which he considered were really the cause of almost all the evils of Ireland. One of those was that, until quite recent times, it had been the almost universal custom—he did not say absolutely the universal custom, because there had been exceptions here and there—for all the improvements on a farm or holding to be done by the tenant. He could not impress too strongly upon his hearers the importance of remembering the existence of this custom, and how difficult it was for persons in England to realise it, because our land customs in England were so different. Barring the few exceptions to which he had alluded, every house and every wall that you saw in Ireland had been put up at the expense and by the labour of the tenant, the drainage, and the cultivation and the manuring of the land had been done by the tenant, and nothing by the landlord. What had been the result of this custom in times past ? The result had been that whenever a tenant improved his little holding of land—if he added another field, or if he put a few feet more on to his house—at the next visit of the agent up went his rent. (Cries of “Shame.”) That had been going on for years ; the tenant had made improvements and his rent was raised at every improvement. He (Mr. Fox) asked his hearers as practical men, whether they thought that if they were living under such conditions they would make many improvements ? (Applause, and a Voice : “Of course not, sir.”) The second land custom to which the chief evils under which Ireland suffered might be ascribed was the way in which the land had been let. They had curious customs of letting land there. Going back to the history of Ireland, his hearers must remember that the English people were responsible for having destroyed almost every industry in



that country outside the land industry. By Acts of Parliament we had destroyed every Irish manufacturing industry except that of linen, and the consequence now was, and had been in the past, that the people in the greater part of Ireland had nothing to live upon except the land. As the population increased in former times, there came an additional demand for land, and the landlords were able to ask almost any rents they liked. There had been no such thing as freedom of contract among the poorer peasantry of Ireland. The great bulk of the Irish tenants were not free men in making contracts with their landlords, and had no alternative but to accept the rent which their landlords asked. The result had been that in a very large number of cases on the poor lands, the tenant was unable to pay the rent which the landlord demanded, and got into arrears and never settled up; so that when a man was paying his rent in 1888 he might, perhaps, be paying the rent for 1882, and have still the rent for the other years owing. What inducement was there for a man to improve his land and crops when he knew that if he became a little better off and got a little more out of his land, all that would follow would be that the landlord would make him pay more of the back rents? Owing to the land usages and the absence of manufacturing industries affording employment for the people, we saw at the present day, in the south and west of Ireland, idleness everywhere. Could anything but idleness be expected when the people had been brought up generation after generation in these habits; every inducement to labour taken away from them? It seemed to him that these causes were quite sufficient to account for the idleness of the people. (Applause) There were in Ireland about two millions of small tenants whose rental was under £10 a year. And how did they pay their rents? There was a time when a great many of these poor tenants did their best to pay the landlord by going over to England and earning what they could there, but, owing to the introduction of agricultural machinery, there was not so large a demand for the services of these men as there was formerly in England, and that resource was, therefore, to a large extent taken from them. We must bear in mind that a considerable proportion of the rents of these poor tenants was paid by their friends and relatives who had emigrated. Mr. Vere Foster had stated that he had aided 18,000 young women from various parts of Ireland to emigrate to America, and that those 18,000 young women had remitted to their relations in Ireland some £200,000, not less than one-half of which amount had gone in paying rents which otherwise must have remained unpaid. (Applause.) We heard a great deal about rack-rents. He (Mr. Fox) did not think there could be any question that a large part of the land of Ireland was too highly rented even now, and what he had just been saying with regard to the



