

LAND AND PEOPLE,

BY

HENRY GEORGE.



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WHOSE LAND IS IT?

To whom rightfully does the soil of Scotland belong? Who are justly entitled to its use and to all the benefits that flow from its use?

Let me go to the heart of this question by asking another question: Has or has not every child born in Scotland a right to live? There can be but one answer, for no one would contend that it is right to drown Scottish babies, or that any human law could make it right. Well, then, if every human being born in Scotland has a right to live in Scotland, these rights must be equal. If each one has a right to live, then no one can have any better right to live than any other one. There can be no dispute about this. No one will contend that it would be any less a crime to drown the baby of a Scottish cottar than it would be to drown the baby of the proudest duchess, or that a law commanding the one would be any more justifiable than a law commanding the other.

Since, then, all the Scottish people have the same equal right to live, it follows that they must all have the same equal right to the land of Scotland. If they are all in Scotland by the same equal permission of Nature, so that no one of them can justly set up a superior claim to life than any other one of them; so that all the rest of them could not justly say to any one of them, "You have not the same right to live as we have; therefore we will pitch you out of Scotland into the sea!" then they must all have the same equal rights to the elements which Nature has provided for the sustaining of life—to air, to water, and to land. For to deny the equal right to the elements necessary to the maintaining of life is to deny the equal right to life. Any law that said, "Certain babies have no right to the soil of Scotland; therefore they shall be thrown off the soil of Scotland;" would be precisely equivalent to a law that said, "Certain babies have no right to live; therefore they shall be thrown into the sea." And as no law or custom or

agreement can justify the denial of the equal right to life, so no law or custom or agreement can justify the denial of the equal right to land.

It therefore follows, from the very fact of their existence, that the right of each one of the Scottish people to an equal share in the land of Scotland is equal and inalienable: that is to say, that the use and benefit of the land of Scotland belong rightfully to the whole people of Scotland, to each one as much as to every other; to no one more than to any other—not to some individuals, to the exclusion of other individuals; not to one class, to the exclusion of other classes; not to landlords, not to tenants, not to cultivators, but to the whole people.

This right is irrefutable and indefeasible. It pertains to and springs from the fact of existence, the right to live. No law, no covenant, no agreement, can bar it. One generation cannot stipulate away the rights of another generation. If the whole people of Scotland were to unite in bargaining away their rights in the land, how could they justly bargain away the right of the child who the next moment is born? No one can bargain away what is not his; no one can stipulate away the rights of another. And if the new-born infant has an equal right to life, then has it an equal right to land. Its warrant, which comes direct from Nature, and which sets aside all human laws or title-deeds, is the fact that it is born.

Here we have a firm, self-apparent principle from which we may safely proceed. The land of Scotland does not belong to one individual more than to another individual, to one class more than to another class; to one generation more than to the generations that come after. *It belongs to the whole people who at the time exist upon it.*

LANDLORDS' RIGHT IS LABOUR'S WRONG.

To say that the land of a country belongs to the whole people, and then merely to ask that rents shall be reduced, or that the tenant-right be extended, or that the State shall buy the land from one class and sell it to another class, is utterly illogical and absurd.

Either the land of Scotland rightfully belongs to the Scottish landlords, or it rightfully belongs to the Scottish people; there can be no middle ground. If it rightfully belongs to the landlords, then every scheme for interfering in any way with the landlords is condemned; it is nobody else's business what they do with it, or what rent they charge for it, or where or how they spend the money they draw from it, and whoever does not want to live

upon it on the landlords' terms is at perfect liberty to starve or emigrate. But if, on the contrary, the land of Scotland rightfully belongs to the Scottish people, then the only logical demand is, not that the tenants shall be made joint-owners with the landlords, not that it be bought from a smaller class and sold to a larger class, but that it be resumed by the whole people. To propose to pay the landlords for it is to deny the right of the people to it. It is to admit that the Scottish people have no more right to the soil of Scotland than any outsider. For, any outsider can go to Scotland and buy land, if he will give its market value; and to propose to buy out the landlords is to propose to continue the present injustice in another form. They would get in interest on the debt created what they now get in rent. They would still have a lien upon Scottish labour.

