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# AGRARIAN TENURES.

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A SURVEY  
OF THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS RELATING TO THE HOLDING OF LAND  
IN ENGLAND IRELAND AND SCOTLAND  
AND OF  
THE REFORMS THEREIN DURING RECENT YEARS

BY

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## PREFACE.

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IN view of the agrarian questions which have been raised in various parts of the United Kingdom, I have thought it may conduce to their discussion and solution to review the existing conditions of landownership and land tenancy, and of the relations to one another of the various classes of the agricultural communities in the three countries, and to describe the efforts made by Parliament during the last twenty-five years to reform or reconstitute them.

These legislative enactments have been numerous and varied, and have accentuated greatly the differences between the agrarian condition of Great Britain and Ireland. Many of them have been tentative and halting. Some have totally failed to produce the effect intended. Looked at as a whole, however, they include almost every method which the most ingenious political draughtsman or the most extreme reformer could suggest, and it would be difficult to invent any new method. They have been the handiwork, not of one political party, but of all parties in turns. They bear the mark of many conflicting currents of opinion, and of many schools of land reformers, aiming at very different ultimate objects.

The multiplication of individual ownerships, the creation of systems of dual ownership between landlord-owners and occupiers of land, the restriction of freedom of contract between landlords and tenants, and the conferring of inalienable rights on the latter, the giving power to local authorities to purchase land by agreement, or by compulsion, with a view to the creation of new classes of tenants, with more or less fixity of tenure, and to the erection of labourers' cottages, the use of

State credit, for turning tenants into owners, and the reform of the laws of inheritance and transfer of land, have been some of the methods adopted of a more or less tentative character. Any fresh legislative efforts must almost necessarily be in the direction of expanding, or making effective some of these measures.

I have thought it might not be without value to compare the methods adopted, the objects aimed at, and the results achieved by such legislation. I had almost completed this work before the passing of the Small Agricultural Holdings Act in 1892. I have since, in the intervals of other work, added a description of that Act, and a study of its probable effect.

Some few of the passages describing the changes in landownership in England during the last two centuries are taken from a pamphlet which I published a few years ago, entitled, "Freedom of Land;" and the description of the system of landownership in the Channel Islands is a *résumé* of an article I wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* on this subject.

If in the course of my description I have not unfrequently quoted from Lord Salisbury's speeches, it is because I have found that he has always stated in the most able and complete manner the views or objections of the political party of which he is the head.

I have only to add that I have not written with a view to the existing agricultural depression. No reform of tenure, however desirable, or however beneficial in the long run, could, in my opinion, have any immediate effect on the condition of the agricultural classes, or prove a remedy for a bad harvest or for low prices of produce.

G. S. L.

IGHTHAM, KENT.

February 1, 1893.

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