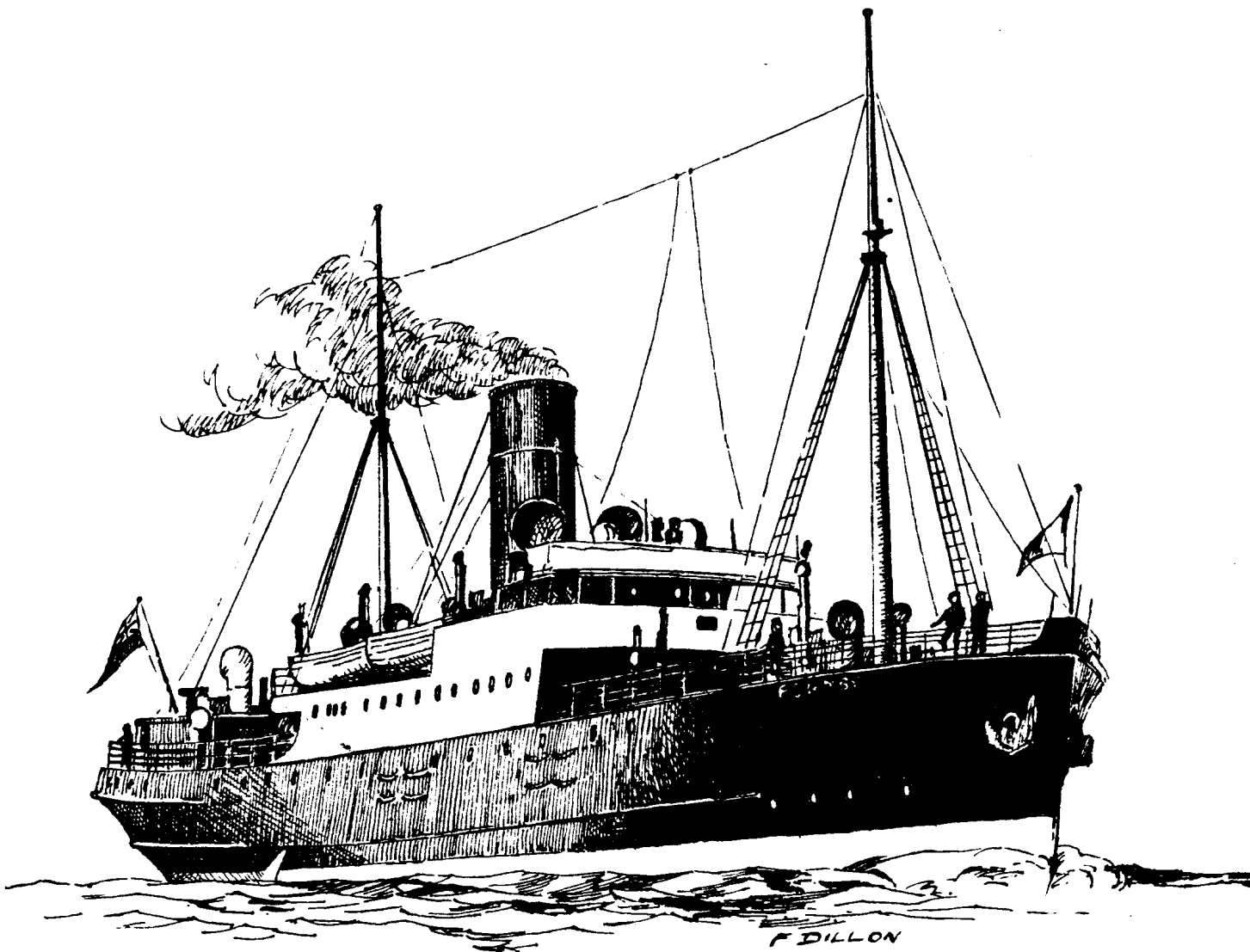


Old Waterford Society

DECIES

XXXVIII

SUMMER 1988.



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FRONT COVER:

The cover illustration shows the Clyde Shipping Company's SS. Formby, which is referred to in the history of the Company in this issue.