position of the poor tenants, and to there being no alternative for them but to remain on the land, was sufficient to account for the fact of the rents being so high. Moralists in England said, "But what an immoral thing for a man to agree to pay a rent which he cannot pay." People had very nice ideas about morality in these things, but what was a poor man situated as the Irish tenant in the south and west of Ireland to do? What alternative had he. He could not find employment. He (Mr. Fox) was quite certain that if any of those present went into Galway and travelled through Connemara he would find that a day's employment outside the holdings of the peasantry was almost impossible to be met with. Some said, "Let them emigrate." How was a man with a family of, perhaps, five or six children, and no money, to emigrate? They could not emigrate, they could not find work: and there stared them in the face the alternatives of either promising to pay a rent which they knew they could not pay, in the hope that they would keep the house over their heads—or starvation. Was it then, under those circumstances, such an extraordinarily immoral thing on the part of these people to accept the former alternative? His hearers had all heard about the Land Commission in Ireland, which adjudicated on the rents. Although he had no doubt that the members of that Commission were doing their best, and making the awards as fairly as they could nevertheless, judging from the character of the appointments to the Commission, and who the appointments were given by—because we must remember that all the officialism and all the influence of Dublin Castle were against the tenants—we might fairly consider that if there were any bias at all in the decisions of the Commissioners, that bias was likely to be on the side of the landlord. He held in his hand a list of reductions which were made by the Land Commission in county Kerry; the list came out when he was in Ireland. In that list 89 rents were adjudicated on. The total rental under the old valuation was £3,951, and that rental the Commissioners reduced to £2,616, being an average reduction of 31 per cent. on the holdings dealt with. The holdings treated in that list were not the holdings of tenants whose rental was under £10, but they were holdings the yearly rent of which averaged about £45 a piece. He would mention a few of the reductions which were made in that list. The rent of one holding was reduced from £53 to £26; the rent of another from £26 to £6; the rent of a third from £300 to £180. Those reductions showed the opinion of the Land Commissioners on the rents of Kerry. Mr. Fox, speaking of his experience of Clare, said that the people of Clare struck him as being by far the worst-looking people he saw whilst in Ireland. From Clare he went to Limerick, at which city he had the opportunity of meeting with the managers of various large mills, with whom he had some conversation, as to the difficulties they experienced with their



workpeople. Many alleged that the Irish were so idle that they could not be got to work. In regard to that point he heard different opinions expressed by those managers. One of them complained of the idleness of the people. Another said that there was no difficulty in inducing them to work if you really understood their ways. Another, who was a Conservative, said there was no difficulty at all with the Irish people in his factory; the only difficulty he had was with the English. They had had some English people over there, and were, this manager said, only too glad to get rid of them. (Laughter.) Now he (Mr. Fox) wanted to say a few words about the priests in Ireland. He had several opportunities of conversing with priests in various parts of the country, but they need not be afraid that, from what he saw there, he was going over to Rome. (Laughter.) He happened to go to Ireland just as the late Papal rescript condemning boycotting and the Plan of Campaign had been issued, and he heard a good deal about that rescript, from both Protestants and Catholics. The universal opinion he heard expressed by Protestants as well as by Catholics was that that rescript was a dead letter, and that Rome could not afford to go against the national expression of the feelings of the Irish people. He was surprised to hear the way in which the priests spoke of the rescript; some of them implied that they were not going to obey it. The priests had a very strong political influence in Ireland, and the fact was not to be wondered at. They were, many of them, very staunch politicians, and almost to a man they were Nationalists. The influence the priests had was so very great because they were everywhere throughout the south and west the men whom the people looked to in their difficulties and troubles. Whilst in Kerry, he (Mr. Fox) saw an emergency man, with a constable on each side of him, all three armed with rifles. All these emergency men were the very dregs of the population. Most of his hearers had probably heard—there was no doubt about the fact—that Kerry was that district of Ireland in which the National League had the least influence, and was at the same time notorious for the outrages that had taken place there. The National League had done what they could to put down outrages in Kerry. Michael Davitt spent weeks recently in Kerry trying to find out who were the people who were connected with the secret associations which instigated the outrages, his object being to endeavour to put a stop to the outrages, but he utterly failed. There were in Kerry secret societies which had nothing to do with the National League. From what he had seen, he was sure that the National League tried to do their utmost to put down outrages. And he believed that if it were not for the National League the condition of Ireland would be far, far worse than it was at the present time. (Loud applause.) He omitted to say at the beginning that he went



to Ireland with a number of introductions ; he had introductions to persons representing both sides of the Irish question. In Dublin he had from the offices of the National League a general introduction which would be available for him anywhere throughout Ireland, he only used that introduction on two or three occasions, because he was anxious, as far as possible, to get at people of independent views, and he thought that if he used everywhere this general introduction from the National League, he would be only hearing the opinions of those who were strongly in favour of the League. (Applause.) He met in the course of his visit people holding all kinds of opinions, and he met a good many members of the Society of Friends. The majority of them in Ireland were what were called Unionists. There had been something said about that lately in the newspapers, and he wished to say that there was no doubt about it that a large majority of the members of the Society of Friends in England were Home Rulers, and that, on the contrary, the large majority of the Friends in Ireland were, as he had already stated, Unionists. He did not when in Ireland meet with a single Friend who was a Home Ruler. With regard to the state of Protestantism in the South of Ireland, he met the cashier of a bank, who had lived all his life in various towns in the south and west. That man was not a Nationalist, and was a Protestant, and he said that all through the south and west the Protestants were treated in the best way by the Catholics, but, his informant added, it was quite the reverse in Ulster, where the Protestants treated the Catholics very badly indeed. With regard to the state of justice in Ireland, from what he could gather from the people he conversed with in the south and west, there was no belief among them in the justice of the courts of law. He did not say that the people were right in that belief—they might not be—but the course England had pursued had forced the people of Ireland into this state of opinion—that they did not believe they could get justice in the courts of law. With regard to Coercion, one of those Friends who was a Unionist and strongly opposed to the Home Rule movement, said the Coercion which was now being resorted to was useless as you could not put a whole people in prison. (Applause.) English people must give up the idea that many held, namely, that all the ill-feeling which existed in Ireland was the work of certain agitators. That, he (Mr. Fox) asserted, was the greatest mistake possible. Those men who were called agitators, and who were the leaders of the Irish people, were merely men who, from their love of country, or by their genius or talents, had come to the front in the political struggles of Ireland. If these men should die ; if a man like John Dillon—(applause)—should die in prison, it might be depended upon that the agitation in Ireland would not be put down ; other men would rise up to take their places. (Applause.) Almost all the



