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FOURTH EDITION.

OUR MOTHER

EARTH



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OUR
MOTHER EARTH:

A SHORT STATEMENT OF THE CASE
FOR
LAND NATIONALISATION.

CHAPTER I.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LANDED AND OTHER PROPERTY.

The object of the following pages is to state a case for the nationalisation of the land as fully and clearly as it is possible to do in so small a pamphlet, to remove a few leading misconceptions on the subject, and to give those who have not time or inclination to go very deeply into the matter some idea of the overwhelming importance of the land question.

It has been beautifully said that as God is our heavenly Father, and breathes life and soul into us, so the earth is our material mother, that supplies us with all our earthly necessities, comforts, and pleasures, and indirectly with our spiritual and intellectual joys. If this be true, no crime surely can be worse in its ultimate consequences than that of depriving our fellow men of the right of direct appeal to their mother earth for all that she will give them in return for their labour.

The old saying that God helps those who help themselves, being interpreted, means that nature or the earth helps those only who will work and do their share. If they will plough and sow the seed, she will work night and day to bring it to maturity. If, however, man cannot get at the earth, nature cannot help him. In this way, by depriving men of nature's help, you also deprive them of the right to help themselves, and make them absolutely dependent on those who, unlike themselves, have direct access to the earth. Thus agricultural labourers and farmers can get a living only when it answers the purpose of the landowner that they shall, and then they do not get the reward of nature for their work, but only such part of it as the landowner is obliged or pleased to let them have.

This is not true in agriculture only; it is true in every walk of life, in every industry, the only difference being that its effects are more direct and more obvious in some than in others. We are essentially land animals, and everything we eat, drink,

use, and enjoy comes from the land. In public works we can't improve a street, carry out sewage or waterworks, lay out a park—in private undertakings we can't get coal, iron, or stone—without dealing with the landowners whose property we touch. To what extent these public or semi-public undertakings are taxed, delayed, spoilt, prevented altogether, or ruined by the action of the landowners and their agents none but those who have had practical experience can have an adequate conception. The landowners are the masters of the situation, and they very naturally let us know it in every walk of life.

That landed property differs essentially from other property is so obvious that it is only surprising that intelligent men should be found to maintain that it does not. The word "land," used in its economic sense, means that which exists without the effort of man, whether it be earth, water, or natural forces. Ground rent is the value given to this by the community as a whole, independently of the individual effort of the occupier. Personal property is that which is created by the effort of man, made possible in the first place by the existence of the land, and helped in the second place by the facilities supplied by the community.

For the upholders of so-called rights of property to argue then that if a man has no moral right to the absolute ownership of the land, which was made by a superhuman power before mankind existed, he therefore has no right to the exclusive use of personal property is a practical absurdity. At this rate there would be no difference between the raw materials paint and canvas are made of, and the finished production of an artist, between the iron ore and coal lying in the bowels of the earth and the finished machine. The ownership of land, so far from protecting the individual's right to the results of his labour, necessarily takes it away, and here it is that the wrong comes in.

The difference between landed and personal property is simply this. God made the land. Man made collectively and individually other sorts of property out of the land. Since God never sold or gave the land to any individual, it follows that property in land is the reward of robbery, while property in other things is the reward of industry. Can any distinction be clearer; can both forms be logically defended? Can we on the one hand assert man's right to the production of his industry, and on the other the right of landowners to take it away without any return?

The plea that we are free to escape payment by declining to use the land cannot be supported. We might as

well say that we may please ourselves whether we pay taxes or not. We are obliged to pay rent and taxes either directly or indirectly as soon as we pay for anything. The first article we buy, the first bed we pay for, includes in its price the rent and taxes paid in the production.

The simple question before us is whether we are to legislate for idlers or workers. People do not yet recognise that all this unearned increment, this undeserved wealth, means at least a corresponding amount of unearned and undeserved poverty, that every West-end square has its counterpart in its East-end slum.

Those who reap what they have not sown, reap what others have sown, and the sowers thus deprived of the fruits of their industry are not the idlers, paupers, drunkards, or thieves, but necessarily the hard-working honest poor. The criminal and idle classes are but the creation of a system that breaks the hearts and blights the lives of so many of those that attempt to earn a living by honest work.

Natural inequalities of wealth brought about by differences of ability, enterprise, industry, and desire for wealth appear to be inevitable, and in comparative wealth and poverty of this sort there need be no injustice or evil. But who can justify the creation by law of unnatural inequality of the grossest description possible, and the consequent establishment not of comparative wealth and poverty, but of inordinate, excessive, and dangerous wealth on the one hand, and hopeless, degrading, miserable poverty on the other? This is not surely a desirable state of things. And yet, as it will be the endeavour of this pamphlet to show, it is a state of things established by our land laws, and which nothing can justify.

They establish wrong and inequality by dividing the people into landed and landless men. They have recognised successful usurpation, and perpetually and increasingly reward the heirs of the usurpers. We are told it is natural for man to be selfish: True, and all the more reason why the landed classes should not have a monopoly? Why not allow the landless to have their share, just enough to enable them to claim their rights, and put an end to the laws which have robbed them in the past and continue to do so now? I have no desire to "confiscate" (as it is called) the land, but the question really is not whether it is just to punish such men as the Duke of Bedford, for instance, for the sins of his ancestors, who grabbed Covent Garden and Long Acre, but whether we are bound everlastingly and continually increasingly to reward them.

CHAPTER II.

LESSONS OF HISTORY.

It will perhaps help us to judge to what extent our present land laws are worthy of our support, if we take a rapid glance at their history, and see how they came about.

What is known as the Feudal system was not created by William the Conqueror, as is commonly supposed. It was but a slight modification of the old manorial system, which had been developing centuries before the Norman conquest. All that William did was to re-organise it, and give the people Norman, instead of Anglo-Saxon and Danish lords. The system was a pyramid, with the king, who represented the nation, at the top. All got their title to the land from him, and very freely in early days did the king take away, or give the land to his vassals.

The Domesday survey which William ordered showed the country divided into 9,250 separate manors or villages, most of which had a resident "lord," who lived in the Manor house, and held the land more or less remotely from the king, generally through some great noble, who would be the superior lord of many manors.

Below the lords of the manor, in the village, who held and farmed a lion's share, were the villeins, who held about 30 acres of land, and the cottars, who held from 5 to 10. These two classes of tenants were bound to the land, and obliged to give personal service on the estate of the lord of the manor, and also to pay tribute in various forms; they were not, however, liable to military service, as were another class, the free tenants, who although more independent in other respects, not being bound to the land nor yet obliged to give any personal service on the estate of their superior lord, were nevertheless constantly called to arms. All, from the king downwards, had rights of pasturage over the common, waste, and forest lands.

There were also a few slaves, about 9 per cent., at the time of the conquest, who held no land. But we find that even these had disappeared about a century later.

The great feature of the Feudal system was that every one had land, and every one a lord. The lords had, however, their duties, and the tenants, who could not be dispossessed, their rights. A landless man was outside the pale of social life, and was of no account. All, from the king downwards, were tenants (but as a matter of convenience I shall in future speak of the lords as landowners, which they afterwards practically became); all had their tribute to pay and

work to do, as a condition of holding the land. There was no idea of provision for idle men, nor of the irresponsible holding of land. Thus in these days, which were far from wholly barbarous, the right of the people to the land and the necessity of the land to the people were legally recognised, and the country roughly divided amongst them, with due regard to local authority and the subjection of a conquered people. The arable land was, indeed, literally re-divided every year amongst the inhabitants of the manor according to their rights and numbers.

Under this system the peasantry steadily improved their position for about 300 years after the Conquest (1066 to 1350), and in the middle of the fourteenth century we find the tenants had largely bought themselves free from personal service and many of the more vexatious forms of tribute by payments made to their superior lords in times of pecuniary difficulty, which were constantly occurring through the silly, wasteful wars on which the lords were perpetually squandering their substance.

The burdens of the peasantry, it must be borne in mind, however irksome, were for the most part fixed, so that any advantage that these workers got from time to time could not be absorbed in a higher rent, as is at present the case. Under these circumstances it was natural and inevitable that the workers should gradually improve their position, so long as they were strong enough to hold their own against the never-ceasing attacks of their superior lords, for the land-owners were continually trying to force back the people into their former servitude, and rob them of the rights they had sold them. But up to the reign of Henry VII. the people proved a match for them, and by repeated revolts and sturdy resistance managed on the whole to hold their ground.

Thus we find in the middle of the fourteenth century the peasantry in a highly-prosperous condition, relieved of most of their burdens, and largely holding their land as copyhold, paying a hardly more than nominal quit-rent, in addition to a few fines. This state of things lasted for about 150 years (1350 to 1500), and this period is agreed upon by all students as the golden age. Wages were so high that Professor Rogers tells us 15 weeks' work would provide the same necessities of life as it takes the agricultural labourer 52 weeks to obtain now. The prosperity and condition of the people and the reasons for it, are well described by Chief Justice Sir John Fortescue at the time: "Every inhabitant is at his liberty fully to use and enjoy whatever his farm produceth, the fruits

of the earth, the increase of his flock and the like ; all the improvements he makes, whether by his own proper industry or of those he retains in his service, are his own to use and enjoy without the let, interruption, or denial of any. If he be in any wise injured or oppressed he shall have amends and satisfactions against the party offending. Hence it is that the inhabitants are rich in gold, silver, and in all the necessaries and conveniences of life. They drink no water unless at certain times and by way of doing penance. They are fed in great abundance with all sorts of flesh and fish, of which they have plenty everywhere ; they are clothed throughout in good woollens ; their bedding and other furniture in their houses are of wool, and that in great store. They are also provided with all other sort of household goods and necessary implements for husbandry. Every one according to his rank hath all things which conduce to make life easy and happy."

Now, mark, the period thus glowingly described was one in which to our modern ideas the people lived under every disadvantage. The system of agriculture was extremely primitive, and produced the most miserable results. Wheat did not yield a quarter as much as it does now, and there was no winter keep for the cattle. The times were most turbulent, the roads almost impassable, production was absolutely unaided by any of the machinery and appliances of modern days. Our foreign and even internal trade was insignificant. But in spite of all this there was rough plenty for all classes, for one and one reason only. They held the land in their own right, and enjoyed the fruits of their own industry.

These days of prosperity came to an end in the reign of Henry VIII., who instituted a system of robbery and violence which gradually, and with the utmost cruelty, reduced the most independent, prosperous tenantry in the world into the state of helpless chronic misery in which we find them at the beginning of this century.

This revolution was brought about by depriving the peasants of their land and common rights, and the gradual substitution of the principle of private ownership for the old feudal system, which recognised the rights of the people to the land. Throughout the whole of the Golden Age the landowners had been trying by legal enactment to reduce the wages, and by lawless oppression to reinforce personal service. They naturally very much objected to paying such high wages, and having parted with their rights to forced labour, felt themselves fairly cornered. But so long as the peasantry managed to keep possession of their land all the efforts of their superiors to

impoverish them were fruitless. The only way by which the landowners could bring them on their knees was to dispossess them of their holdings. This they at last managed to accomplish by dint of the most dogged perseverance, and aided by favourable political circumstances, economic development, and foreign mercenaries.