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E D I T O R I A L.

The news that Waterford Corporation has acquired the former Methodist Church at Greyfriars for use as a Heritage Centre must be a source of considerable satisfaction to all who are interested in the history of the city.

The lack of a civic museum in Waterford has long been felt and the new premises should admirably fill this need. Reginald's Tower which has done yeoman service for many years is not ideally suitable as a museum, being too small and its upper floors difficult of access. Nevertheless, while saluting the new centre, we must not forget to doff our hats to the venerable building.

We would hope that , in addition to the objects found in the course of the recent excavations in the city centre, some of which are currently exhibited in Reginald's Tower, various other artefacts which have a strong Waterford link and which are housed elsewhere will find a resting place in the new centre. Of interest in this connection are the flints found in the course of the Bally Lough Survey and which are at present in University College, Cork. Perhaps these, or a representative selection, could be returned for display in Waterford.

The city's heritage is so rich and varied that a very large building would be required to house a collection reflecting all aspects of its history. Nevertheless, it is hoped that its importance as a major seaport and trading centre will receive due recognition. Many of our readers will remember the regrettably short-lived maritime museum which existed here some years ago.

We would not presume to dictate to our city officials and representatives who have demonstrated their awareness of the historical resources of Waterford and whose record to date has been very good. We would, however, suggest that now perhaps would be an appropriate time to consider the appointment of a full time archaeologist who could act as curator of the Heritage Centre and be available to evaluate any further finds coming to light.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held at Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford, on Friday, 8th April, 1988.

In their reports the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer indicated that the Society was in a healthy state financially and otherwise. Tributes were paid to the two officers concerned by the Chairman and by the large attendance of members.

In his address, the Chairman, Mr. P. Kenneally, reviewed the activities of the Society during the previous twelve months and expressed his gratification at seeing a number of new young members at Society gatherings.

On the proposition of the Chairman Honorary Life Membership of the Society was conferred on Mr. John Hodge. This motion was passed with acclamation.

Various Society matters were discussed after which the election of Officers and Committee was proceeded with as follows:

Chairman	:	Mr. P. Kenneally.
Vice Chairman	:	Mrs. Lisa Gallagher.
Hon. Secretary	:	Mrs. Nellie Croke.
Hon. Treasurer	:	Mrs. Renee Lumley.
Hon. Editor	:	Mr. F. Dillon.
P.R.O.	:	Mr. N. Cassidy.

COMMITTEE:

Mr. T. Cooney
 Miss P. Fanning
 Mr. F. Heylin
 Mr. P. Kennedy
 Mr. S. O'Brien
 Mr. L. O'hEachtighearn
 Mr. N. O'Flaherty
 Mr. J. O'Meara.

Parnell and the Leadership of Nationalist Ireland.

Dr. Martin Mansergh.

Charles Stewart Parnell's entry into politics in 1874 and election in 1875 certainly owed much to his name. Isaac Butt, the leader of the Home Rule Party, told Barry O'Brien, a Fenian and later Parnell's biographer, 'My dear boy, we have got a splendid recruit an historic name, my friend young Parnell of Wicklow', even though he could hardly string two sentences together. 'We all listened to him with pain while he was on his legs and felt immensely relieved when he sat down', wrote Barry O'Brien afterwards. Although we have in the meantime had a democratic revolution, having a name with a tradition behind it is still an asset in Irish politics and in many other walks of life as well.

Parnell for me has always been one of Ireland's greatest and most inspiring leaders, a favourite historical figure, despite the fact that he was never perhaps an easy person to like.

There is a temptation for those involved in the political world to be free with the historical facts, when they speak about or commemorate great men and women of the past while they have their minds firmly concentrated on the present. I feel some irritation when I hear Wolfe Tone republicanism equated with the pluralist society, very often by people who have little sympathy with constitutional separatism in the present day. Not too long ago in a Tipperary cemetery, the devotion of Liam Lynch to the constitutional path and to peaceful methods was warmly praised in a commemoration speech. At regular intervals we have from public affairs broadcasters and party politicians the benefit of Michael Collins' posthumous views on the current Northern situation.