And why should the landlords be paid? If the land of Scotland belongs of natural right to the Scottish people, what valid claim for payment can be set up by the landlords? No one will contend that the land is theirs of natural right, for the day has gone by when men could be told that the Creator of the universe intended His bounty for the exclusive use and benefit of a privileged class of His creatures—that He intended a few to roll in luxury while their fellows toiled and starved for them. The claim of the landlords to the land rests not on natural right but merely on municipal law—on municipal law which contravenes natural right. And, whenever the sovereign power changes municipal law so as to conform to natural right, what claim can they assert to compensation? Some of them bought their lands, it is true; but they got no better title than the seller had to give. And what are these titles? Titles based on murder and robbery, on blood and rapine—titles which rest on the most atrocious and wholesale crimes. Created by force and maintained by force, they have not behind them the first shadow of right. That men, now dead, have had the power to give and grant Scottish lands is true; but will any one contend they had the right? Will any one contend that in all the past generations there has existed on the British Isles or anywhere else any human being, or any number of human beings, who had the right to say that in the year 1889 the great mass of Scotsmen should be compelled to pay—in many cases to residents of England, France, or the United States—for the privilege of living in their native country and making a living from their native soil? Even if it be said that might makes right; even if it be contended that in the twelfth, or seventeenth, or eighteenth century lived men who, having the power, had therefore the right, to give

away the soil of Scotland, it cannot be contended that their right went further than their power, or that their gifts and grants are binding on the men of the present generation. No one can urge such a preposterous doctrine. And, if might makes right, then the moment the people get power to take the land the rights of the present landholders utterly cease, and any proposal to compensate them is a proposal to do a fresh wrong.

Should it be urged that, no matter on what they originally rest, the lapse of time has given to the legal owners of Scottish land a title of which they cannot now be justly deprived without compensation, it is sufficient to ask, with Herbert Spencer, at what rate per annum wrong becomes right?

And, even supposing that in their ignorance the masses have acquiesced in the iniquitous system which makes the common birthright of all the exclusive property of some. What then? Does such acquiescence turn wrong into right? If the sleeping traveller wake to find a robber with his hand in his pocket, is he bound to buy the robber off—bound not merely to let him keep what he has previously taken, but pay him the full value of all he expected the sleep of his victim to permit him to get? If the stockholders of a bank find that for a long term of years their cashier has been appropriating the lion's share of the profits, are they to be told that they cannot discharge him without paying him for what he might have got, had his peculations not been discovered?

THE GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON OF CAPTAIN KIDD.

I apologise to landlords for likening them to thieves and robbers. I trust they will understand that I do not consider them as personally worse than other men, but that I am obliged to use such illustrations because no others will fit the case. I am concerned not with individuals but with the system. What I want to do is to point out a distinction that in the plea for the vested rights of landowners is ignored—a distinction which arises from the essential difference between land and things that are the produce of human labour, and which is obscured by our habit of classing them altogether as property.

The galleys that carried Cæsar to Britain, the accoutrements of his legionaries, the baggage that they carried, the arms that they bore, the buildings that they erected; the scythed chariots of the ancient Britons, the horses that drew them, their wicker boats and

wattled houses—where are they now? But the land for which Roman and Britain fought, there it is still. That British soil is yet as fresh and as new as it was in the days of the Romans. Generation after generation has lived on it since, and generation after generation will live on it yet. Now, here is a very great difference. The right to possess and to pass on the ownership of things that in their nature decay and soon cease to be is a very different thing from the right to possess and to pass on the ownership of that which does not decay, but from which each successive generation must live.

To show how this difference between land and such other species of property as are properly styled wealth bears upon the argument for the vested rights of landholders, let me illustrate again.

Captain Kidd was a pirate. He made a business of sailing the seas, capturing merchantmen, making their crews walk the plank, and appropriating their cargoes. In this way he accumulated much wealth, which he is thought to have buried. But let us suppose, for the sake of the illustration, that he did not bury his wealth, but left it to his legal heirs, and they to their heirs, and so on, until at the present day this wealth or a part of it has come to a great-great-grandson of Captain Kidd. Now, let us suppose that some one—say a great-great-grandson of one of the shipmasters whom Captain Kidd plundered, makes complaint, and says: "This man's great-great-grandfather plundered my great-great-grandfather of certain things or certain sums, which have been transmitted to him, whereas but for this wrongful act they would have been transmitted to me; therefore, I demand that he be made to restore them." What would society answer?

Society, speaking by its proper tribunals, and in accordance with principles recognised among all civilised nations, would say: "We cannot entertain such a demand. It may be true that Mr. Kidd's great-great-grandfather robbed your great-great-grandfather, and that as the result of this wrong he has got things that otherwise might have come to you. But we cannot inquire into occurrences that happened so long ago. Each generation has enough to do to attend to its own affairs. If we go to righting the wrongs and re-opening the controversies of our great-great-grandfathers, there will be endless disputes and pretexts for dispute. What you say may be true, but somewhere we must draw the line, and have an end to strife. Though this man's great-great-grandfather may have robbed your great-great-grandfather, *he* has not robbed *you*. He came into possession of these things peacefully,

and has held them peacefully, and we must take this peaceful possession, when it has been continued for a certain time, as absolute evidence of just title; for, were we not to do that, there would be no end to dispute and no secure possession of anything."