This successful campaign against the rights and property of the common people was opened by King Henry VIII., who wanting money and a divorce from his wife, suppressed the monasteries and confiscated all their lands, giving most of them to court favourites, who breaking all customs and recognising no rights, exacted for the first time in English history competitive rents. Wool being dear, a great deal of land was let to large sheep farmers. From that day the principle on which the institution of private ownership in land is founded began to take possession of the minds of the upper classes. That principle is : that the best use which the land can be put to, is not that which will enable the workers to live in the greatest comfort, happiness, and independence, but that which will enable the landowners to gather the most with the least trouble.

After Henry's first sally there began a determined and ultimately successful effort, all along the line, on the part of the landowners to free themselves of their tenants, and enclose the common fields. I need hardly say that they did not do this by legal enactment, which would have disclosed their designs, and brought the people down upon them from one end of the kingdom to the other. The work was accomplished by a system of continued persecution, force, and fraud, wherever an opening presented itself. The peasantry constantly revolted, but were always worsted by force of arms or treachery, and it is in this period that I believe we first hear of the regular use of foreign mercenaries for the suppression of the people in England, long as the system had flourished abroad.

This is what the good Sir Thomas More says :—

“Therefore that one covetous and insatiable cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and enclose many thousands of acres of ground together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own, or else by coveyn and fraud, or by violent oppression, they be put besides it, or by wrongs and injuries they be so worried that they be compelled to sell all : by one means, therefore, or by other, either by hook or by crook, they must needs depart away poor, silly, wretched souls, men, women, husbands, wives, fatherless children,

widows, woeful mothers with their young babes, and their whole household, small in substance, and much in number, as husbandry requireth many hands. Away they trudge, I say, out of their known and accustomed houses, finding no place to rest in. All their household stuff, which is very little worth, though it might well abide the sale, yet being suddenly thrust out, they be constrained to sell it for a thing of naught. And when they have wandered about till that be spent, what can they then else do but steal, and then justly, pardy, be hanged, or else go about a begging. And yet then, also, they be cast into prison as vagabonds, because they go about and work not; whom no man will set a work though they never so willingly proffer themselves thereto. For one shepherd or herdman is enough to eat up that ground with cattle to the occupying whereof about husbandry many hands were requisite. And this is also the cause why victuals be now in many places dearer."

The process has been long and cruel, and is hardly completed yet, millions of families having been driven to penury, vagrancy, and death. Most of the rough work was done in the time of the Tudors, but there were also terrible doings at the end of last century and the beginning of this, when the long-continued high price of wheat, due to the French wars and protection, together with the great improvement in agriculture, and the high value of wool, gave a fresh impetus to land grabbing; 7,000,000 acres of common land were enclosed during this period, the proportion given to the poor being one in 300. Scotch dales were literally cleared of their inhabitants at one stroke. Chiefs whose loyalty to the English crown had been bought by giving them absolute possession of the soil which belonged to their clans, drove off their own clansmen by the aid of the British bayonet. In Ireland the same thing was going on with, if possible, greater cruelty. As many as 700 people were sometimes turned out of their homes in a day, with nowhere to go, the sick and dying dragged out of their cottages and their home burned down before their eyes, till a whole country side would be ablaze at once. Some of the acts were pure robbery, some legal, as at this time our landowners' parliament framed acts of enclosure by the score, there being little to fear from the country people, who had long since lost all their power of self-defence. Anyone would think that fierce barbarians were laying waste the country with fire and sword instead of English gentlemen acquiring their landed rights.

Amongst the most notorious were the Sutherland evictions, which began in 1807, when a population of 15,000 were almost

all forcibly evicted and replaced by 39 sheep farmers and their shepherds. Here is an account by an eye-witness, Donald M'Leod :—

“In former removals tenants had been allowed to carry away the timber of their old dwellings to erect houses on their new allotments, but now a more summary mode was adopted—by setting fire to them. The able-bodied men were now away after their cattle or otherwise engaged at a distance, so that the immediate sufferers by the general house-burning that now commenced were the aged and infirm, the women and children. . . . The devastators proceeded with the greatest celerity, demolishing all before them, and when they had overthrown all the houses in a large tract of country, they set fire to the wreck. Timber, furniture, and every other article that could not be instantly removed was consumed by fire or otherwise utterly destroyed. The proceedings were carried on with the greatest rapidity and the most reckless cruelty. The cries of the victims, the confusion, the despair and horror painted on the countenances of the one party, and the exulting ferocity of the other, beggar all description. . . . Many deaths ensued from alarm, from fatigue, and cold, the people having been instantly deprived of shelter, and left to the mercies of the elements. Some old men took to the woods and to the rocks, wandering about in a state approaching to, or of absolute insanity; and several of them in this situation lived only a few days. Pregnant women were taken in premature labour, and several children did not long survive their sufferings.”

It was in the time of the Stuarts that the Act of Frauds was passed, and the practical abolition of the land tax was accomplished, and that the lords of the manors relieved themselves of the last remaining dues to the king, while carefully keeping them on their tenants, thus gradually throwing off all burdens from above, as they heaped them on those below. By the Statute of Frauds, which was passed in Charles II.'s reign, all the small freeholders who could not show clear titles were deprived of their land. Now, as many had inherited their holdings from centuries back when custom was law, they naturally never had any titles, and many others had lost them. It would be interesting to know how many of their lords could have found titles for half their possessions. There was something peculiarly and revoltingly mean in this Act.

It hardly needs the saying that these acts of oppression and injustice were accompanied by the most inhuman criminal code, directed against the resistance, crime, and vagrancy inevitably created. Throughout the whole of the Tudor period

a succession of the most barbarous acts were passed against "sturdy beggars," otherwise evicted tenants. They were to be flogged, branded, enslaved, and hanged. Nor were these a dead letter. In Henry VIII.'s reign alone there were from 70,000 to 80,000 vagrants hanged, and this out of a population of under 3,000,000, equivalent to the hanging of nearly a million of our present population in course of little over a generation. Of the brutal criminal code existing at the early part of this century, with its 140 capital offences, we all know.

One gleam of sunshine there was, however, something over a hundred years ago, on the eve of the introduction of machinery and the final swoop on the common lands. Cloth being all made by hand could not be made fast enough, and gave employment to any number of weavers, who, making their own piece of cloth with the aid of their family, and generally being surrounded with a few acres of land, lived in considerable comfort. Prosperity in trade had, in fact, for the moment checked the power of the landowning classes to keep wages down to starvation point, just as it does in the case of skilled labour at present. But there were other contributing causes as well at this period. There had been great improvements in agriculture, and much labour was required and money spent on the large estates to improve them. So what with the great demand for their labour and their still-possessed common rights, the agricultural labourers shared the general prosperity, and wages were very much higher in most parts of the country than they are even now.

Alas, this silver age, as we may call it, lasted but about one generation. The introduction of machinery soon turned the prosperous weavers and their families into factory slaves. Money was made much faster than before, but it went into heaps. The American and French wars sent up wheat to famine prices, which were kept up by protection after their close, and this, in addition to excessive taxation on all articles of consumption, and the rapid enclosure of 7,000,000 acres of land, which the high price of wheat made worth while, brought all classes of labourers down to a state of starvation and misery which it is too painful to dwell on, and out of which they only began to rise about 1850, about which time the Corn Laws were repealed and many other reforms passed, placing some restriction on the merciless power of capital over the helpless and starving multitude.

There has been no improvement in the land laws worth mentioning during the last 40 years. Whatever improvement there has been in the condition of the people has been made in

spite and independently of them. High rents and insecure terms of tenancy have within the last 20 years ruined a generation of farmers and depopulated our villages. Thousands of our poor in London are spending half of their wretched earnings in rent for miserable cellars or garrets which in Soho run from 5s. to 10s. a week. The landowners are taking more than ever. The sole reason for our comparative prosperity is that trade and reform have for the moment gone too fast for the landowners to absorb the benefit all along the line, successful as they have been in keeping well up in some parts.

For 350 years, from 1500 to 1850, the struggle between the landowners to filch the land, and the people to keep it, had been going on. It ended in the complete triumph of the landowners. During the whole of this period, broadly speaking, had trade, manufacture, and rents been increasing, but the position of the working classes deteriorated till it reached a climax in that awful period of misery between about 1780 and 1850. During the French war trade actually doubled, but the rich had been getting richer and the poor poorer.

In this period, unlike the golden age, the poor were surrounded by good farmers, labour-saving machinery, and advantages of every description which their forefathers had never dreamed of, but they shared none. The whole went to those above them who held the land; all the labourers had to do was to work at starvation wages, and live for the most part in cottages not nearly as comfortable as the stable provided for their master's horses.

Private ownership and large estates were fairly established in place of the old Feudal system, which had broken down as it was bound to do. It was altogether too inelastic to accommodate itself to changing economic development, and the fact of the peasants all having their lords, with their rights and privileges over them, was of course a standing menace which was bound to work the ruin of the labourer sooner or later. Apart from this, the Feudal system was incapable of absorbing the gradually growing manufacturing and wage-earning classes, so that independently of the oppression and fraud of the landowning classes in the country, a landless class must have inevitably grown up in the towns.

I have attempted to sketch as clearly as possible in the brief space I have, the rise and fall of the Feudal system, together with the establishment of private ownership and the effect on the labouring population. We have seen that the institution of private ownership in land has taken about 350 years fully to mature, and has been the production not of carefully matured

laws by wise and humane legislation, but of lawless cruelty and intolerable wrong during the whole of that period. Tearing up and trampling down at every step, it has taken its baneful course, like a great Jagannâth rolling over writhing, agonised humanity, sacrificed at its feet, and littering all around its inhuman course ruined homes and blighted hopes, broken hearts and joyless lives; feeding the workhouses, jails, and gallows, starving the poor, fattening the rich, establishing bitter, degrading poverty on the one hand, and dangerous corruption and inordinate wealth on the other, persecuting the weak, aiding the strong. In its very essence it is nothing more or less than the legal recognition and perpetual reward of successful robbery. It is a vast engine to take from producers and give to non-producers, and its power of absorption grows with the amount there is to absorb. And yet we find good people defending this institution as if it were sacred, and sincerely believing that it can only be tampered with at the peril of all rights of property and of the existence of our civilisation.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAY TO MANAGE THE LAND AND GIVE ALL MEN ACCESS TO NATURE'S BOUNTIES.

We have been speaking about the early history of England only in the last chapter, but as a matter of fact, in all primitive communities the common right of the people to the land is recognised and acted upon. The land itself is divided in some sort, and if there are any who have no right to the land they will be slaves. But as civilisation advances and the people, instead of being purely agricultural, begin to have different occupations and to congregate in cities, the old system of dividing the land and rights of pasturage amongst the whole population becomes impossible, and the powerful, always ready to take advantage of their opportunities, begin to add field unto field as fast as economic changes, poverty, death, or successful war allow. Thus the land gradually gets into the hands of the few, while the many are left landless, poor, and dependent. "By force or fraud or violent oppression these poor people needs must go."