I hope I will not cause disappointment, when I say that I have not been able to discover what Charles Stewart Parnell thought about the Anglo-Irish Agreement, either in 1879, in 1884 or in 1891, and therefore do not propose to speculate on the subject.

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Indeed many of Parnell's beliefs and political actions do not particularly accord with contemporary political fashions or the type of consensus that is now reflected in the national media. In recent years Parnell has been rarely quoted on a political platform, and it is an interesting question why. Parnell was a highly controversial figure in his day, long before the divorce case, revered by the people but passionately hated by the Unionist establishment in Ireland and especially by a large segment of the British establishment. It is not reasonable to expect that discussion of his career, even after the lapse of a century, would be completely devoid of controversy, even if we would hope to avoid the accrimony of the Joyce family dinner table. Much as one might like to adopt the approach recommended in the book of Ecclesiasticus: 'Let us now praise famous men', analysis is more interesting than panegyric.

Parnell had some of Swift's 'savage indignation'. It is related to two objects, the humiliating treatment of Ireland and of Irish people by England in general and specifically the catastrophe of the famine. With regard to the first Parnell relived for himself the experience of the more intelligent and sensitive members of the Ascendancy in 18th century Ireland. Even the Irish gentry were never treated as equals by the British ruling classes. Their ideals were expressed by Grattan, the reality of their position pointed out brutally by Lord Clare. The Protestant Anti-Unionist tradition, which came briefly to the surface again after disestablishment in the 1870's, was allied in Parnell's case to an American ancestry, a grandfather Admiral Stewart of Ulster origins, who had captured two British vessels in the war of 1812.

Most contemporaries, both enemies and friends, described Parnell as anti-British or at least anti-English. That was not of course quite as heinous a charge a century ago as it appears to be today. Barry O'Brien wrote: 'The idea that the Irish were despised was always in Parnell's mind. This arrogance, this assumption of superiority galled Parnell, and he resolved to wring justice from England and to humiliate her in the process'. But what does or did the term anti-British mean? It could mean an inherited or acquired antipathy to or dislike of a country, its people and its whole way of life. While it is quite possible that Parnell disliked some things about England, Cambridge University for example, or at least some of the people he met there, the fact is he spent much of his life as a parliamentarian in London, and he eventually married an Englishwoman, with whom he had lived for nearly a decade. His political beliefs were founded on a positive principle stated in his maiden speech: 'Why should Ireland be treated as a geographical fragment of England.....? Ireland is not a geographical fragment but a nation'. This was no more than a statement of the position of Grattan and Davis. But since Britain was denying Ireland the political rights of nationhood, Ireland had only two choices, to persuade Britain by sweet reason and saintly patience that she was wrong, or to fight her by every available political means and in the last resort non-political means to obtain legitimate national rights. After all, Liberal politicians were prepared privately to admit by the 1880's, Ireland was held by force not by consent. Anyone engaged in a political battle faces within the framework of that battle, an opposing political force, and is obviously anti that force as well as pro its own objectives.

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If Parnell was anti-British, then a whole string of British politicians, Disraeli, Gladstone for quite a lot of his career, Chamberlain, Hartington, Harcourt, Forster, Salisbury, Lord Randolph Churchill and so on were anti-Irish. To pick a single example, Disraeli's biographer, Lord Blake, says of him: 'Disraeli was at heart wholly out of sympathy with the Irish, and, excepting certain proposals in 1852, made essentially for tactical purposes, he never did or said anything helpful to them'. Britain has been fairly successful over the last century in labelling any vigorous assertion of Ireland's independent political rights as anti-British, while avoiding being confronted itself with the opposite accusation because Irish people are mostly too polite to make it. What in reality is at issue is a difference of opinion, on both sides, as to whether conciliation or reconciliation as we call it nowadays, is an effective political method for the weak to use vis a vis the strong and vice versa. By definition most forms of violence also have limited effectiveness between the weak and the strong. What Parnell and his political allies were engaged in between 1877 and 1882 was creative resistance at its most successful (the civil rights movement of the late 1960's in the North was another example of creative resistance). In many ways this was the most brilliant period of Parnell's life, which created a decisive political momentum, which was never thereafter wholly lost, even though diverted into other channels.