present leaders of the Irish movement were comparatively young men, and had come into notoriety during quite recent years ; if they passed away, others would take their places. One man used to him the expression "The country is dead" ; and elsewhere he heard that the country was being depopulated. All intelligent young people who could afford it were fleeing from the country. The landlords were being ruined, and were going away too ; and if this state of things continued very much longer, we should see Ireland more and more depopulated. There were absolutely no industrial enterprises, and the absence of new buildings was remarkable ; he believed that in his visit he saw one house being built, and one only. Ireland was at the present time divided into two hostile camps. The landlord had on his side the Executive to help him : and his hearers must remember that the Executive of Ireland—that was to say, Dublin Castle—all the officialism of Dublin Castle, was Orange through and through, and all the sympathies of the official life of Dublin Castle were on the side of the Orange party and on the side of the landlords, and against the peasants and the National League. What had the tenant to support him ? The landlord on his side had the Executive. The tenant could do nothing unless he combined ; the only force the tenant had to employ against the strong powers that were opposed to him was combination. The tenant had that force in the National League, which was a vast combination of those who were working for the peasantry of Ireland. Let him not be misunderstood in what he had said about the landlords of Ireland. There were a number of very good landlords there, and if all landlords were like those good landlords, most of the difficulties which attended the government of Ireland would vanish ; but there were other landlords : men like Lord Clanricarde. What was it that gave a man like Lord Clanricarde the great power he possessed over his tenants ? It was the fact of arrears of rents. If a man had been rack-rented for a long time and had got into arrears in consequence, it was impossible, whatever might be said to the contrary, for him to go into the Land Court for redress. He only got evicted ; and hence had arisen what was called the Plan of Campaign. He wanted to say a few words about the Plan of Campaign. He knew that it was a difficult subject, and that many people in England, and many writers in the Press, spoke of the Plan as one of the most immoral things that ever was invented. He (Mr. Fox) thought that this matter had been very much over rated by these writers, and that many of those who had spoken so strongly and with such horror of the immorality of the Plan of Campaign did not really understand what it meant. The plan was set on foot by John Dillon.—(applause)—and a nobler man, and a man of purer and more unselfish life, and a nobler patriot, than John Dillon had rarely lived upon earth. (Loud