Now, it is this common-sense principle that is expressed in the statute of limitations—in the doctrine of vested rights. This is the reason why it is held—and as to most things held justly—that peaceable possession for a certain time cures all defects of title.

But let us pursue the illustration a little farther:—

Let us suppose that Captain Kidd, having established a large and profitable piratical business, left it to his son, and he to his son, and so on, until the great-great-grandson, who now pursues it, has come to consider it the most natural thing in the world that his ships should roam the sea, capturing peaceful merchantmen, making their crews walk the plank, and bringing home to him much plunder, whereby he is enabled, though he does no work at all, to live in very great luxury, and look down with contempt upon people who have to work. But at last, let us suppose, the merchants get tired of having their ships sunk and their goods taken, and sailors get tired of trembling for their lives every time a sail lifts above the horizon, and they demand of society that piracy be stopped.

Now, what should society say if Mr. Kidd got indignant, appealed to the doctrine of vested rights, and asserted that society was bound to prevent any interference with the business that he had inherited, and that, if it wanted him to stop, it must buy him out, paying him all that his business was worth—that is to say, at least as much as he could make in twenty years' successful pirating, so that if he stopped pirating he could still continue to live in luxury off the profits of the merchants and the earnings of the sailors.

What ought society to say to such a claim as this? There will be but one answer. We will all say that society should tell Mr. Kidd that his was a business to which the statute of limitations and the doctrine of vested rights did not apply; that because his father, and his grandfather, and his great and great-great-grandfather pursued the business of capturing ships and making their crews walk the plank, was no reason why he should be permitted to pursue it. Society, we will all agree, ought to say he would have to stop piracy, and stop it at once, and that without getting a cent for stopping.

Or supposing it had happened that Mr. Kidd had sold out his piratical business to Smith, Jones, or Robinson, we will all agree

that society ought to say that their purchase of the business gave them no greater right than Mr. Kidd had.

We will all agree that this is what society *ought* to say. Observe, I do not ask what society *would* say.

For, ridiculous and preposterous as it may appear, I am satisfied that, under the circumstances I have supposed, society would not for a long time say what we have agreed it *ought* to say. Not only would all the Kidds loudly claim that to make them give up their business without full recompense would be a wicked interference with vested rights, but the justice of this claim would at first be assumed as a matter of course by all or nearly all the influential classes—the great lawyers, the able journalists, the writers for the magazines, the eloquent clergymen, and the principal professors in the principal universities. Nay, even the merchants and sailors, when they first began to complain, would be so tyrannised and browbeaten by this public opinion that they would hardly think of more than of buying out the Kidds, and, wherever here and there any one dared to raise his voice in favour of stopping piracy at once and without compensation, he would only do so under penalty of being stigmatised as a reckless disturber and wicked foe of social order.

If any one denies this, if any one says mankind are not such fools, then I appeal to universal history to bear me witness. I appeal to the facts of to-day.

Show me a wrong, no matter how monstrous, that ever yet, among any people, became ingrafted in the social system, and I will prove to you the truth of what I say.

The majority of men do not think; the majority of men have to expend so much energy in the struggle to make a living that they do not have time to think. The majority of men accept, as a matter of course, whatever is. This is what makes the task of the social reformer so difficult, his path so hard. This is what brings upon those who first raise their voices in behalf of a great truth the sneers of the powerful, and the curses of the rabble, ostracism and martyrdom, the robe of derision and the crown of thorns.

Am I not right? Have there not been states of society in which piracy has been considered the most respectable and honourable of pursuits? Did the Roman populace see anything more reprehensible in a gladiatorial show than we do in a horse-race? Does public opinion in Dahomey see anything reprehensible in the custom of sacrificing one or two thousand human beings by way of signalling grand occasions? Are there not states of

society in which, in spite of the natural proportions of the sexes, polygamy is considered a matter of course? Are there not states of society in which it would be considered the most ridiculous thing in the world to say that a man's son was more closely related to him than his nephew? Are there not states of society in which it would be considered disreputable for a man to carry a burden while a woman who could stagger under it was around?—states of society in which the husband who did not occasionally beat his wife would be deemed by both sexes a weak-minded, low-spirited fellow? What would Chinese fashionable society consider more outrageous than to be told that mothers should not be permitted to squeeze their daughters' feet, or Flathead women being restrained from tying a board on their infants' skulls? How long has it been since the monstrous doctrine of the divine right of kings was taught through all Christendom?