Isaac Butt, the leader of the Home Rule Party when Parnell entered Parliament, is an honourable figure in Irish history, but was a hopeless political leader. Starting life as a Tory, he became totally disillusioned by the callousness of Britain towards Ireland during the Famine. He won the respect of the Fenians by defending their actions as political and as President of the Amnesty Association. A very loose Home Government Association of which he was the head grew out of a temporary Protestant backlash against Disestablishment, which was in breach of the promise at the Act of Union that the churches would be perpetually united. It adopted in place of repeal federalism (within the U.K.) as its programme, that blind alley which crops up with a certain monotonous regularity at different points in Irish history. This ever so mild political movement would not have been complete without clerical condemnation from some quarter. Dr. Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry, who it will be remembered had said that 'hell was not hot enough nor eternity long enough' to punish the Fenians described the Home Rule Association as 'in the circumstances of the country, one of the most mischievous movements to which you have been ever urged or excited', and the Bishop of Cork had gently to point out to him that Home Rule and Fenianism were not quite the same thing. The tensions in the early period between those, including the Church, who favoured support for the Liberal Party and those who favoured an independent movement were not satisfactorily resolved under Butt's leadership.

The Disraeli Government of the late 1870's constituted probably the heyday of British imperialism. Butt's disorganised Home Rule party, which imposed no discipline on its members, and allowed nominal 'Home Rulers' to sit on different sides of the house, got no hearing when it put forward private members bills dealing with issues such as the land, the university question or home rule itself. Biggar, Parnell and a small group of MPs systematically obstructed the proceedings of the House, kept Ministers and Members out of bed at all hours, and eventually forced Parliament to change its rules. Parnell sometimes spoke for hours in a deserted house.

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He said he rather liked an empty House. It gave him more time to think. When later on a young MP asked him what was the best way of learning the rules of the House, he replied: 'By breaking them'.

Butt deplored obstruction, on the grounds that it was the abandonment of constitutional action. He steadfastly maintained that something was being achieved, even when it was obvious that nothing had changed or was going to change. 'They had not obtained Home Rule', Butt said, 'but they had been making a steady progress in the House of Commons and in English public opinion in regard to all their measures'. The Freeman's Journal commented in 1878: 'Mr. Butt seems to think that his policy of self-effacement on every occasion is the way to win for Ireland her rights'. Butt in his last years finally succumbed to the fatal magnetic charm of Westminster, which in one speech he referred to 'as the mother of representative institutions, the seat of intellect, the life, and the power of this great united nation'. He believed that Parnell and his friends were simply antagonizing British opinion, and were behaving in a thoroughly counterproductive fashion.

The Irish MP, Mitchell Henry put it in a rather different perspective: 'I do not hesitate to say that what makes Mr. Parnell and some others so hateful to the English press and to most of the English members is that they think them formidable because not likely to be bought by office, or by what is quite as fatal, by personal flattery'. Today, with all the international bodies, it is just as possible for a politician of a small country to be flattered into thinking he is a great statesman, when he supports the interests of other countries and neglects those of his own.

Parnell's background and upbringing gave him one inestimable advantage. He was not in any sense overawed or intimidated by the venerable aura of British institutions, with which he was thoroughly familiar. He was ready to take them on in their own heartland. Unlike Butt, unlike Redmond, Parnell was not seduced by Westminster. As the radical MP, Dilke said: 'We could not get at him as at any other man in English public life. He was not one of us in any sense. Dealing with him was like dealing with a foreign power. This gave him an immense advantage.