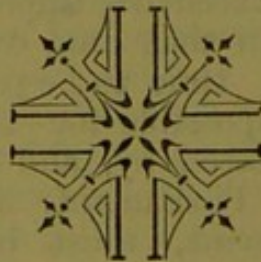
applause.) John Dillon was the hero and the idol of the Irish people. Every week you kept John Dillon in prison, you added to the hatred of the Irish people against the English Government. (Applause.) What were the facts about the Plan of Campaign? The plan was never brought into action except against a bad landlord. A good landlord who had fairly met his tenants was in no fear of the Plan of Campaign but there were in Ireland bad landlords—landlords whose properties had been rack-rented, whose rents were much higher than the rents of the neighbouring landlords, and who would not reduce their rents to a level with those of the surrounding properties—to the level of the rents of the good landlords and to the level fixed by the Land Commission. It was only in these cases of bad landlords who refused to reduce their rents, that the Plan of Campaign had been brought into action, and he believed that in no instance had a lower rent than was given by the Land Courts or by neighbouring landlords themselves been asked for under the Plan of Campaign. In every case where the landlord had capitulated to the Plan of Campaign, every penny of rent had been handed over to him—every penny of rent which had been agreed upon. He (Mr. Fox) confessed it was playing with edged tools, but we must bear in mind the position of these poor tenants who were forced, through the action of their landlords, to resort to the Plan of Campaign in order to obtain a reduction of their rents to a reasonable amount, and he could not see that the adoption of the Plan of Campaign was, under the circumstances, such a very immoral thing as some people tried to make out. He wanted to give them a parallel case. In the slavery agitation in the United States of America when slavery existed in the south, the slaves used to escape through the northern states to Canada where they were free. There were in the northern states people who made it their business to assist slaves to escape from slavery. There were members of the Society of Friends who spent most of their time and a great part of their substance in working this underground railway as it was called. Yet what were these liberators of the slaves doing? They were breaking the law, as those slaves were slaves by the law, and they were not only breaking the law in accomplishing the escape of these slaves, but they were also assisting to rob the owners of their property. They were doing an illegal action; but was there any one present at that meeting that night who would stand up and condemn the action of those who thus took part in liberating the slaves of America by aiding them to escape from their masters? (Cries of "No.") He thought that when party passions had passed away, and people had had time to think over the Irish Question, then in all probability this action of John Dillon in establishing the Plan of Campaign, would be looked upon in a very different light from that in which it was regarded in the present day. He (Mr. Fox) dared to say that many people would condemn



him for what he said that night about the Plan of Campaign, but he had the courage of his opinions. (Applause.) In order to bring peace and prosperity back to Ireland the land question must be settled, and the great problem was : How was that land question to be settled ? His opinion was that if the Irish had had a Parliament of their own during the last 50 years, that question would have been settled long ago, and Ireland now would have been a prosperous country. (Applause.) How were we to settle the Irish land question ? We must either come to some fair arrangement between the landlords and the tenants in Ireland or we must extinguish the dual ownership in land, and come to some arrangement by which the landlords should be bought out on equitable terms. He did not think that the first plan—that any attempt to bring about an arrangement between landlord and tenant which would be mutually satisfactory and acceptable to both—would answer if legislated upon by an English Parliament. The English Parliament never had understood Ireland, and never would understand her, and, moreover, there was this great initial difficulty, that by their actions in the past the English Parliament had forfeited the good opinion of the Irish people, and it was very difficult now for the Irish to believe that true justice would be done to them by the English Parliament. There were enormous difficulties surrounding the solution of the Irish land question by the other mode he had spoken of, the extinction of the dual ownership in land—but that solution must come. He believed the Conservative leaders as well as the Liberal leaders now admitted that the time must come when the dual ownership of land in Ireland would have to be extinguished, and arrangements would have to be made between the landlord and the tenants for the purchase by the tenants of the interests in their holdings. When that was done, an Irish Parliament and an Irish Executive, appointed by that Parliament, were bound to follow. When that dual ownership was extinguished and the rent had for a time to be paid into the coffers of the Executive it would be impossible for the rent to be paid into the coffers of an Executive created by, and dependent on, the British Parliament. An Irish Parliament, and an Irish Executive responsible to that Parliament, must be, for the time, the landlords of Ireland. He could not conclude that lecture without making some reference to the religious question, especially as he believed there was a great fear among English Protestants lest the granting of Home Rule should injure the cause of Protestantism in Ireland. Nothing could be worse than the position of the Protestants there at the present time. Protestant ascendancy in Ireland was not a thing of the past, it was rampant now. The Irish of the south and west judged of Protestantism by its fruits; and it was in their minds indissolubly connected with oppression and injustice. Protestants



attempted to convert the Irish Catholics to the Protestant religion and wondered at their want of success. We should never succeed in converting the Irish people to the Protestant form of Christianity until we could show them that the Protestant religion was a religion of charity, of justice, and of mercy. By our action in times past, and by our action now, we were driving the Irish into the arms of Rome, and to the priests who were their friends and helpers. In India and China we forced rum and opium, and yet more horrible things, on the people of those countries, and wondered that our missionaries did not meet with greater success in their labours there. When would England learn that we must not treat the men of subject races as if they were niggers, and when should we learn that the true way to govern Ireland was to treat the Irish as the strong should treat the weak—as a man should treat a woman—with forbearance and chivalry? We should show our strength, not by oppression, but by a willingness rather to suffer wrong than to inflict it. If the English people would carry out the principles of Christianity in their dealings with Ireland, we should soon find a way out of our difficulties with regard to that country, and should bring about a real and lasting union between England and Ireland. We might then safely leave the issue in God's hands, knowing that His cause would not suffer. (Loud and continued applause.)





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