What is the slave trade but piracy of the worst kind? Yet it is not long since the slave trade was looked upon as a perfectly respectable business, affording as legitimate an opening for the investment of capital and the display of enterprise as any other. The proposition to prohibit it was first looked upon as ridiculous, then as fanatical, then as wicked. It was only slowly and by hard fighting that the truth in regard to it gained ground. Does not the American constitution bear witness to what I say? Does not the fundamental law of that Republic, adopted twelve years after the enunciation of the Declaration of Independence, declare that for twenty years the slave trade shall not be prohibited nor restricted? Such dominion had the idea of vested interests over the minds of those who had already proclaimed the inalienable right of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!

Is it not but yesterday that in the freest and greatest Republic on earth, among the people who boast that they lead the very van of civilisation, this doctrine of vested rights was deemed a sufficient justification for all the cruel wrongs of human slavery? Is it not but yesterday, when whoever dared to say that the rights of property did not justly attach to human beings; when whoever dared to deny that human beings could be rightfully bought and sold like cattle—the husband torn from the wife, and the child from the mother; when whoever denied the right of whoever had paid his money for him to work or whip his own nigger was looked upon as a wicked assailant of the rights of property? Is it not but yesterday when in the South whoever whispered such a thought took his life in his hands; when in the North the abolitionist was held by the churches as worse than an infidel,

was denounced by the politicians, and rotten-egged by the mob? I was born in a Northern State; I have never lived in the South; I am not yet grey; but I well remember, as every American of middle age must remember, how over and over again I have heard all questionings of slavery silenced by the declaration that the negroes were the *property* of their masters, and that to take away a man's slave without payment was as much a crime as to take away his horse without payment. And whoever does not remember that far back, let him look over American literature previous to the war, and say whether, if the business of piracy had been a flourishing business, it would have lacked defenders? Let him say whether any proposal to stop the business of piracy without compensating the pirates would not have been denounced at first as a proposal to set aside vested rights?

But I am appealing to other states of society, and to times that are past, merely to get my readers, if I can, out of their accustomed ruts of thought. The proof of what I assert about the Kidds and their business is in the thought and speech of to-day.

Here is a system which robs the producers of wealth as remorselessly and far more regularly and systematically than the pirate robbed the merchantman. Here is a system that steadily condemns thousands to far more lingering and horrible deaths than that of walking the plank—to death of the mind and death of the soul, as well as death of the body. These things are undisputed. No one who will examine the subject can deny that the chronic pauperism and chronic famine which everywhere mark our civilisation are the results of this system. Yet we are told—nay, it seems to be taken for granted—that this system cannot be abolished without buying off those who profit by it. Was there ever more degrading abasement of the human mind before a fetish? Can we wonder, as we see it, at any perversion of ideas?

Consider: is not the parallel I have drawn a true one? Is it not just as much a perversion of ideas to apply the doctrine of vested rights to property in land, when these are its admitted fruits, as it was to apply it to property in human flesh and blood; as it would be to apply it to the business of piracy? In what does the claim of the Scottish landholders differ from that of the hereditary pirate, or the man who has bought out a piratical business? "Because I have inherited or purchased the business of robbing merchantmen," says the pirate, "therefore respect for the rights of property must compel you to let me go on robbing

ships and making sailors walk the plank until you buy me out." "Because we have inherited or purchased the privilege of appropriating to ourselves the lion's share of the produce of labour," says the landlord, "therefore you must continue to let us do it, even though poor wretches shiver with cold and faint with hunger; even though, in their poverty and misery, they are reduced to wallow with the pigs." What is the difference?

This is the point I want to make clear and distinct, for it shows a distinction that in current thought is overlooked. Property in land, like property in slaves, is essentially different from property in things that are the result of labour. Rob a man or a people of money, or goods, or cattle, and the robbery is finished there and then. The lapse of time does not, indeed, change wrong into right, but it obliterates the effects of the deed. That is done; it is over; and, unless it be very soon righted, it glides away into the past, with the men who were parties to it, so swiftly that nothing save omniscience can trace its effects; and in attempting to right it we would be in danger of doing fresh wrong. The past is for ever beyond us. We can neither punish nor recompense the dead. But rob a people of the land on which they must live, and the robbery is continuous. It is a fresh robbery of every succeeding generation—a new robbery every year and every day; it is like the robbery which condemns to slavery the children of the slave. To apply to it the statute of limitations, to acknowledge for it the title of prescription, is not to condone the past; it is to legalise robbery in the present, to justify it in the future. The indictment which really lies against the Scottish landlords is not that their ancestors, or the ancestors of their grantors, robbed the ancestors of the Scottish people. That makes no difference. "Let the dead bury their dead." The indictment that truly lies is that here, now, in the year 1889, they rob the Scottish people. And shall we be told that there can be a vested right to continue such robbery?