Parnell first came to British public notice, when to the shock of the House of Commons he told the British Home Secretary, Sir Michael Hicks Beach that he could not regard the Manchester martyrs, who had killed a police guard while trying to rescue prisoners, as murderers. Parnell had already identified himself with the amnesty movement. The British Government of the day stated adamantly that Home Rule was 'out'. 'The Times' stated: 'Parliament will not, cannot grant Home Rule. The mere demand for it lies beyond the range of practical discussion'. Some flavour of Parnell's attitudes in this period can be gauged from his speeches, as at Manchester in 1877:

Did they get the abolition of tithes by the conciliation of their English taskmasters? No, it was because they adopted different measures. Did O'Connell gain Emancipation for Ireland by conciliation? Catholic Emancipation was gained because an English King and his ministers feared revolution. Why was the

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English church in Ireland disestablished and disendowed ? Why was some measure of protection given the Irish tenant ? It was because there was an explosion at Clerkenwell and because a lock was shot off a prison van at Manchester.

In July in the House of Commons, in the process of keeping the House sitting for 35 hours on the South Africa Bill Parnell said :

I did not think myself called on to refrain from acting on English questions for fear of any annoyance the English might feel, any more than the English have ever felt called on to refrain from interfering in our concerns for fear of any annoyance we might feel.

At the Rotunda in August 1877 he stated :

I care nothing for this English Parliament nor for its outcries. I care nothing for its existence, if that existence is to continue a source of tyranny and destruction to my country.

As he often stated: 'By the judgement of the Irish people only do I and will I, stand or fall'.

The royal family was another British institution for which Parnell showed little affection. In 1880, he engaged in controversy in the columns of the press with Lord Randolph Churchill on the Famine Queen. 'In reference to Lord Randolph Churchill's contradiction of my statement, that the Queen gave nothing to relieve the Famine in 1847, I find I might have gone still further and said with perfect accuracy that not only did she give nothing, but that she actually intercepted £6,000 of the donation which the Sultan of Turkey desired to contribute to the Famine Fund'. Or take his attitude to a visit by the Prince of Wales in the 1880's:

I fail to see upon what ground it can be claimed for any lover of constitutional government under a limited monarchy that the Prince is entitled to a reception from the independent and patriotic people of Ireland, or to any recognition save from the garrison of officials and landowners and placehunters who fatten upon the poverty and misfortunes of the country. Would it be tolerated in England for a moment if the Government, for their own party purposes, on the eve of a general election were to use the Prince of Wales as an electioneering agent in any section of the country in order to embarrass their political opponents ? The breach of constitutional privilege becomes still graver when we consider that it is the march of a nation which is now sought to be impeded.

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Certainly many of the emotional attitudes of Parnell, from his early bid for Fenian support to his late hillside appeal in Navan that royal Meath might one day become republican Meath, were close to what would nowadays be described as republican, even if Home Rule required retention of the monarchical link.

Some, mainly English, historians have argued that Parnell was too self-indulgent, and that there was a price to be paid for his alleged hostility to Britain. Ensor, in his late 19th century volume in the Oxford history of England claimed 'his whole attitude expressed a deliberate hatred towards their nation, which was not unnaturally returned' and that 'to concede home rule to Parnell seemed like handing over Ireland to a king of the ogres ! But of course whether there would have been any Home Rule Bill to have been defeated but for Parnell's tough political approach must be open to doubt.

In the circumstances of 19th century Ireland, British resistance to repeal, coercion, evictions, and above all, the outrage that the Famine constituted, the only surprising thing is how limited was the resort to physical force. Practical experience in 1848 and 1867 showed the difficulties of mounting a militarily significant rising, though doing nothing to diminish the romantic aura of rebellion. Parnell's sister Fanny still in her teens, was contributing patriotic verse to 'The Irish World'. From the very beginning and throughout his career, Parnell sought the support of the Fenians, and never lost touch with 'advanced nationalists' as he usually referred to them, although some of them opposed his political course. Physical rebellion on the open warfare lines of the '98 rebellion, one historical event in which he showed some interest - he was a maker of history not a reader of it - did not seem to him to be a practicable option, and he was fortunate as a politician that the Fenians or many of them were prepared to give political agitation a try, while reserving their other options. He knew better than to mix the role of politician and rebel in the manner of Wolfe Tone or Lord Edward Fitzgerald. He as a politician, had a certain sphere of action and certain possibilities. If those failed, then the initiative would return to the advocates of physical force. This was not what he desired, it was just political realism. As he said when he was sent to prison, 'Captain Moonlight would take over'. But he sharply repudiated a reported threat by Devoy in 1881 on the lives of British Ministers and to burn down cities, if coercion were proceeded with. He was, moreover, appalled at the Phoenix Park murders, and in a moment of rare emotion uncharacteristically offered his resignation to Gladstone both because he regarded Lord Frederick Cavendish as sympathetic to Ireland and because it undermined completely the assurances he had given to Gladstone in the so-called Kilmainham Treaty. The Phoenix Park murders did far more damage to the Irish party than to Britain.

