

1845 Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners...Occupation of Land in Ireland

The Reverend Patrick Tracey, sworn and examined

1. Are you a parish priest?—I am coadjutor curate to the Rev. Martin Flynn, who was examined here today, the parish priest of Trinity Without and Butlerstown.
2. With what district are you acquainted?—I was acquainted with the district of Kinsale Beg, near Youghal, for many years, but in my professional capacity, with this district generally. I know the county of Waterford well.
3. Is the land in the district held generally by lease or at will?—Generally by lease.
4. What is the usual term of lease?—Twenty-one years is the usual term. Sometimes a reversion of lives.
5. Do you know what are the usual covenants in the leases; are there any particular covenants?—I am not aware of any particular covenants, unless rights of minerals the landlord reserves to himself.
6. What are the general arrangements entered into between landlord and tenant, with regard to the improvements of land or buildings?—In some places the landlords give materials for buildings, timber and slates, and the farmer builds the stone walls and stone work. Some landlords give nothing at all.
7. Has there been any considerable consolidation of farms in any of the districts with which you are acquainted?—No, except one district; there were some persons I understand some years ago removed from that part, and the farms enlarged.
8. Does the subletting or subdividing of farms still continue in the district with which you are acquainted?—In some places; not very generally.
9. With respect to the condition of the farming population, are the large farmers getting more wealthy?—In my opinion they are not getting more wealthy. There is a spirit of improvement notwithstanding so far as green crops; that is getting into use a good deal with the farmers. Their habits of industry are improved, particularly since the temperance movement; the farmers are more industrious. There was a great loss of time when the farmers drank; the next day they were sick and not able to attend to their business. This necessarily induced a loss of time, and labour is worth something to a farmer.
10. Are the small class of tenantry becoming richer in your opinion?—Not in my opinion; I do not think they are, in the district with which I am acquainted. Prices have not been so good as they were for many things; there was a reduction of prices.
11. Is the condition of the labourers getting better?—No.
12. Can they obtain employment?—I regret to say they cannot. I am in my professional capacity often under the necessity of regretting the want of employment. I often employed men for charity to themselves, and gave them work till I could not assist them any longer. And what aggravated the feeling was when they pleaded want of employment, having health and willingness to work—which was a melancholy thing.

13. What are the rates of wages given in the immediate vicinity of the city of Waterford ?—They vary a good deal. When they are cutting the harvest and digging the potatoes they sometimes get Is. a. day, and sometimes 10. 4d. At other seasons of the year they work for 2.9. or 38. per week; if fed, they work for 2.9., and the diet is of the very worst description.

14. Of what does it consist ?—Potatoes. Some farmers in this district give oaten bread, potatoes, and milk, and the worst description of potatoes.

15. Do they, in addition to their wages, generally receive food ?—In some cases, where an arrangement subsists between them and that is understood.

16. Has there been much emigration among the labourers in this neighbourhood ; I am not aware of much : there has been some.

17. Principally to what country ?—Principally to America the United States; some to Canada. Some persons I knew went from this to Australia, two families.

18. Do you think that if employment were found for them in the colonies they would be willing to emigrate ?—I think if the wages were fair, and were secured to them, they would be, notwithstanding their attachment to their native land; but they should be such wages as would supersede the natural affection which every person has for his native country .

19. Have you ever conversed with any of them upon the possibility of their being located upon waste lands in this country, though at a distance from home ?—I have, and they would be willing. They anticipate the construction of the railway with a good deal of pleasure, anticipating employment from it; and I am sure that they would be willing to locate themselves upon the waste lands in this country.

20. Should you think it your duty rather to encourage their doing that, if you saw there was a prospect of their being located upon fair terms upon waste lands in other parts of Ireland ?—I consider it my duty to recommend what I consider would ameliorate the condition of the poor man, and I consider that that would be a mode of doing it. But the matter has never been proposed to them in a tangible way.

21. Have there been any agrarian outrages in this immediate district ?—I am not aware of any. There was an indisposition to the payment of the poor rates in a portion of the district some time ago. That arose from agrarian feeling about property, and also about tithe. There was some disturbance before the decision of the government upon that measure. I am not aware in this district of any other.

22. Have you any suggestions you wish to lay before the commissioners ?—I can scarcely add to the information you have received from more intelligent persons than I; but there is one thing I would observe in addition to the security of tenure, which is of paramount importance, that collateral with that there is another advantage the tenant would derive from the intercourse the landlord or the agent would have with him. That is a very great fault in this country, the estrangement of the landlord and tenant. If there was nothing but habits of industry promoted, and civilisation promoted, and intelligence among the tenants, it would be a very great advantage. There are some cases where it is done. Mr. Roberts is a very good agent, and takes an interest in the welfare of the tenants, and visits them, and sees if their houses are clean, and their furniture is clean, and their very bedclothes he sees that they are clean. This is a very important thing, and it operates disadvantageously for the landlords in this country that such a course is not more generally followed. We go twice a year in the discharge of our duties to the farmers to what we call stations,

and the houses are never cleaned scarcely till we go there at any other time they scarcely attend to it; and the influence we have over them arises from our communication with them; and if the landlords had more intercourse with the people, they would secure more advantages to themselves, even in a temporal view. The people are all in a very bad condition. It is preposterous to be educating without improving them physically also, by the government making roads, and without looking to the main point first. If a person is educated and has not a suitable residence to live in, he is more enabled to perceive the disadvantages he labours under. If he has to herd with the pigs in the same house, the more he feels the want of physical comforts the more you give him education. First improve their physical condition; if not, do make it concomitant with education. There is a fault also among the farmers as to the con-acre system. When a poor man has a bad crop they are not in the habit of allowing for the bad crop—they will get the rent whether he has a bad or a good crop; they will make no allowance. I have no interest in saying this; but the Protestant landlords in the district are as good, if not better, than the Roman Catholic landlords. I would make an observation as to Kilbarry. They are in a very bad way there; it is the estate of Mr. Lane Fox. There are only a few of the tenants who have leases; they have no tenure at all, and they are in a very bad way. They are in arrear, and they get no receipts, except little slips with the name of the person who acts as agent. Mr. Stuart is the agent, and under him Mr. Kells. They are left in arrears, and it is a very bad plan to leave them in arrears at all; it is a millstone round the tenant's neck. It paralyses his industry when left in arrear; he has not any spirit to improve the land or cultivate it.

23. Do you know yourself whether those arrears are of long standing?—I have been told that some of them are of twenty years' standing. _

24. Some of them may have accrued then in the time of the predecessors of the present tenants?—I cannot say that.

25. Do you know whether there is any plan pursued for encouraging the tenants to make improvements upon the estate?—Yes, the land is a good deal improved. The agent was engaged in draining a bog there, but he failed in it. The farmers and their servants were for a long time engaged in this, and I understand this was taken in lieu of arrears; but the tenant is in the dark, he does not know how the account stands, or what sum is due. Mr. Stuart's treatment of the tenants is not of the most interesting kind. I know an instance of the poor men having to work down in these cuts in the wet up to the breast, and I heard that he threw one or two of them into the Pill.

26. Do you mean that he did that himself?—Yes, Mr. Stuart. If a certain fixed quantity of ground were marked out for the labourers, and they were allotted an acre and a half, it would be a great matter.

27. Do you think it would be advantageous that the labourers should hold their cottages rather more direct from the landlord, with a small piece of ground attached to them at a reasonable rent, than as they do now under the farmer?—The general presumption is, they ought to be better under the landlord. I am not certain of the fact. Some farmers are kind to them, and others are not.

[The witness withdrew.]