On looking calmly at the whole question it appears inevitable that the institution of private ownership in land in more or less absolute form should have taken its place in the evolution of

civilisation. Its growth is natural in certain crude stages. To prevent it requires an advanced development of political life that does not exist, and a scientific knowledge of economic problems which it is impossible should precede the very existence of the problems themselves. Doctors cannot study and find out remedies for diseases before they are known, neither can politicians remove an abuse before it shows itself.

True, the abuse of private ownership in land has shown itself long, and the history of civilisation, properly written, is largely made up of a huge struggle between the many to keep their right to the land and the few to take it from them. But the many blundered and were without method, or at any rate that which they had was unpractical. They had not the whole question before them, and did not rise *en masse* against the whole system, but in part against particular acts of oppression and hardship. They were naturally worsted by the few, who, having political power and economic change ever on their side, won all along the line, though not, of course, without sanguinary conflict and temporary defeats.

In this nineteenth-century Western European civilisation of ours, however, the balance of power is fast changing hands. The development of political liberties, the education of the common people, and the very complication of civilised life all tend in the same direction. Our great landowners, although providing an object-lesson of how the people are robbed, have not the power to injure and oppress individuals which they used to have, and are, comparatively speaking, unable to terrorise them into voting and speaking to order. The people now have the power to right themselves, and are daily acquiring the necessary knowledge and the inclination to use it; for with the continually increasing acknowledgment of the inalienable rights and the common brotherhood of man, comes the ever deepening conviction of the utter incompatibility of the institution of private ownership of land with the realisation of this noble view of human life.

If one may judge from what many people say, the first and in many cases the only thing that occurs to them when they hear of the equal rights of man to the earth, is the country being cut up into equal pieces, all men being turned into peasant proprietors, land being forced on people who do not want and who will not use it, and taken away from those who do want and can use it. They imagine all the parks cut up into patches, and then end up by saying triumphantly, "And then when you have done all this, how long would it last? Why, if you divided it to-day, it would be unequal

to-morrow, and in a few years things would be as bad as ever again."

Now if anything like this were really proposed, it would be just as preposterous as these people think, but nothing of the sort is involved in restoring to all men their equal rights to the use of the earth. If a number of men had equal shares in a ship, for instance, they would not divide the ship into equal parts, nor would they think it necessary that all, or indeed, any of them, should work on the ship, but they would manage it for their common benefit, and would equally divide the profits. Thus, if we recognised that all men had an equal right to the land, we should do exactly the same sort of thing; we should manage the land for the benefit of all, give all equal opportunities to use the earth, but divide the rent—not the land—equally amongst the people; which would in practice mean that the rent would take the place of rates and taxes, and would be used for the benefit of the community.

People often say that they are in favour of municipalising the land but not of nationalising it. As a matter of fact, the one is necessary to the other in any reasonable scheme.

Nationalised the land always has been, is now, and ever will be, in this much, that the nation cannot part with its ultimate control of the land, or the making of the laws that regulate its use, nor yet its power to draw its revenue from this source, or of appropriation for national purposes. If it parted with these rights it would cease to be a nation. The thing has never been suggested by the wildest reactionist. Now in this sense I do not propose to nationalise the land to any greater extent than it is at present, but only to induce the nation *to alter the laws that regulate its use.*

On the other hand, municipalised the land must be, in so much as the management and letting of the land must, in all cases, be in the hands of the municipalities themselves. They would collect and receive the advantages of the ground-rent and work their district, as it were, for their own benefit. The central government would merely make a rate for imperial purposes on the *ground-rents*. Each district would therefore be under its own responsible management, losing or gaining comparatively, as this was good or bad, without interference from the Imperial Government, more than that it must manage the land according to the laws of the country. No other rates or taxes would be necessary, the ground rent being more than sufficient for all imperial and local expenditure; and the vast economy effected in collection, together with the redemption of the national debt and the reduction

or abolition of many other imperial expenses that exist at present, would soon bring the imperial rate down to but a few shillings in the pound.

The idea of a corrupt, incapable centra. management being a necessary accompaniment of land nationalisation is natural enough, but an entire misconception. Nor would the local authorities have any opportunity for jobbery, favouritism, mismanagement and waste in providing, building and carrying out improvements on their tenants' land. They would not, in this way, manage the estate as a great landowner does now. They would simply claim the ground-rent or value of the site that they allowed the tenant to use, everything else would be done by the individual, subject, of course, to such general and sanitary laws as were thought necessary for the benefit and protection of the public. Thus, although the land would be nationalised and the latent authority that the nation possess at present, by law, would at last be used to its full extent for the benefit of the people, as far as the direct control, management, and and benefits were concerned, it would be municipalised. I use the word "nationalised" in these pages simply because it is inclusive.

There is but one way of fairly letting the land, and that is the simplest and most workable. It must be let to those who are willing to pay the most rent for it, as it is now; or in other words the holders of land must pay the market yearly value of the sites they occupy.

We have the cruelties of enforcing a "rack" or strictly competitive rent on a peasantry, who have no alternative but to take the land or starve, so strongly impressed on our minds, that we are obliged to pause a little to clear our vision and balance our judgment, before we see the difference between a competitive rent that is simply an engine to extort the last farthing out of a helpless and dependent population, and the same competitive rent as a means of apportioning national wealth and natural opportunities fairly amongst the people. In the one case the rent is taken away from the workers, in the other it is divided amongst them. Is there no difference between these?

Then, again, it is difficult to understand how any clear-minded person, who will take the trouble to think, can help seeing that nothing short of a rent levied on competitive principles rationally carried out can prevent privilege and favouritism. If the highest bidder is not to have the land, who is? Either the man in possession or the one in influence or favour with the authorities. In the one case a privileged

and landed class would be established, in the other the flood gates would be opened to favouritism, jobbery, and corruption.

Land thrown on the "market" might be let by public tender or auction. In the case of building land a board might be put up stating the best prices offered up to date, and informing the public that it would be let on an appointed day. The man who lost it could take the next plot; there would be plenty for all who wanted. The land should be let on such conditions, however, that when once obtained a man might use it exactly as if it were his own; the board only claiming rent for the site; it need have nothing to do with any buildings or other improvements, which should be the property of the tenant, and which he should be able to sell whenever he liked. No one need be disturbed except for public purposes, when he might have compensation given. The ground rent of an individual need never be pushed up by the direct competition of a greedy and covetous neighbour, for the simple reason that no one ought to have a chance of making a bid for a piece of land unless it happened to be in the market; the rent would gradually rise or fall, as the case might be, by the rent obtained for land thrown into the market from natural causes; periodical revisions being ordered from time to time, according to the necessities of the case.

There would be nothing revolutionary in this. The State tenant would be as secure in his holding as the present owner, who only holds the land on certain conditions—first, that he obeys the sanitary and other laws, secondly, that he pays his rates and taxes of all descriptions; if he fails to do this, he will first have anything he has got on the land sold by Government, and he will then have the land itself sold. The State tenant would hold his land under exactly similar conditions; he must obey the sanitary laws and must pay his ground rent, otherwise similar proceedings would be taken against him to those which would be taken against an owner at present. The State tenant would pay only for the site that he was monopolising. He would not have to pay extra taxes on every improvement he made as he does now, being, in fact, fined for making good use of the land, while his neighbour, who acts the dog in the manger, neither making good use of his land, nor yet allowing anyone else to do so, is practically let off all taxation, and thus encouraged to do nothing.

Rent, and a market-rent, is a necessary medium of justice—is a necessary and perfect means of giving us all, whether we use much or little land, our equal rights to it. It is a market-rent, *and that only*, that can find out the fittest to have the land,

that can decide who is to have the best situation in the town and who the worst, who is to have the farm in the fertile vale and who that on the arid mountain side. If a man no longer thinks it worth his while to pay this rent, he can sell his tenant right as he can his house now and allow some one else to step in his place. All, whether paying rent direct or not, will be deriving the benefit of this communal fund spent for the common good.

CHAPTER IV.

GROUND RENT.

THE POWER OF LANDOWNERS TO ABSORB NATIONAL WEALTH

Ground rent, so long as it is fairly charged, is a natural and beautiful instrument for separating public from private funds, for taking from the individual occupier of a site that which, although passing through his hands, really belongs to the public.

Every political economist admits that ground rent is created by the public as a whole, by their numbers and industry, and not by the individual occupiers of the land who pay it. So long as we require public funds for public needs, what can be more unjust, not to say insane, than to allow this public fund made by and belonging to the community to be absorbed by private individuals, and then set to work to tax private individuals on what is undoubtedly their private property, in twenty clumsy, wasteful ways, to make up the deficiency? It is not even common sense.

Those who have in no way studied political economy may ask to be shown first that ground rent is created by the public and not by the individual occupiers who pay it. The following examples will perhaps make this clear.

A tradesman looking about for a site to build his shop on, is offered two of the same size and frontage, one in the outskirts of the town, at a ground rent of five pounds per annum, one in the centre at fifty pounds. Having plenty of capital and energy he chooses the fifty pound site, because he considers that he will be surrounded by so many more customers and conveniences that, after having paid the extra forty-five pounds a year, he will have more left over for himself in the expensive site than in the cheap. Clearly, the extra forty-five pounds, in spite of its going through his hands, is earned by the community and not by him. If he could earn it by his own individual effort he could earn it as well in one site as in another,

but as a matter of fact he can earn it only with the help and co-operation of the community. Apart from this, it is only fair that if he is allowed to monopolise such a good situation he should pay for it; and pay for it to whom? As a matter of course to the people who make the position so good.

A few years ago there was a quantity of land sold in the Transvaal at public auction for $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per acre. At the same time an Aërated Bread Company gave 14s. per square foot ground rent per annum for the leasehold of a site off the Strand. It would have its shop to build and, in addition to this, its rates and taxes to pay and at the end of the lease would have its building confiscated to the owner of the land. Thus we have the one piece of land worth over fifty-eight million times as much as the other. None of this difference is made by the respective landowners, yet the London ones take the whole of the advantage. The difference is made by the fact of the London site being surrounded by five millions of people working and trading and the Transvaal having, perhaps, only twenty in the same area.

In the same way in agriculture, the excessive rents given for patches of land close to towns, and the difference of the value of land close to good markets and of that which is so far away that the carriage comes to nearly as much as the produce is worth, are manifestly made by the community and not by the individual occupier.

In advocating the rights of the people to the ground rent we ask simply a nation's right to its own, by which alone individuals can be secured in full ownership of what is rightfully theirs. Surely there is nothing for honest men and patriots to dread in this.

It is curious that although everyone admits that a fair rent is a fair thing, and that a man who wants to get a better site than his neighbour without paying for it is wanting an unfair advantage, people have been absolutely careless as to where this fair rent went to. Centuries of usurpation have blinded us to the most barefaced robbery of this, our public fund, which is going on in broad daylight all around us. We wax indignant when we hear of a few perpetual pensions, we talk loud of the expenses of royalty, while we quietly allow landowners to take perpetual and ever-increasing pensions out of us to the amount, say, possibly of £200,000,000, certainly of £150,000,000 a year, which latter sum comes to about £4 per man, woman, and child, or £20 a family per annum all round. This sum would pay much more than all our imperial and local taxation, would pay double the amount, after deducting interest, of the

National Debt and numerous other charges that never had any business to exist.