While violence did not cease completely during the period of his leadership, he succeeded in harnessing the support of many of those who believed that physical force was in principle justified. Without a vigorous and aggressive policy, he could never have succeeded in obtaining the measure of Fenian and ex-Fenian support that he did for what was basically a constitutional movement. From the mid 1880's to 1912 was one of the most prolonged peaceful periods in modern Irish history. It was when Redmond reverted to

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the constitutional nationalism of Butt, in September 1914 that the Nationalist Party lost the initiative to the straight separatists.

Nowhere was Parnell's success greater than in harnessing effectively for the first time Irish American support behind a national movement. Nowadays it is fashionable to denigrate Irish-American views as naive and ill-informed, because of their more fundamentalist approach to national issues. American support was vital to the success of the Land League and of the Parnellite movement. Parnell, like De Valera after him, proud of his American blood, was well-placed to tap that support. British politicians were fully aware that the Irish presence in America had shifted the imbalance of power somewhat more in Ireland's favour. Sir William Harcourt stated, 'In former Irish rebellions the Irish were in Ireland. Now there is an Irish nation in the United States equally hostile, with plenty of money, absolutely beyond our reach and yet within ten days of our shores'. The Irish-American community have made an inestimable contribution over the past hundred years to the attainment and maintenance of Irish independence. Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, writing 30 years ago, stated 'America did remain a great resource, in money and encouragement whenever an Irish movement was on a leftward line, a fact that gave Irish politics a greater depth and Irish leaders a much wider range of choice than they would otherwise have had'. Parnell's success also reflected well on Irish-Americans in their own country. The so-called 'New Departure' based on a programme outlined in an open telegram from Devoy to Kickham, President of the IRB, for passing on to Parnell laid out the conditions for the support of Irish Nationalists in America, the pursuit of self-government, vigorous agitation of the land question on the basis of a peasant proprietary and an aggressive and disciplined voting behaviour at Westminster, especially in resistance to coercion. The alliance worked extremely well, while it lasted. The challenge facing Irish politicians of later generations has been to try and reunite Irish-American opinion behind a positive political programme, that has some prospect of success, and to recreate if possible the momentum of the New Departure.

The agricultural depression of 1879, the emergence of famine, and the wholesale evictions posed a dilemma both for constitutional and for revolutionary nationalists. What was the proper relationship of the central national issue to a burning social issue like the land question? It is an important question, worth pondering, as it has some relevance to our own time. Professor Oliver MacDonagh, in his brilliant study States of Mind on Anglo Irish Conflict, has pointed out the political function of simple, easily grasped, demands such as Catholic Emancipation, Repeal, Home Rule, and he could easily have added the Irish Republic and later still a united Ireland. The fulfillment of any one of these demands was meant to comprehend with them the solution of all other problems. It was held by some, both Fenians and constitutional politicians, that the solution of all other questions had to await the fulfillment of the central political goal. If social questions could be solved within the framework of the Union, it might serve to weaken the demand for Home Rule or for separation. As against that the abstract political demand, when it had no immediate prospect of fulfillment because of British opposition, only aroused a limited degree of popular favour and support, presumably

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because it did not seem to have an immediate relevance to people's lives.

James Fintan Lalor writing in 1848 was of the view that 'the land question contains and the legislative question does not contain the materials from which victory is manufactured. There is, I am convinced, but one way alone; and that is to link Repeal to some other question, like a railway carriage to an engine; some questions possessing the intrinsic strength which Repeal wants; and strong enough to carry both itself and Repeal together..... Repeal had always to be dragged. This I speak of will carry itself - as the cannonball carries itself down the hill'.