HOW TO RESTORE THE LAND TO THE PEOPLE.

I have dwelt so long upon this question of compensating landowners, not merely because it is of great practical importance, but because its discussion brings clearly into view the principles upon which the land question, in any country, can alone be justly and finally settled. In the light of these principles we see that land-

owners have no rightful claim either to the land or to compensation for its resumption by the people; and, further than that, we see that no such rightful claim can ever be created. It would be wrong to pay the present landowners for "their" land at the expense of the people; it would likewise be wrong to sell it again to smaller holders. It would be wrong to abolish the payment of rent, and to give the land to its present cultivators. In the very nature of things, land cannot rightfully be made individual property. This principle is absolute. The title of a peasant proprietor deserves no more respect than the title of a great territorial noble. No sovereign political power, no compact or agreement, even though consented to by the whole population of the globe, can give to an individual a valid title to the exclusive ownership of a square inch of soil. The earth is an entailed estate—entailed upon all the generations of the children of men, by a deed written in the constitution of Nature; a deed that no human proceedings can bar, and no prescription determine. Each succeeding generation has but a tenancy for life. Admitting that any set of men may barter away their own natural rights (and this logically involves an admission of the right of suicide), they can no more barter away the rights of their successors than they can barter away the rights of the inhabitants of other worlds.

What should be aimed at is thus very clear. The "three F's" are three frauds; and the proposition to create peasant proprietorship is no better. It will not do merely to carve out of the estates of the landlords minor estates for the tenants; it will not do merely to substitute a larger for a smaller class of proprietors; it will not do to confine the settlement to agricultural land, leaving to its present possessors the land of the towns and villages. None of these lame and impotent conclusions will satisfy the demands of justice, or cure the bitter evils now so apparent. The only true and just solution of the problem, the only end worth aiming at, is to make ALL THE LAND the Common Property of ALL THE PEOPLE.

This principle conceded, the question of method arises. How shall this be done? Nothing is easier. It is merely necessary to divert the rent which now flows into the pockets of the landlords into the common treasury of the whole people. It is not possible to so divide up land as to give each family, still less each individual, an equal share. And, even if that were possible, it would not be possible to maintain equality, for old people are constantly dying, and new people constantly being born, while the relative value of land is constantly changing. But it is

possible to equally divide the rent, or, what amounts to the same thing, to apply it to purposes of common benefit. This is the way, and this is the only way, in which absolute justice can be done. This is the way, and this is the only way, in which the equal right of every man, woman, and child can be acknowledged and secured. As Herbert Spencer says of it: *

"Such a doctrine is consistent with the highest state of civilisation; may be carried out without involving a community of goods, and need cause no very serious revolution in existing arrangement. The change required would simply be a change of landlords. Separate ownership would merge into the joint-stock ownership of the public. Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body—society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. Instead of paying his rent to the agent of Sir John or his grace, he would pay it to an agent or deputy-agent of the community. Stewards would be public officials instead of private ones, and tenancy the only land tenure. A state of things so ordered would be in perfect harmony with the moral law. Under it, all men would be equally landlords; all men would be alike free to become tenants. . . . Clearly, therefore, on such a system, the earth might be enclosed, occupied, and cultivated, in entire subordination to the law of equal freedom."

Now, it is a very easy thing to thus sweep away all private ownership of land, and convert all occupiers into tenants of the State, by appropriating rent. No complicated laws or cumbersome machinery is necessary. It is only necessary to tax land up to its full value. Do that, and without any infringement of the just rights of property, the land would become virtually the people's. What under this system was paid as rent by the tenant would be taken by the State. The occupiers of land would come to be nominally the owners, though, in reality, they would be the tenants of the whole people.

How beautifully this simple method would satisfy every economic requirement; how, freeing labour and capital from the fetters that now oppress them (for all other taxes could be easily remitted), it would enormously increase the production of wealth; how it would make distribution conform to the law of justice, dry up the springs of want and misery, elevate society from its lowest stratum, and give all their fair share in the blessings of advancing

* "Social Statics," Chap. ix., sec. 8.

civilisation, can perhaps only be fully shown by such a detailed examination as I have made in my books, "Social Problems" and "Progress and Poverty." Nevertheless, any one can see that to tax land up to its full rental value would amount to precisely the same thing as to formally take possession of it, and then let it out to the highest bidders.

If it be denied that land justly is, or can be, private property, if the equal rights of the whole people to the use of the elements gratuitously furnished by Nature be asserted without drawback or compromise, then the essential difference between property in land and property in things of human production is at once brought out. Then will it clearly appear not only that the denial of the right of individual property in land does not involve any menace to legitimate property rights, but that the maintenance of private property in land necessarily involves a denial of the right to all other property, and that the recognition of the claims of the landlords means a continuous robbery of capital as well as of labour.