Landowners are, in fact, given the power to tax their fellow countrymen, and the more an average tenant can make the more the landowners can take. Their power of absorption is absolutely unlimited, as is shown by the fabulous prices and rents obtained for land in our large towns. Clearly this value is communal wealth, and yet it all goes to individuals, while the masses of the people, whose lives and homes it ought to brighten and enrich, live and die all around, starved in mind, body, and soul.

Theoretically, landowners might conduct all the business of the country themselves, if they chose, making all landless men their servants, but practically it is more convenient and profitable for them to let most of the land. They are therefore obliged to allow their tenants to work by the piece and cannot prevent the cleverest and luckiest of them from making fortunes, especially when aided by privileged professions and monopoly businesses, but they can grind down the masses of workers to the lowest possible wages in the long run; although, occasionally, through changes in industry, a flush of trade, or unusual facilities for emigration, this power is temporarily checked, and for the moment, the labourer may get somewhat higher wages. The capitalists are also servants to the landowners, and are not allowed long to obtain more than a certain amount of interest, but they, of course, like others, work by the piece, and in spite of the rent or royalty being the utmost that the average man can pay, the cleverest of them can make money.

It is all important that this should be thoroughly understood, and that it should be seen that the worker is in no sense a partner of the landowner, but is simply his servant. More profit to the landowner does not mean more wages to the worker; indeed, the rent has no influence on the rate of wages paid—in many cases wages are actually lower on very productive, than on comparative unproductive land.

For instance, in the Lowlands of Scotland, where a few years ago land was letting at £5 an acre, the labourers were as miserably paid as any in the country, simply because they were dependent on the farmers for employment, while in Northumberland, where the land was only worth about a quarter as much, the labourers were about the best paid, because they were comparatively independent, and could get work in the mines and elsewhere.

Then, again, thirty years ago, in Norfolk, where rent had risen through an improved system of agriculture, from 2s. 6d.

and 5s. an acre to 20s. and 30s. on light land, and where farmers were driving their carriage and pair, the wages of the labourers were only 7s. to 11s. a week. They had not risen at all with the increased value of the land. They only rose about 1871, when the state of trade in the manufacturing and mining districts enabled the labourers for a time to demand more wages, and it has been notable that in spite of the long depression in agriculture the wages, with possibly a few exceptions, have, since then, only fallen in the districts where the labourers are entirely dependent on the farmers for employment.

The amount landowners can gain from the land, then, has nothing to do with the wages they will give. Wages are solely regulated, and always will be, by the amount labourers are able to "demand," and they will never be able to demand a fair wage until the equal right of man to the land and to the profits accruing from its use are recognised.

It matters not where you look, the same results are seen. If a new process is introduced in agriculture which makes the land more productive, if a new use is found for ironstone which makes it more valuable, if a town grows up on the site of a farm, docks where mud used to be, or a beautiful watering place where formerly there was but a desolate seashore, neither the labourer nor the capitalist gets the advantage for long. The owner of the land will sooner or later step in and take it all. It is true he is always a little behind, but his advance is none the less certain for that, and what he loses in a rising market when the farmer makes a little money before the rent is clapped on, he gains in a falling market, which absorbs a great part of the farmer's capital before he reduces the rent.

It came out in the Royal Commission lately held on the Crofter question, that the Duke of Argyle had during the last 30 years doubled the rent of one of his islands, and that during the same period the population had been reduced to one-half, so that the people now have to pay four times as much rent per head as they had before. Now what difference does it make to these crofters what the taxes are, so long as they are under the absolute control of the Duke, who can take all from them that the taxgatherer leaves? What difference does it make to the people whether they pay the money to the Duke or the Crown? Is it not plain that this Duke had the legal right to a tax, not of a fixed amount, but as much as the people could pay, and the taxes are not spent for their good and protection, as the taxes of the Crown are supposed to be, but for the sole good of the Duke, who need not, and often does not, return a

penny in any form. This must be clear enough to anyone, but what people don't recognise is that this power to tax is in no way diminished by the land being divided up amongst a number of smaller landowners. The small men are generally harder taxmasters than the large, and it is no compensation to the taxpayer that he is supporting a small instead of a big landowner.

In London, the ground rent comes to many millions a year, over twenty; a great deal of this goes from the East to the West, goes from the poor children who are working in noisome garrets, with their tiny fingers numbed with cold in the winter, without hope, without relaxation, without sufficient air, light, food, or clothing, it goes from these poor children and equally ill-paid adults, to idlers who spend as much in food and dress in a day as these poor things earn in a year. This money, when, wrung out of the incessant toil of these poor people, is flung about for their personal gratification by those who have nothing to do with making it, but who have inherited or purchased the "right" to extract it from thousands.

But I am told that at any rate a good many get advantages out of the system. Advantage! and out of whom? Not out of the comparatively well-to-do, they get at least their share under the present system; not from the idlers and people who won't work, that we hear spoken of with such virtuous indignation by their high-class comrades, nor yet from the criminal classes; it is quite evident that these people do not supply the luxuries of life. The advantage is got, then, out of the "hard-working, honest poor," and from them alone is the money extracted.

Out of the poor town labourers, working for 16s. a week, out of the agricultural labourer at 10s. a week, when he can get it; out of children who are making matchboxes at 2¼d. a gross, and women who make trousers at 2½d. a pair, and earn 1s. in a day of 17 hours. It is out of these people—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—slowly dying, starving for want of food, clothes, warmth, air, a little relaxation and change. It is the land laws that are responsible for all this; it is these laws that first defraud, then degrade, and then debauch the people, as Michael Davitt so truly puts it.

Is there any language strong enough to condemn the institution which perpetrates such pitiless robbery?

People do not recognise that undeserved wealth means a corresponding amount of undeserved poverty, that the unearned increment so glibly spoken of does not come from the moon but from the toils of the poor, and is taken as mercilessly as

Shylock would have had his pound of flesh according to "bargain." Indeed, so long as the poor are placed in so pitiable and helpless a position that they are obliged to compete one against the other for the right to earn a bare living and dwell in a house, it is difficult to see how it can be otherwise. If a benevolent landowner remitted the rent no permanent good would result, a middle-man or someone else would derive the benefit, as the cause of the evil which is the helplessness of the people and not the greediness of the landowner would have been undisturbed. It is the system, not the individual, that is to blame.

CHAPTER V.

SLAVERY.

Landless men are, according to law, absolutely dependent on landed men who could, by combination, so far as the law is concerned, turn them all out of the country, bag and baggage, doing collectively only what they have so often done individually when clearing Scotch valleys for deer parks or destroying Irish homes for cattle graziers. English noblemen have bought large districts in the United States where they can deal with American subjects as they like and keep them off the land altogether if they choose, and Americans have returned the compliment by buying up Scotch glens and clearing them of British subjects, the only man entitled by English law to live on the soil being the American citizen who purchases it.

Of course, as a matter of practice, although landowners clear islands and districts of their population, they could not clear a country like England, the fountain-head of legislation, even if it were their interest to do so. The progress they have made in this direction, however, in the agricultural districts in the Highlands of Scotland and almost all over Ireland is surprising, and does more credit to the capabilities of the landowner than to the spirit of the people for quietly submitting.

If you read the terms of a building lease in a large town, or a royalty lease, you will find all dictation and take on one side, and submission and pay on the other. The landowner risks nothing and lays out nothing, the tenant pays all and risks all. In these leases, therefore, as in the petty, mean tyranny and paternal government that prevails in so many of our agricultural villages, the ugly word slavery is distinctly branded. "Take my terms or go" or "Go, I offer you no

terms." The principle of private ownership in land is the principle of slavery, of dependence of one man on another; and this shows itself in practice as plain as daylight when opportunity affords, however much the personal power to oppress may sometimes be hidden behind the general power to tax.

The terms which the masters are able to exact from their slaves vary, however, very materially; where the estates are very large and the slaves so poor and dependent that they practically cannot move, the slavery is nearly as absolute as personal slavery. In many instances the landowners make and administer their own laws according to their own fashion, and if the laws will not cover any particular offence it matters little, as they have other ways of punishing the people who belong to them. They can boycott them and deprive them of all chance of earning a livelihood, break their hearts, starve their families, and end perhaps, after turning them out of their cottages, by sending them to prison for loitering about in search of game, or being found sleeping in an outhouse without visible "means of subsistence." They can make an example of them in fact. This power they have, and this power they often use; and this is slavery. It is as idle to justify it because the extensive use of this power is not usual, as it is to justify personal slavery because extra barbarity on the part of the masters may in some countries have been the exception. When people are dependent on the chance cruelty or benevolence of others, they are slaves.

This power of governing and punishing the people cannot be carried out when the landowners are numerous, and where commercial principles creep in. In these cases, the slaves may do pretty much as they like so long as they pay for the right of the use of the earth. All that the landowners in the towns care about and can exact of them is money; the slave can defy and insult him, and refuse to work for him, and sue him for assault, but he cannot get out of paying him tribute, he cannot live in a house, manufacture or buy an article, without paying blackmail at every stage. Political, social, or religious slavery is changed only for the grinding tyranny of money. The latter state is, in many respects, worse than the first; public opinion, restrictive laws, and personal benevolence on the part of the landowner all modify and ameliorate the former description of slavery, but nothing of the sort has much effect on the latter. Rise in value, as it is called in towns, that is the increased power of the landowner to take from the worker, and the increased dependence of the latter on the former, drifts along

with all its attending evils independently and in spite of personal effort. The destitution and misery of our poor in London garrets and cellars would bring public odium to any individual personally responsible. But when the responsibility can be put off the individual on to the social system, it is regarded as one of the inevitable dispensations of Divine Providence.

The North American slaves were freed, but the slave owners were left in possession of the land, and as a consequence the slaves are as dependent on their masters as ever. The masters are, however, freed from much burdensome responsibility, and get more work out of their slaves than they did before. Henry George says it is acknowledged amongst the negroes that they are worse off materially now under the pitiless social system which casts them adrift to look after themselves without the means of being independent, than they were as slaves when the masters were bound by law to feed and look after them, and were held personally responsible for their well being.

We have heard a great deal of indignation about boycotting in Ireland, from a class who have practised boycotting themselves in all ages. An instance appears in the *Democrat* of March 20th, 1888. Allan Gilmour, a Scotch laird, prosecuted ten men for poaching, but the case was dismissed by the Sheriff's substitute. Allan Gilmour then writes thus: "I have intimated to the committee for distributing charity that I shall in future withdraw all subscriptions towards any charitable purpose whatever in the village, if any assistance is given by them to any of the under-named or their families." The names then follow. "I am requesting every tenant on the estate to withhold all occupation or employment from the above-mentioned ten men. Other names will be added as occasion requires." This is a little barefaced and thorough, certainly, but it in no way differs from the sort of thing that has gone on and does and always will go on where the people who live on the land are dependent on the men who own it.