To take over the leadership of the land struggle, as was being urged by Michael Davitt, and to relegate Home Rule for the time being to second place, represented an awesome responsibility, and Parnell did not commit himself to it in haste. But as well as a strong political instinct, he had a strong sense of social justice. He played a key role in the abolition of flogging in the navy, for which his likeness has appeared ever since on the packet of Players cigarettes. He also voted against capital punishment. The scenes that he saw in the West made a deep impression on him. His attendance at the Westport meeting in 1879, despite the condemnation of the aged Archbishop MacHale, when he urged the tenants to keep a firm grip of their homesteads and lands and not to allow them to be dispossessed as they were in 1847, was regarded as the most courageous act of his political career by Michael Davitt. Of course, most of the credit for the setting up of the Land League and for organized resistance meant to stop just short of physical violence belongs to Davitt and several individuals in the West of Ireland. The leadership and prestige of Parnell helped to improve its chances of success. Parnell and Dillon went to America to raise funds for the Land League. He also helped to set a realistic goal of a peasant proprietary of the land.

In America Parnell was the first Irish leader to address the House of Representatives on 2 February 1880, and only one of the very few including Lafayette and Kossuth who had yet been given that privilege. He himself described his reception as 'an unprecedented honour to the humble representatives of an oppressed people'. He used his opportunity well and I would like to read extracts from this speech, which is passed over by all the standard works on Parnell, and which I had to cull from the columns of the Freeman's Journal, both for its intrinsic political interest, and as an example of a cogent and effective appeal in the context of a fund-raising tour.

'The public opinion of the people of America will be of the utmost importance in enabling us to obtain a just and suitable settlement of the Irish question.... We do not seek to embroil your Government with the Government of England. But we claim that the public opinion and sentiment of a free country like America is entitled to find expression whenever it is seen that the laws of freedom are not observed. Mr. Speaker and gentlemen, the most pressing question in Ireland is at the present the tenure of land. That question is a very old one. The feudal tenure has been tried in

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many countries and it has been found wanting everywhere, but in no country has it wrought so much destruction and proved so pernicious as in Ireland. We have as a result of that feudal tenure constant and chronic poverty and we have a people discontented and hopeless. Even in the best years the State of the people is one of chronic poverty and when, as on the present occasion, the crops fail and a bad year comes across the face of our land claiming their victims in hundreds of thousands And now that thousands are starving, the singular spectacle is presented by a government which refuses to come to the aid of its own subjects sanctioning appeals to the charity of America. The present famine, as all other famines in Ireland has been the direct result of the system of land tenure which is maintained there.

Now we have been told by the landlord party, as their defence of this system, that the true cause of Irish poverty and Irish discontent is the crowded state of that country, and I admit to the fullest extent that there are parts of Ireland which are too crowded. The barren lands of the West of Ireland which the people were driven to from the fertile lands after the famine are too crowded, but the fertile portions of Ireland maintain scarcely any population at all, and remain as vast hunting tracts for the landlord class I should like to see the next emigration from the West to the East, instead of from the East to the West - from the barren hills of Connemara back to the fertile plains of Meath, and when the resources of my country have been taken full advantage of and fully developed, when the agricultural prosperity of Ireland has been secured, then if we have any surplus population, we shall cheerfully give it to this great country. The emigrants would come to you, as come the Germans, with money in their pockets, education to enable them to obtain a good start in this great and free country, and sufficient means to enable them to push out to your Western lands instead of hanging about the Eastern cities, doomed to hard manual labour, and many falling a prey to the worst evils of modern city civilisation.

A writer in the London Times, giving an account of the island of Guernsey, knows that it supports in marvellous prosperity a population of 30,000 on an area of 16,000 acres while Ireland has a cultivable area of 15.5m acres, and would if as densely peopled as Guernsey, support a population of 45m. instead of only 5m. at present.... We propose to imitate the example of Prussia and of other continental countries where the feudal tenure has been tried, found wanting and abandoned, and we propose to make or give an opportunity to every tenant occupying a farm in Ireland to become the owner of his own farm.