All this will appear more and more clearly as the practical measures necessary to make land common property are proposed and discussed. These simple measures involve no harsh proceedings, no forcible dispossession, no shock to public confidence, no retrogression to a lower industrial organisation, no loaning of public money, or establishment of cumbrous commissions. Instead of doing violence to the rightful sense of property, they assert and vindicate it. The way to make land common property is simply to take rent for the common benefit. And to do this, the easy way is to abolish one tax after another, until the whole weight of taxation falls upon the value of land. When that point is reached, the battle is won. The hare is caught, killed, and skinned, and to cook him will be a very easy matter. The real fight will come on the proposition to consolidate existing taxation upon land values. When that is once won, the landholders will not merely have been decisively defeated, they will have been routed; and the nature of land values will be so generally understood that to raise taxation so as to take the whole rent for common purposes will be a mere matter of course.

To put the public burdens upon the landholders is not a new proposition. On the contrary, it is the ancient British practice. It would be but a return, in a form adapted to modern times, to the system under which British land was originally parcelled out to the predecessors of the present holders—the just system, recognised for centuries, that those who enjoy the common

property should bear the common burdens. The putting of property in land in the same category as property in things produced by labour is comparatively modern. In Scotland, as in England and Ireland, as in fact among every people of whom we know anything, the land was originally treated as common property, and this recognition ran all through the feudal system. The essence of the feudal system was in treating the landholder not as an owner but as a lessee. To every grant of land was annexed a condition which amounted to a heavy perpetual tax or rent. National debt, pauperism, and the grinding poverty of the poorer classes, came in as the landholders gradually shook off the obligations on which they had received their land, an operation culminating in the abolition of the feudal tenures, for which were substituted indirect taxes that still weigh upon the whole people. To now reverse this process, to abolish the taxes which are borne by labour and capital, and to substitute for them a tax on rent, would not be the adoption of anything new, but a simple going back to the old plan. In Great Britain, as in Ireland; in the Highlands, as in the Lowlands, the movement would appeal to the popular imagination as a demand for the reassertion of ancient rights.

There are other most important respects in which this measure will commend itself. The tax upon land values or rent is in all economic respects the most perfect of taxes. No political economist will deny that it combines the maximum of certainty with the minimum of loss and cost; that, unlike taxes upon capital or exchange or improvement, it does not check production or enhance prices or fall ultimately upon the consumer. And, in proposing to abolish all other taxes in favour of this theoretically perfect tax, Reformers will have on their side the advantage of ideas already current, while they can bring the *argumentum ad hominem* to bear on those who might never comprehend an abstract principle. Britons of all classes have happily been educated up to a belief in Free Trade, though a very large amount of revenue is still collected from customs. Let Reformers take advantage of this by proposing to carry out the doctrine of Free Trade to its fullest extent. If a revenue tariff is better than a protective tariff, then no tariff at all is better than a revenue tariff. Let them propose to abolish the customs duties entirely, and to abolish as well harbour dues and lighthouse dues and dock charges, and in their place to add to the tax on rent, or the value of land exclusive of improvements. Let them in the same way propose to get rid of the excise, the various license taxes, the tax

upon buildings, the onerous and unpopular income tax, &c., and to saddle all public expenses on the landlords.

This would bring home the land question to thousands and thousands who have never thought of it before; to thousands and thousands who have heretofore looked upon the land question as something that related exclusively to agriculture and to farmers, and have never seen how, in various direct and indirect ways, they have to contribute to the immense sums received by the landlords as rent. It would be putting the argument in a shape in which even the most stupid could understand it. The British landowners are in numbers but an insignificant minority. And the more they protested against having to pay all the taxes, the quicker would the public mind realise the essential injustice of private property in land, the quicker would the majority of the people come to see that the landowners ought not only to pay all the taxes but a good deal more besides. Once put the question in such a way that the working man will realise that he pays two prices for his ale, and half a dozen prices for his tobacco, because a landowners' Parliament in the time of Charles II. shook off their ancient dues to the State, and imposed them in indirect taxation on him; once bring to the attention of the man who grumbles as he pays his income tax, the question as to whether the landowner who draws his income from property that of natural right belongs to the whole people ought not to pay it instead of him, and it will not be long before the absurd injustice of allowing rent to be appropriated by individuals will be thoroughly understood. This is a very different thing from asking the taxpayer to buy out the landlord for the sake of the peasant.