We boast that we have perfect religious liberty in England; the members of our National Church go further, and say we have perfect religious equality. Here is an example of the sort of religious liberty and equality that some of our villages have. In 1879, Mr. McAulay, a Wesleyan minister, was trying to get permission from Mr. Langhorne Barton for the continuation of religious services in the village of Bay Enderby, in Lincolnshire, which had been suddenly interdicted, although they had been held for 30 years. After referring to Mr. McAulay's proposal to continue the meetings in a cottage, Mr. Barton writes thus: "The result of such a step on your part

would probably be the removal from Bay Enderby of all the members of your body, who are of little value to me as tenants. I have a wish to have as tenants none but thorough Church people, and consider myself quite at liberty to choose such as I like without being dictated to by anybody. . . . Your letter I have placed in my rector's hands, and beg to state in conclusion that I will write to you again should occasion require it." I admire this man, he is straightforward.

The landowners tell us that we are free, but that everything that is necessary for our existence belongs to them. We may please ourselves whether we make use of the land or not, just as the man who has fallen into the sea may please himself whether he makes use of the boat which belongs to someone else. He is perfectly free; he has the happy alternative of making a bargain with the man in the boat or getting drowned.

CHAPTER VI.

EFFECT ON LABOURER, FARMER, AND AGRICULTURE GENERALLY.

In an ordinary "close" village, the agricultural labourer has no social status whatever; he has no rights to opinions of his own. Only two or three people in the village have. He is of no account except as a labourer. He cannot provide himself with employment or with a home. The employment provided for him by others is far from regular, miserably paid, and he is often thrown out of work in the winter, just when his expenses are most and the need for food and fire the greatest. When he is ill he gets on somehow with the kindness of squire, parson or farmer; when he is out of work he gets on nohow. Without hope, holiday, relaxation, or any share in the comforts and luxuries he is enabling others to enjoy, he works through summer's heat and winter's tempests to a pauper's allowance and grave. Is it any wonder that he is often slow and spiritless, and that he takes no interest in his work, as is so often complained of?

The difference between the positions of the landowner and the labourer is simply that one holds the land and the other does not. Since the law has taken it from the one and given it to the other, the law of the land only is responsible for all this. It follows, then, that if the law were altered and the labourer had as good a right to the land as the present landowner, instead of having a village with a few idlers living in luxury

and many workers in poverty, we might have none but workers all living in independence and comfort, according to their respective abilities and industry.

Unnatural differences being abolished instead of created by law, natural and healthy differences only would remain. The total income would, moreover, be vastly increased by the better use which the land would be put to and the superior labour of a free and prosperous man working for himself.

In order to put the labourer in a position to demand a fair wage, he must be in a position to work on the land for himself on the same just conditions as his would-be employers. A cottage farm of five or six acres would enable a man to provide himself with all the first necessities of life, and with the help of outside wages, put him in a thoroughly comfortable position, as I have shown in my pamphlet, "Village Politics and Cottage Farms." Such a farm, a labourer ought to be able to get from the local authority, at nearly the same rent as the farmer pays for similar land and on such conditions and security that he could use it as if it were his own, build his cottage, plant his fruit trees, manure and drain his land, with the knowledge that he would neither have his rent raised on his own improvements, nor yet be disturbed so long as he paid it, and that at any time he could sell his tenant-right, that is, his buildings and improvements to the highest bidder, did he want to leave.

The result of such a change in the laws would not make all labourers cottage farmers, but by giving to all the opportunity and right, it would leaven the whole of society, practically put an end to the "unemployed," and enable those who worked for the farmers to make a fair bargain, and say, "You must pay me so much, or I will work on the land on my own account instead of yours. If your machinery, capital, and method will not leave you a profit after paying the same rent for the land as I do, and giving me the same wages that I can earn for myself, there is no room in social economy for you, nobody wants you and you must find another occupation." As a matter of fact, I think there will always be a most useful sphere for large farmers to supply the wholesale markets. Bearing in view how enormously ordinary manufactures are facilitated by being carried on in large concerns, where alone the best machinery and the most economical division of labour are possible, it is difficult to believe that farming should form altogether an exception to the rule.

There are, however, and, as far as we can see, always will be some smaller industries, where personal superintendence and

hand labour are indispensable, that will be best carried on in a small way. For the same reason it appears likely that there will always be some forms of agriculture carried on as well or better in a small way than in a large. We cannot yet conceive of machinery gathering fruit, pruning trees, or setting out strawberry runners, for instance, and as long as this must be done by hand, the hand that belongs to the man most interested in the result will do it the best.

Then, again, there is a great difference between growing for the market and growing for oneself, so that much of the disadvantage of cultivating small holdings would be balanced where the produce was consumed on the spot, instead of passing through the hands of several middlemen, with expenses and profits added to the cost with each transfer, and by a little combination among, say, a dozen cottage farmers in a team of horses, implements and machinery, other disadvantages of small culture would largely disappear.

I do not, however, urge the opportunity of cottage farming being given to the labourer because it is the best system of cultivating the land, although in many instances this may be the case, but *as a simply invaluable means of giving him an opportunity of an independent livelihood, of putting him in a fair position to make a bargain and demand a fair wage, of putting in the bottom rung of the ladder, which Mr. Bright said was taken out for the agricultural labourer.*

Nor need we be afraid of there not being land enough; there is plenty for all classes of farming. There are, roughly speaking, two acres for every inhabitant in the United Kingdom, or ten acres for an average family of five. Thus if a quarter of the population were agriculturalists instead of less than a twentieth as is the case now, we should have forty acres a family, or thirty acres after allowing twenty-five per cent. off for town roads, wastes, etc. It will thus be seen that, after all who wanted had had their five or six acres allotted, there would be plenty left for larger farms.

As for farmers, they are workers like labourers, and the interests of all workers are the same. They simply want justice and opportunity given to work to the greatest advantage, with security for the products of their industry. It is idlers only that require injustice to enable them to secure the productions of others.

The only conditions under which agriculture can be continuously carried on with success are simple and obvious enough.

First, the farmer should be owner of what we will call the

“tenant-right;” that is, all improvements which are due to individual industry. This tenant-right he should be able to sell to the highest bidder whenever he likes.

Secondly, he should have security of tenure at a fair but revisable rent. Under these simple conditions depression in agriculture would cease, a farmer would be secure of his capital and would never be driven to discharge his men; if he improved his tenant-right he would be the gainer, if he depreciated it he would be the loser, and it would therefore be his interest to keep his land in good condition.

The revisable rent is perhaps the most important thing of all, for is it not true that ever since the days of Joseph, we have been having, metaphorically speaking, seven fat years followed by seven lean, and that we are always likely to have these ups and downs? We have not only the variable bounty of Nature to contend with, but the variable price of the produce we grow, as well as that most important modifier of rents, the shifting and growth of population. With our present system, during the seven fat years rents go up and all goes well, the farmer, at any rate, getting his share of the profit; but when the pinnacle is reached, and the lean years set in, what then? Why, the landowners who have raised their standard of living during the fat years, will not lower the rents until both the farmers and the land are ruined, labourers dismissed, tradesmen left unpaid, and depression of trade spread over the whole country.

Is it not obvious that we ought to follow Joseph's example, and save up during the seven fat years, that we may give out during the lean? Is it not obvious that, as soon as the lean years set in, the rent ought to drop, not only immediately, but sufficiently; and that if that were the case, the farmer could go on as usual during the lean years, could keep his men employed, his land well cultivated and manured, and his tradesmen paid, the only difference being that he would pay, roughly speaking, as much less rent as he received less for his produce? Trade would go on as usual, agricultural labourers would not flock to the towns to compete with the labourers there, and the country would not be depopulated. This can only be done by nationalising the land, when the community with its large and variable income from other sources would be able without inconvenience to take less rent on agricultural account as occasion demanded, even if it did not actually save up during the fat years as Joseph did. At present too many landowners not only consume all in prosperous times, but increase their scale of living and the charges on their estates to

such an extent that a return to the old rents is little less than ruin in many cases. Under these circumstances it is natural and inevitable that nothing short of the compulsion brought about by the impoverishment and bankruptcy of their tenants will force them to materially reduce their rents. Until these simple truths are realised and acted upon, farmers will always be periodically in great distress, and their distress will be followed by that of the labourers, tradesmen, artisans, landlords, and in fact, all classes of the community.

People conversant with agriculture only can fully realise what ruin an excessive rent brings on. When a farmer pays in rent £100 without return, instead of spending it in labour and manure, in which case there would be a return, or is obliged to sell his stock at a disadvantage or refrain from keeping or buying stock that the land ought to have on it, he not only loses the £100, but at least another £100 in indirect losses, and this, of course, increases year by year. In this way, the ignorance, greediness, or necessities of the landowners ruined thousands of capable farmers and impoverished and threw out of cultivation millions of acres of land between 1876 and 1886.

It has been calculated that during these ten years the farmers of England lost one hundred million pounds of their capital, and that during the same period the landowners received six times that amount in rent. Assuming this estimate to be correct, it follows that if the landowners had taken five hundred millions instead of six hundred, and made the reduction soon enough, and on the right lands, the farmers might have retained their capital, and all would have been going smoothly. In times of depression, it is not that agriculture does not pay, but that the sleeping partners are taking too much. They get helped first instead of last.

CHAPTER VII.

EFFECT ON TOWNS AND THE MANUFACTURING POPULATION.

Any reform which enabled the agricultural population to find plenty of employment, and to live in comfort and independence *without drawing the belt of privilege around them—without giving them any advantages that all were not equally welcome to enjoy*, would inevitably have an instantaneously beneficial effect on the urban population.

The country people would no longer work in industrial

villages, making clothes, for instance, at prices that are starvation for the townsfolk who must compete with them, and little better for themselves. Nor yet would the less skilled workers in the towns be driven down to the pitiable wages they are now by the grim competition of the unemployed, struggling for existence with numbers daily augmented from the country.

The rural population would migrate into the towns by inclination only, instead of force; and although young men would, no doubt, still often seek a town life and learn a town occupation, their parents would no longer be driven from a home they loved and an occupation they understood, to compete for the lowest wages, the most precarious occupations, and the vilest dwellings that disgrace civilisation. There would also be a not inconsiderable emigration from the town into the country, of grown men who understood and liked agriculture, and of lads who longed for pure air and a country life.

The direct raising of wages is, however, only a part of the work to be done. A matter of more than equal importance is to improve the surroundings of the working population, to put health, beauty, and hope within the reach of all; to raise the standard not only of comfort but of self respect and the respectability of the working classes; to make a man ashamed, for instance, of walking the street at night, unchanged and unwashed; and more than all, to make possible and encourage higher and nobler views of human life and aims, without which no material prosperity can be of any lasting good. To do this, we must surround a man with something better than miserable rows of shabby, dirty cottages, relieved only by a public-house here and there, without a solitary attempt at anything beautiful or cheerful—any influence to elevate him, or any pastimes to invigorate him and afford him that enjoyment so necessary for the development of a healthy mind and body.

It is difficult to see how any material rise in the wages of the better paid of our workpeople is going to benefit any but a few, so long as the surroundings are such as to suggest little but demoralising ways to spend their extra earnings.