I have been speaking as though all landholders would resist the change which would sacrifice their special interests to the larger interests of society. But I am satisfied that to think this is to do landholders injustice. For landholders as a class are not more stupid nor more selfish than any other class. And there is that in a great truth which can raise a human soul above the mists of selfishness.

A LITTLE ISLAND OR A LITTLE WORLD.

Imagine an island girt with ocean; imagine a little world swimming in space. Put on it, in imagination, human beings. Let them divide the land, share and share alike, as individual property. At first, while population is sparse and industrial processes rude and primitive, this will work well enough.

Turn away the eyes of the mind for a moment, let time pass, and look again. Some families will have died out, some have greatly multiplied; on the whole, population will have largely increased. And even supposing there have been no important inventions or improvements in the productive arts, the increase in population, by causing the division of labour, will have made industry more complex. During this time some of these people will have been careless, generous, improvident; some will have been thrifty and grasping. Some of them will have devoted much of their powers to thinking of how they themselves and the things they see around them came to be; to inquiries and speculations as to what there is in the universe beyond their little island or their little world; to making poems, painting pictures, or writing books; to noting the differences in rocks and trees and shrubs and grasses; to classifying beasts and birds and fishes and insects—to the doing, in short, of all the many things which add so largely to the sum of human knowledge and human happiness, without much or any gain of wealth to the doer. Others again will have devoted all their energies to the extending of their possessions. What, then, shall we see, land having been all this time treated as private property? Clearly, we shall see that the primitive equality has given way to inequality. Some will have very much more than one of the original shares into which the land was divided; very many will have no land at all. Suppose that, in all things save this, our little island or our little world is Utopia—that there are no wars or robberies; that the government is absolutely pure and taxes nominal; suppose, if you want to, any sort of a currency; imagine, if you can imagine such a world or island, that interest is utterly abolished; yet inequality in the ownership of land will have produced poverty and virtual slavery.

For the people we have supposed are human beings—that is to say, in their physical natures at least, they are animals who can live only on land and by the aid of the products of land. They may make machines which will enable them to float on the sea, or perhaps to fly in the air, but to build and equip these machines they must have land and the products of land, and must constantly come back to land. Therefore those who own the land must be the masters of the rest. Thus, if one man has come to own all the land, he is their absolute master even to life or death. If they can live on the land on his terms only, then they can live only on his terms, for without land they cannot live. They are his absolute slaves, and so long as his ownership is acknowledged, if they want to live, they must do in everything as he wills.

If, however, the concentration of landownership has not gone so far as to make one man or a very few men the owners of all the land—if there are still so many landowners that there is competition between them as well as between those who have only their labour—then the terms on which these non-landholders can live will seem more like free contract. But it will not be free contract. *Land can yield no wealth without the application of labour; labour can produce no wealth without land.* These are the two equally necessary factors of production. Yet, to say that they are equally necessary factors of production is not to say that, in the making of contracts as to how the results of production are divided, the possessors of these two meet on equal terms. For the nature of these two factors is very different. Land is a natural element; the human being must have his stomach filled every few hours. Land can exist without labour, but labour cannot exist without land. If I own a piece of land, I can let it lie idle for a year or for years, and it will eat nothing. But the labourer must eat every day, and his family must eat. And so, in the making of terms between them, the landowner has an immense advantage over the labourer. It is on the side of the labourer that the intense pressure of competition comes, for in his case it is competition urged by hunger. And, further than this: As population increases, as the competition for the use of land becomes more and more intense, so are the owners of land enabled to get for the use of their land a larger and larger part of the wealth which labour exerted upon it produces. That is to say, the value of land steadily rises. Now, this steady rise in the value of land brings about a confident expectation of future increase of value, which produces among landowners all the effects of a combination to hold for higher prices. Thus there is a constant tendency to force mere labourers to take less and less or to give more and more (put it which way you please, it amounts to the same thing) of the products of their work for the opportunity to work. And thus, in the very nature of things, we should see on our little island or our little world that, after a time had passed, some of the people would be able to take and enjoy a superabundance of all the fruits of labour without doing any labour at all, while others would be forced to work the livelong day for a pitiful living.

But let us introduce another element into the supposition. Let us suppose great discoveries and inventions—such as the steam engine, the power loom, the Bessemer process, the reaping machine, and the thousand-and-one labour-saving devices that are such a marked feature of our era. What would be the result?

Manifestly, the effect of all such discoveries and inventions is to increase the power of labour in producing wealth—to enable the same amount of wealth to be produced by less labour, or a greater amount with the same labour. But none of them lessen, or can lessen, the necessity for land. Until we can discover some way of making something out of nothing—and that is so far beyond our powers as to be absolutely unthinkable—there is no possible discovery or invention which can lessen the dependence of labour upon land. And, this being the case, the effect of these labour-saving devices, land being the private property of some, would simply be to increase the proportion of the wealth produced that landowners could demand for the use of their land. The ultimate effect of these discoveries and inventions would be not to benefit the labourer, but to make him more dependent.