There is, in the nature of things, nothing very costly and nothing more than we can well afford, in making even the portions of our towns where working men dwell, healthy and beautiful, dotted all over with public gardens, with space for such games as lawn-tennis and bowls, with play-grounds, gymnasiums, and baths, and at greater distances, recreation grounds or parks; with pleasant, well-furnished assembly rooms and halls, and roads made cheerful with trees and bright looking houses. In these

and countless other ways, quite out of the scope of this short pamphlet to dwell upon, would the people be made richer, not by having more money to spend, but by being surrounded with advantages free, that large incomes even can hardly secure now. The reason these things are at present impossible is simply that that blighting institution, private ownership of land, stands in the way. Its action is two-fold. It first demands such an exorbitant price for the land that the cost is out of the question; it next deprives us of the constantly increasing ground-rent, which is the natural fund for providing and supporting all things that benefit the public.

If the land belonged to the nation, a public garden placed where the Bank of England now stands, or any other valuable place in London, would cost us not the present ground-rent of the position, say about £50,000 per acre, but simply the agricultural value, of perhaps £2 an acre. True, we should be losing £50,000 in ground-rent that we could have obtained for that particular spot, but, all the land belonging to the nation, it would not matter whether we got it off that particular spot or not, so long as we got it. The great banking and other houses would be in London all the same; they would simply be a step farther out, with their rent-paying capacity enhancing the value of the part of the town next nearest to the centre, the effect of which would gradually decrease, with distance, as a ripple would on the smooth surface of a lake. When the outskirts of the town were reached, the only difference would be (other things being the same) that another acre of agricultural land would be used for building. The ground-rent would be the same as before, minus the agricultural value of that piece of land. If the community would look after its own business and claim its own property, it could thus have any spaces it liked in the towns at nominal cost.

All improvements in our towns could be carried on with the greatest ease and economy, the cost of widening a road or clearing a space for any other public purpose simply being the value of the property to be pulled down, plus, say, ten per cent., which it would only be fair to pay for disturbance. In many cases of real improvement, the ground-rent might actually be enhanced in the town as a whole, in spite of extensive clearances. A remarkable instance of this is furnished by Birmingham, the corporation of which bought up, at excessive valuation and enormous cost (between £300,000 and £400,000 more than its value, according to the evidence of Mr. Chamberlain before a Royal Commission) a great district in the centre of the town and made a financial success of it. The citizens are already

deriving a handsome revenue from this source, for this one reason: they had enough pluck to buy a sufficient area, so that they would derive the advantages of their own improvements instead of allowing neighbouring landowners to profit by them, as is usually the case, and they had foresight enough not to part with the land obtained, thus securing the future unearned increment.

We are huddled together, with no gardens, or playgrounds, or any sort of public spaces, not in order that the landowners, as a whole, shall get the uttermost farthing out of us, but in order that those at the centres of population shall do so. With a more extended township, and those ugly gaps of unused land waiting for buyers filled up on the outskirts, the total ground-rent would probably be more than at present, and small towns, at any rate, might be at least as convenient and compact for business purposes. If we allowed as much as a quarter of an acre for a family even, and twenty per cent. for the public, there would be a population of 10·240 to a square mile.

The more we look into the matter and compare the ease with which improvements of the most vital importance to the health, morals, and enjoyment of the people, could be carried out by state ownership and municipal management of the land, the stronger must be our condemnation of the present stupid, bungling, wasteful system that a people, supposed to be intelligent and free, still allow to continue.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRADE, CAPITAL, AND COMPETITION.

I confess I am no Socialist in the ordinary acceptance of the term. I do not advocate any direct attempt to nationalise capital and am even old-fashioned enough to have the greatest dread of state interference or management of business except those which in their nature are monopolies, such as gas and water works, electric lighting, railways, canals, docks, tramways, postal and telegraphic service, which should of course belong to, and be managed by the community they affect. I love individual freedom and independence—that is one reason why I am so ardent a land nationalist—and like the poor wild creatures who starve in the slums

rather than enter the workhouse, I feel that I would rather have liberty even with hardship than be well-fed and housed under perpetual law and order and officialdom. At the same time I admit that with the growing complexity of society, and industrial development, it is highly probable that we should work and very likely live to a large extent in co-operative societies of some sort.

Under the existing state of things, competition instead of being honourable is for the most part nothing but a greedy struggle to get trade from others ; and freedom in our industrial system means little more than the liberty of the strong to trample on the weak. But is all this because honourable competition to excel in business and the necessary freedom to go your own way and make your own bargains are in themselves wrong, or is it that they have never yet had fair conditions to work under, or a clear course for a trial? To place men on land and tell them to make the best use they can of it, and that the better they do, the better off they will be, is one thing, but to take the land away from them and then say, "Now scramble for it and see who can pay the most for the privilege of using it," is quite another.

Put ten men into a clay field to make bricks and build themselves houses ; so long as the field belonged equally to all, and so long as there was plenty of clay for all, could the man who built himself a beautiful mansion be said to be stopping the man who only built himself a hovel from doing likewise? So far from doing this he would by his example be giving the man with the hovel a better chance of building the mansion than he would have, had the mansion never been built. If, however, the men had not an equal right to the field, or if they were placed on it with the understanding that the most successful man would be able to buy the field, it would be very different. The successful man would buy up the opportunities of the weaker ones, and by doing this would make it impossible for them to build at all without his leave ; so the successful in this case not only would not help his weaker brother, but he would be able to crush both him and his children ; he would be able to perpetuate and multiply the original differences between his labour and that of his less industrious or clever brother. The competition of capital means one man having something instead of another. The competition of labour, as long as all have the same field to work on, is the same as the competition of boys at school ; it is a competition of who can learn the most for himself, not at the expense of his neighbour, but by his own exertions. It is honourable emulation instead of

ignoble forestalling. The boy who reads the best, so far from preventing the other boys from reading well, gives them a good example and helps to stimulate better reading, so long as the teaching is the same; if, however, the boy who could read the best could monopolise the master for the future, the case would be quite different, and by his success he would deprive his schoolfellows of all chance.

Competition of labour without monopoly would be as helpful to the hindermost as with monopoly it is destructive; the hindermost could take advantage of all the knowledge possessed by the leaders, and would at all times have equal access to natural opportunities.

What irony to ask a lot of landless men to show a spirit of independence and self-reliance and enter into honourable competition as to who amongst them can pay the most rent.

Under the present conditions, the faster civilisation can run, the greater its handicap. Double the wealth-creating power, and the scramble to obtain a livelihood is greater than ever, the landowner simply walking behind and taking up the advantage in rents and royalties. In this way have great landowners' incomes been increased from tens to hundreds of thousands.

There are three things necessary for production, viz. : land, labour, and knowledge. It is nonsense to say that capital is a necessity. Capital is only a help, it is the creation of the other three and must have been anticipated by them. If capital had been necessary to production nothing would ever have been produced. Of these three, labour belongs to the individual; knowledge, which is fast being nationalised, is the result of unknown ages of human progress and development; but land, the precursor of both labour and knowledge, without which neither could have existed at all—land which so far from being the creation of man, has taken a supreme and superhuman power countless ages to develop into a form useful to, and possible for, the existence of man—land which is in itself even incomplete and incapable of supporting life without the light and heat of that marvellous blazing orb the sun, the vastness and activity of which entirely surpasses human comprehension—land, I say, is still private property, actually parcelled out by right of bits of parchment to individuals, and this not by savages without a moral religion, but pre-eminently by Christian governments who profess to believe in the common brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God, by those who profess and, no doubt, think that we are all equal before our **Maker**, and ought to be equal before the law.

By such is the institution of private ownership of land supported, which deprives the great mass of men of their birthright by forbidding them any right of access to the bounties of nature.

Under the dark shadow of this institution, countless cruelties and injustices are daily perpetrated by men who would never dream of doing such things even if they had the power, had not the system under which they lived hardened them to it, and trained them in the fixed belief, latent if unexpressed, that the best use to which land can be put, is not that which will conduce most to the health, happiness, and morality of the people, but that which will enable the owners to extract most out of the necessities of their fellow men with the least trouble.

To follow up the argument, if we nationalise the land, the first necessity of production, and recognise that we have a right to *use* the earth only, and not to *own* it, the result will be that capital (which although vast in itself, compared with knowledge and land is but a drop in the ocean, but the creation of one moment to decay the next) would take its natural place as servant and helper of labour, its creator, instead of its master and tyrant.

Capital has no natural power to oppress, but it has artificial and legal power given to it when it is allowed to buy man's first necessity, the land, not to speak of other natural monopolies, just in the same way that it had the power to enslave men when the slave trade and slavery were legal in America. It could then rig out ships and enslave men who were before free. But people who disapproved of slavery did not attack capitalists but boldly said, "We ought to tell the legislature plainly and strongly that no man has a right to property in man, and that there are 800,000 individuals sighing in bondage under the intolerable evils of West Indian slavery who have as good a right to be free as we ourselves have." This, bear in mind, was considered quite as preposterous in those days as the idea that no man has a right to property in land is in these.

It was the unjust land laws that supplied the factory slaves to the manufacturers to work to death in the early age of machinery, and it is these that supply the miserably paid labour of to-day. It is unjust land laws that deprive men of natural independence and ability to make a fair bargain. It is these that drive men to the vain endeavour to make up for the loss of their natural power of self-defence by unions and strikes, a pitiable alternative indeed, however excusable and

necessary it may be, in the present state of things, in order to allow a disinherited people to show their teeth.

The advocates of *laissez faire*, the disbelievers in strikes, the supporters of the rights of capital, would work heart and soul for land nationalisation had they their eyes open, for the present failure of their pet theories is so patent and disgraceful that forces are gathering to assail their whole position in numbers that make success, as far as the destruction of the *laissez faire*, inevitable, whatever else they may fail in. If the Manchester School believe in their theories, they had better give them a fair field to work on by *leaving men alone* to make use of nature's bounties, instead of first depriving them of their mother earth and then *leaving them alone* to scramble for it. The more they are able to pay, the more they are charged, the plum being always held well out of the reach of all but the strongest. The Manchester School have yet to learn that it is a wicked thing first to take away the land from the people and then to starve them, and that no comfortable theories in political economy can make it right.

Anything that would more equally distribute wealth would improve trade. Good and regular earnings for the working classes mean good and regular trade; they at least have natural investments for their wages, for they have wants which need satisfying, of food, houses, clothes, and furniture, wants which could easily be satisfied if access to land was not denied. Many of the rich, on the contrary, have satisfied all their wants already, and therefore look out for fresh investments for the extra millions that come rolling in, and for extra trade with foreign parts to make those investments remunerative. This leads to the wildest speculation and alternate inflation and depression of trade, the latter, of course, accompanied by many fortunes lost and homes ruined, to say nothing of the thousands of working men who are thrown on the verge of starvation.

Periodical depression in trade was unknown before the introduction of machinery, and over-production was unheard of. What the so called over-production really means is that the enormously increased means of producing wealth caused by machinery were not accompanied by such rise of wages as would give the workers a corresponding power to consume; so far from this being the case, their wages were actually reduced. The inevitable result of this was that, so long as the masters were not able to consume all the surplus themselves, the market would be glutted. Thus we find the Manchester School pushing open foreign markets by foul means as well as

fair, in order to sell the very goods which their own work-people were starving for at home.

At this time the capitalists, with the aid of landlordism, were masters of the field and were making cent. per cent. profit. Had the people been able to demand their own, however, which I maintain they could have done under a just land system, and kept say, 75 per cent. more of production of their own industry, for their own use, there would have been no over-supply and no foreign commercial wars would have been necessary. The people's power of consumption will always keep pace with their ability to produce, so long as they get fairly paid. When they have as much as they require, they will begin to slack work and enjoy more of the pleasures and refinements of life instead of "over-producing," as factory slaves are driven to do.

With the more equal distribution of wealth would necessarily come a more healthy and less grinding competition, and with this a better use of capital and human effort, so much of which is worse than wasted in the hundred ways where competition at present means commercial warfare quite as destructive, almost as cruel as real war. Co-operation in almost every walk of life would, it appears to me, inevitably become the rule, this again helping to bring capital and competition into their proper places in our social system.

Our present system, which is founded on the robbery from the producer of all that the holder of the land and his henchman, vested interest, can get out of him, is as much death to healthy and regular industry as the blackmailing and highway robbery of old. There is but one road to honest and healthy trade and that is by such just laws as will encourage it and give the workers the only help they require, that is, the power to help themselves, restoring to them their birthright, watching over them and protecting them in their toils, securing to them instead of depriving them of the fruits of their industry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAY TO REGAIN THE LAND.

It is hardly worth while dwelling much on schemes for regaining the land, for if once the people have made up their minds that it is just and necessary for their welfare that they should have it, a way will very soon be found, and although it may be well to think out beforehand the just and reasonable principles that should guide us, or even to go as far as to

elaborate a scheme in order to show unbelievers that it can be done, nevertheless all politicians must know that it is impossible to foresee what will be the best scheme practicable, until the time arrives and we know with what forces we have to deal.

More than this, if we keep true to our traditions we shall simply drift into it piece-meal, blundering along without any scheme at all till the thing is half done. There is one plan, however, that of confiscation, that we may rest assured will not be carried out, as the gradual growth of public opinion will have reached the stage of compensating landowners, and what is more to the point, have put it in practice long before it was "educated" up to confiscation. Confiscation would be possible only if we lived under a despotism that would not yield till it broke, but under a constitutional government which passes into law the changes which the people have thoroughly made up their minds about, the thing is impossible.

No less a man than Henry George advocates a scheme of piecemeal confiscation by a gradually increasing land-tax which should finally absorb all rent. This would avoid the violence of a revolution and might be supposed to travel in some sort with public opinion. There are grave objections to a scheme, however, which involves a long and fierce struggle between the landowners and the people, and does not, in the meantime, give the people possession of the land or the benefit of the unearned increment, to say nothing of the undoubted power of the landowners to increase the rent as rates and taxes are taken off their tenants, which makes many think that the whole scheme is economically at fault.

Here is a plan which would, I think, work smoothly and avoid these difficulties, which I suggested in the *Westminster Review* of May, 1890.

1.—Reimpose the 4s. in the pound land tax as a part of a comprehensive scheme for land nationalisation. This would depreciate land values 20 per cent.

2.—Use the money thus obtained in purchasing land, and not in relieving rates and taxes, the benefit of which would, according to many able thinkers, ultimately filter back to the landowners in the form of increased rents.

3.—The rent accruing from the land purchased to be used, at first at any rate, for the purchase of more land.

4.—To avoid the enormous expenses of valuation by arbitration and the excessive values so often given, the landowners should be obliged to assess their own land in detail. Thus, if the assessment were too low, they would be bought out at

their own valuations ; if too high, their taxes would be proportionately heavy. They would be in the position of the boy who is allowed to divide the apple, but obliged to give his play-fellow the first choice. They would be obliged to assess fairly.

It may be urged, as an objection to the perfect working of this plan, that although at twenty years purchase there would only be one-hundredth part of the land bought every year at first ; nevertheless, the landlords might be aware that certain land was more particularly required, and would, therefore, be willing to pay the extra tax on a high valuation for the prospect of sale. This objection is quite valid, but could be fairly met by some such provisions as the following :

1.—The purchase value should be calculated from the last five years' assessment.

2.—The purchasing authority should have the power of appeal against any assessment to a commission.

3.—As the State gradually resumed ownership, and confidence in this new system became thoroughly established, the whole process might be summarily cut short by purchasing all the remaining land at one stroke by means of State bonds redeemable at par.

It will be observed that the 4s. in the pound tax performs three most important functions. First it depreciates the value of land in a much better way, both for the country and land-owners than by agitation and disturbance such as we have had in Ireland. Second, it provides a fund to purchase the land. Third, and the most important by far, *it establishes a fair valuation and makes possible an easy and cheap procedure unattainable in any other way.*

Another suggestion, but not so good, I made some years ago in "The Land for the People." I showed how the land might be bought up at once, the unearned increment or increased value of the land going to pay off the principal, the rent paying the interest on the bonds which would be given in payment for the land ; the interest, let loose year by year by the redemption of the bonds going to relieve taxation. Reckoning a yearly increase of ground rent at one per cent., the whole of the land would be paid for in seventy years and presuming the total value of the land to be £3,000,000,000, taxation during that period would have been remitted to the amount of £2,111,000,000, no extra tax having been put on and all the landowners paid in full.

This scheme was of course open to much fair criticism but the principle was adopted by great numbers of friends to our cause. It was only a suggestion, however, and intended merely

to show that the land can be regained quietly by purchase. What queer irony surrounds us. In the midst of all the jeers at land nationalisation and the profound arguments proving the impossibility of purchasing the land; our strongest opponents, the Conservative Government of the day, begins to do both. During the panic that followed the Spalding election they gave local authorities power compulsorily to purchase land to be let out for the benefit of the villagers, the land being gradually paid for and becoming the permanent property of the nation or district. It is true they took care to make it unworkable and limited the purpose for which the land was to be used to allotments, but, nevertheless, here were the fatal principles which they had been teaching us were impractical, ridiculous and wicked, quietly admitted and put down in black and white in an Act of Parliament. "Land was to be nationalised for the benefit of the people to whom it was to be let," and landowners were to be compelled to give it up for a fair consideration. All the Liberals have to do is to extend this principle to building-land and small holdings, making the act workable by reducing expenses and putting the initiation into the hands of authorities in full sympathy with the villagers instead of in the hands of the Boards of Guardians, and we shall have land nationalisation in full swing.

This, the Liberal not only will do but must. The agricultural population are thoroughly aroused and awake and will demand it as a pledge for their future support.

It is said that every reform goes through three stages—first, it is ridiculous, second, it is irreligious, third, "we were always in favour of it." The three acres and a cow, in spite of continued ridicule, is actually being advocated by some of the more advanced Conservatives, who are now so far converted that they think a peasant can not only find money to buy a cow, but to buy the land as well, and while the absurdity of buying out the landlords is still being expounded, Mr. Balfour, in his Land Purchase Bill, is quietly doing it and teaching us that if we first agitate furiously enough to depreciate the value of land, we can nationalise it very cheaply. True, he is using the nation's credit to create another privileged class, and for this reason the bill, so far from aiding land nationalisation, is directly opposed to it. But nevertheless, just as in the Allotment Act, the Conservative Government has acknowledged the principle of land nationalisation, so in his Land Act Balfour has shown the perfect feasibility of the nation buying out the landed interest without loss or difficulty. If only the nation's money in this bill was used to

buy land for the nation, never to be parted with again, instead of for the benefit of a few chance tenants, we should be able to enrol Mr. Balfour as a member of the Land Nationalisation Society. The following is the gist of his bill as explained in the *Review of Reviews*, July 1891 :—

“The Bill is too complicated to explain in detail here, but in brief it may be said that it provides for the issue of £33,000,000 of $2\frac{3}{4}$ Stock by the Imperial Government for buying out the interests of the Irish landlords who wish to part with their property, and who can persuade their tenants to purchase. The tenants who buy obtain at once, for the first five years, an immediate reduction of 20 per cent. on their rent, and after that five years a further reduction, corresponding to the difference between their old rents and 4 per cent. on the purchase-money. For instance, landlord A agrees to sell to tenant B a farm for which the latter is paying £50 per annum at sixteen years’ purchase. The Government will give to A Government Stock, bearing $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. interest, to the amount of £800, and will give B ownership of the farm subject to a payment for the first five years of £40 per annum, and after that time of £32 per annum for forty-four years. The £8 extra per annum levied for the first five years goes to form an insurance fund. Afterwards, of the £32 paid by the tenant for forty-four years, twenty-two pounds goes to pay the landlord, £8 to a sinking fund to repay capital, and the remaining £2 is devoted to local purposes, notably to the supply of labourers’ dwellings. . . . The bulk of the money is to be set apart for tenants and farmers under £50 valuation.”

As an illustration, here is a statement which shows the financial position clearly :—

	Rent.		
	£	s.	d.
Supposed value of land in first instance, £100	5	0	0
4/- in the £ depreciation which Mr. Balfour insists upon before he will buy, £80.....	4	0	0
Cost to Government who borrow at $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.	2	4	0
Balance after reducing rent 20 per cent. which is used for reduction of rent at future date, repayment of principal, and reserve fund or insurance.....	1	16	0
	4	0	0

CHAPTER X.—SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

This question is moving so fast while I write, now in March, 1892, that what I have just been saying may be ancient history, compared with what may be proposed before these pages are published.

Lord Salisbury has just been advocating small holdings as a happy breeding ground for conservative props to a rotten system, and Chaplin has consequently brought in a bill to bring this desirable object about. There is, however, more to encourage us than to alarm us in these proposals. These gentlemen can't guide the revolution they are helping to bring about into the narrow grooves they would wish; the flood gates once open, the water will take its own course, and there is every indication that that will be in the right direction, in the long run, although they may wind about a little at first.

Even in Mr. Chaplin's bill, bad as it is, there are good points. There is a perpetual rent of one quarter the total value, which, although redeemable at option, seldom will be, so long as the cultivator owns the land. Then again land may be let at fair rents to those who can't afford to buy, and through a great part of his speech Mr. Chaplin evidently recognises that the purchasers will have plenty to do with their money in furnishing their farms without buying them; he moreover fully realises how much better it is that all buildings and improvements should be made by the occupier than by the government.

It would be but a very small step to make this bill a thorough land nationalising one, giving a man the same security as a tenant as it proposes to do as an owner.

The whole tendency of the most interesting debate that followed was to widen the bill, to protect the cultivator from being over burdened by repayments and from the clutches of the money-lender, to give the nation a *quid pro quo* for its risks, and to allow men to acquire land for cottages surrounded by gardens only. No one had a word to say in favour of peasant proprietorship as developed abroad and more particularly in France; all were for stopping the mortgaging of the land and the entrance of the money-lender. It will only be a matter of time when they will see that the best and simplest way of preventing mortgages will be for the State not to part with the fee simple, thus preventing also the necessity, by leaving free the working capital of the small farmer instead of first making him sink

NOTE.—October, 1892. Mr. Chaplin's Bill is now law. Under it County Councils may levy a rate of 1d. in the £ for the purpose of buying land, which may be permanently held by them and let out to agriculturists. The thin end of the wedge thus fairly entered merely requires driving home.

this necessity in the land and then making him dig it up again at great expense. That is, pay the cost of a mortgage and afterwards a high interest.

Mr. Jesse Collings said "The bill proposed the adoption of a system of peasant proprietorship which the right hon. gentleman and others had stated to have failed miserably on the Continent; but we knew the causes of that failure, and could guard against them in England. Those causes were the money-lender, sub-division, and sub-letting. Go where you will, in France and elsewhere, these were the three evils attending peasant proprietorship. If the scheme were not confined to the cultivating classes, the rent-charges would be bought up by little capitalists, who would re-let at exorbitant rates. At a place in Oxfordshire there were 90 small holdings of from two to four acres in the hands of 60 occupiers in a population of 300 people; but many of these had been bought up by little shopkeepers in Witney and Oxford, and they were charging as much as £17 a year for holdings originally let at £9 10s. This case only coincided with the common experience that small landowners were the worst to deal with in carrying out a policy like the policy of this bill."

Mr. James Lowther said "It was generally admitted that where this system had hitherto been tried in England it had failed, and the cause was of especial consequence. In the counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland the system had been largely tried, and it was there in the hands of those who possessed ample capital and experience. It had broken down, though it was only fair to say that the main cause had been that the owners of land found they could *invest their capital to greater advantage by divesting themselves of ownership and investing their money in the stock on the land*. His right hon. friend had referred to the curse of the money-lender as one of the causes of the failure of small holdings. He hoped that provisions would be inserted in the bill requiring that the consent of some competent authority should be necessary before any charge might be imposed on the land.

Mr. Heneage said "He could not agree with the right hon. member for Thanet that the want of success of the small holders on the Isle of Axholme was due to the price of corn. The cause of their failure was to be found in the interposition of money-lenders. He was glad that the principle of compulsion had not been adopted in a tentative measure of this kind. It was his opinion that in all transactions under the bill a quit-rent ought to be left upon the land, and precautions ought to be taken to prevent mortgages like that which had

had such unfortunate results in the case of the Isle of Axholme. If half the purchase money were left as a quit-rent for ever people would not be anxious to advance money upon the land. He suggested that a clause should be inserted in the bill limiting the costs of conveyancing."

Mr. Chaplin, referring to his change of front, said that some years ago, when the agricultural depression was at its very lowest, he had visited a number of small holdings, which were in a most deplorable condition and had made a deep impression on him, but that since that date he had found that the most extravagant prices had been paid for the land, and that the rent and not the system was probably responsible for the ruin he saw around him.

Now this state of things is not confined to tenants—it is exactly the position that peasant proprietors find themselves in when they have a fixed and heavy interest to pay on a mortgage. In the recent depression numbers of well-to-do farmers who had bought their farms but had not money enough to pay more than a substantial deposit, were ruined for no other reason than that they farmed their *own land* and had to pay a fixed *rent* to money lenders far in excess of what the land would produce.

In speaking of small holdings Mr. Chaplin says:—

"I know scores of instances, most of which have come under my own notice during the present year, where men with a single acre for an allotment, and sometimes with even less, have been able to make a profit out of the land for themselves—a profit ranging from £5 to £8, and even in one case rising to £10 in the year.

Another most interesting debate has just been raised on Mr. Sexton's amendment to the address on Balfour's Irish Land Act, in which it appears that, in spite of the exceedingly favourable terms given, the Irish peasantry were so far availing themselves of it but to a very small degree. This I was altogether unprepared for, knowing how thoroughly both the Irish peasants and their representatives believed in proprietorship. My first idea was that the terms were not favourable enough for the landowners. The hitch does not appear to have been here, however. Many reasons were given, but none of them seemed to account for the failure except one, which was brought out very plainly by several speakers, and which was this, that having got security of tenure by other acts, and feeling certain of further reduction of rents if prices again fell, the Irish tenants had been advised not to take the responsibilities of ownership with the uncertainty of future liabilities and

burdens on the land. In other words, they felt safer as tenants under perfect security and a fair rent than as owners.

Looking back a little for signs of the times, we have the remarkable fact of no less than 150 members of the House of Commons voting for Mr. Reid's resolution of May 6th, 1890, which asserted the right of public authorities compulsorily taking land *for any purpose whatever* when such action should be deemed necessary for the public interest.

More important than this even has been the attitude taken by the *Daily News* through its Special Commissioner, whose letters on rural life created such wide-spread interest during the summer. Writing some time after he says he is dismayed to see that on one vital point he has been grievously misunderstood.

"I am supposed to have been endeavouring to show that the way to get the agricultural working man back to the village and to finally solve the agricultural problem is to afford him every facility for acquiring a bit of land of his own. From the discussions that have taken place, many Liberals appear to regard this as the true remedy, and Lord Salisbury says that 'if by any use of the public credit we are able to increase the number of small proprietors in this country, I shall think it to be an enormous gain in the first instance to our country, and in the second instance to the Conservative party.' The Tories have been doing this in Ireland on a large scale, and quite obviously it will be to the interest of the Tory party to do it in England if they can. But I should have supposed that the evils of private ownership in land were sufficiently apparent to all Liberals to prevent them advocating anything of the kind. They may not all of them see their way to any great scheme of land nationalisation; but that any thoughtful Liberal should for a moment countenance any proposal to move in exactly the contrary direction by an indefinite multiplication of private owners, is, to my mind, simply amazing. Those letters certainly advocated nothing of the kind. If public credit is to be used for the purchase of land, the purchase should be made by public bodies for the public benefit. This would permit of its being let out on equitable terms and on a tenure practically secure so long as that tenure should be consistent with the general welfare, thus affording all the advantages of actual ownership, while it would reserve to the community the right and the power to resume possession should the common good require it. . . . That way lies social health and progress and prosperity. The other is a *cul de sac* from which sooner or later we shall be bound to retreat, it may be only after much suffering and disaster."

Now, the article was printed in large type in the leading Liberal paper, by its own Special Commissioner, and thus practically commits the *Daily News* to the principles laid down. With all this evidence around us, ought not the laughing and indifferent stage of opposition at least to be over, and is it not a trifle feeble to continue to speak of land nationalisation as ridiculous and impracticable?

The only reform in the land laws that will be permanently successful and all-pervading is the one we advocate, which recognises in a practical fashion the equal rights of all men of all ages to the use of the earth, and inasmuch as it is just for the Government to secure to the individual the production of his own industry, so the dictates of common sense and justice, let alone any higher motives, should induce the collective power of the State to show just sufficient ordinary business capacity to appropriate the collective earnings of the people represented by ground rents and royalties. We can understand a despotism robbing the people for its own advantage; we can understand a Government favouring certain classes at others' expense, but that a representative Government should favour classes at its own expense, take from one class to give to another that which belongs all the time to itself, can be explained only by the stupefying influence of dark centuries of usurpation and wrong, and the respectability and prestige which accrues to stupid and wicked acts, if only they are successful enough and repeated often enough to come under the cover of custom and the halo of an ancient institution.

Free sale of land, easy and cheap transfer, abolition of primogeniture and entail, establishment of peasant proprietors, &c., look plausible enough at first sight, but as soon as you come to examine them, they are at best but an improvement to a system that is rotten and evil at its core, a system that must be struck down root and branch, and not pruned and propped. If these reforms could have saved civilisation from the evils it suffers from, it would have been saved in many countries long ago. All nations have had their peasant proprietors, while America and our colonies have had from the beginning a system of easy and cheap land transfer, in the case of Australia an absolutely perfect one. They have, in fact, arrived at the happy goal aimed at by one school of land reformers. They can buy and sell land as easily as stocks and shares, or any other sort of property, and with what result? Why, that with the growth of population exactly the same evils arise that we have to contend with here, the same excess of wealth and poverty, power and helplessness, if anything accentuated, while

the ease of transfer appears to facilitate a furious and ruinous gambling in land, that is happily unknown in the old country. None of their efforts to have the land fairly distributed have prevented the most monstrous monopolies and the most gigantic estates. The holding of land for speculative purposes has driven emigrants through hundreds of miles of rich but unused land, to lead an isolated, arduous and dangerous life, far away from civilisation, while magnificent forests are wastefully destroyed which would have been invaluable, had agriculture proceeded step by step with a population behind to use the timber for fuel, building, and other useful purposes. The vast area of land, in comparison to the population in the new countries, and the shameful way in which the native territories are annexed, as soon as land jobbers require a further field for their exploitations, has so far kept the colonies clear of many difficulties that we have to contend with here. But this is no thanks to their land laws, which are far worse than ours, and grant the tenants no such protection as they get in Ireland, for instance.

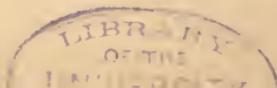
All experience goes to show that private ownership in any form leads to the land getting into the hands of the moneyed classes, who use it simply for purposes of investment and speculation. Their money flows in this direction as inevitably and naturally as water flows down hill. Working agriculturists or tradesmen almost invariably require all their capital in their business when they ought to be making, say, from 10 per cent. to 25 per cent., while the investor is glad to get 4 per cent. or 5 per cent. for a secure investment. As certain as it is in physics that lead will displace water, is it in economics that the investing classes will displace the working classes in the virtual possession of the land.

Whatever merits or demerits there may be in peasant proprietorship let us be clear about this, that this system and land nationalisation are as far removed as the poles. We land nationalists advocate a radical reform that will be all-pervading and inclusive, that will affect all classes directly as well as indirectly, instead of a few agriculturists only; that is founded on the rock of justice and worked on the principle of the common brotherhood of man, a principle, the benefits of which will multiply with generations instead of ending with the first; a principle which opens itself to the natural development of man, and the unforeseen evolutions of industry. We don't attempt artificially to plant certain men in certain holes, for their own exclusive benefit with the idea that they will flourish, because in past ages under entirely different con-

ditions, in an uncommercial and comparatively unprogressive period of our civilisation, these men in their holes managed to reap their share of the rough plenty of their day. Where peasant proprietors have played a useful part in history they have grown up naturally through their own fitness. Their day is gone, and unless we are to be again over-run with the barbarians, and begin all over again, their day will never return.

We should shun as poison the re-establishment of a system the whole tendency of which is, to make men self-centred, selfish, unprogressive and narrow. Their whole life and fortune tied to one particular corner of the earth in one particular occupation; out of sympathy with, and jealous of the changes around them, fearful that they should injure their particular and immoveable stake, you can hardly find in the lowest of our town populations a people so utterly wanting in public spirit and so out of sympathy with national movements as a long established peasant proprietary of the present day.

A reform to be healthy must embrace humanity, must have nothing in the form of privilege or vested interest to eat into it like a cancer, must have nothing to check free evolution, and individual accomodation to the changes around, *must lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* It must make us all feel ourselves an integral portion of society, must make us feel that with it we stand or fall, that it is our duty, pleasure and interest to protect society, instead of to protect ourselves against it. It must give us common interests and aspirations not with a class only, nor yet even with a nation, but ultimately with the whole human race: it must make us public spirited, and render it possible to carry out in practice the few great central truths taught us over 1800 years ago. "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also likewise. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It must enable us to feel when we pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," that we are honestly doing our part to bring about what we are praying for, and that, however far from the goal we are and always must be, that nevertheless step by step we are nearing it, step by step leaving behind us the sordid misery and revolting vice of the present age. It must reward those who have faith in righteousness, and bless those who love mankind, by seeing ever growing up around them a healthier, happier, and nobler generation of the children of God, who live on their Mother the Earth,



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