And, since we are imagining conditions, imagine labour-saving inventions to go to the farthest imaginable point, that is to say, to perfection. What then? Why then, the necessity for labour being done away with, all the wealth that the land could produce would go entire to the landowners. None of it whatever could be claimed by any one else. For the labourers there would be no use at all. If they continued to exist, it would be merely as paupers on the bounty of the landowners!

THE CIVILISATION THAT IS POSSIBLE.

In the effects upon the distribution of wealth, of making land private property, we may thus see an explanation of that paradox presented by modern progress. The perplexing phenomena of deepening want with increasing wealth, of labour rendered more dependent and helpless by the very introduction of labour-saving machinery, are the inevitable result of natural laws as fixed and certain as the law of gravitation. Private property in land is the primary cause of the monstrous inequalities which are developing in modern society. It is this, and not any miscalculation of nature in bringing into the world more mouths than she can feed, that gives rise to that tendency of wages to a minimum—that, in spite of all advances in productive power, compels the labouring classes to the least return on which they will consent to live. It is this that produces all those phenomena that are so often attributed to the conflict of labour and capital. It is this that condemns Highland crofters to rags and hunger, that produces the pauperism of Great Britain and Ireland, and the tramps of America. It is this that makes the almshouse and the penitentiary

the marks of what we call high civilisation; that in the midst of schools and churches degrades and brutalises men, crushes the sweetness out of womanhood and the joy out of childhood. It is this that makes lives that might be a blessing a pain and a curse, and every year drives more and more to seek unbidden refuge in the gates of death. For, a permanent tendency to equality once set up, all the forces of progress tend to greater and greater inequality.

All this is contrary to Nature. The poverty and misery, the vice and degradation, that spring from the unequal distribution of wealth, are not the results of natural law; they spring from our defiance of natural law. They are the fruits of our refusal to obey the supreme law of justice. It is because we rob the child of his birthright; because we make the bounty which the Creator intended for all the exclusive property of some, that these things come upon us, and, though advancing and advancing, we chase but the mirage.

When, by lightning flash or friction amid dry grasses, the consuming flames of the fire first flung their lurid glow into the face of man, how must he have started back in affright! When he first stood by the shores of the sea, how must its waves have said to him, "Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther!" Yet, as he learned to use them, fire became his most useful servant, the sea his easiest highway. The most destructive element of which we know—that which for ages and ages seemed the very thunderbolt of the angry gods—is, as we are now beginning to learn, fraught for us with untold powers of usefulness. Already it enables us to annihilate space in our messages, to illuminate the night with new suns; and its uses are only beginning. And throughout all Nature, as far as we can see, whatever is potent for evil is potent for good. "Dirt," said Lord Brougham, "is matter in the wrong place." And so the squalor and vice and misery that abound in the very heart of our civilisation are but results of the misapplication of forces in their nature most elevating.

I doubt not that whichever way a man may turn to inquire of Nature, he will come upon adjustments which will arouse not merely his wonder, but his gratitude. Yet what has most impressed me with the feeling that the laws of nature are the laws of beneficent intelligence is what I see of the social possibilities involved in the law of rent. Rent* springs from natural causes.

* I of course, use the word "rent" in its economic, not its common sense, meaning by that what is commonly called ground rent.

It arises, as society develops, from the differences in natural opportunities and the differences in the distribution of population. It increases with the division of labour, with the advance of the arts, with the progress of invention. And thus, by virtue of a law impressed upon the very nature of things, has the Creator provided that the natural advance of mankind shall be an advance toward equality, an advance toward co-operation, an advance toward a social State in which not even the weakest need be crowded to the wall, in which even for the unfortunate and the cripple there may be ample provision. For this revenue, which arises from the common property, which represents not the creation of value by the individual, but the creation by the community as a whole, which increases just as society develops, affords a common fund, which, properly used, tends constantly to equalise conditions, to open the largest opportunities for all, and to utterly banish want or the fear of want.

The squalid poverty that festers in the heart of our civilisation, the vice and crime and degradation and ravening greed that flow from it, are the results of a treatment of land that ignores the simple law of justice, a law so clear and plain that it is universally recognised by the veriest savages. What is by nature the common birthright of all, we have made the exclusive property of individuals; what is by natural law the common fund, from which common wants should be met, we give to a few that they may lord it over their fellows. And so some are gorged while some go hungry, and more is wasted than would suffice to keep all in luxury.

In this nineteenth century, among any people who have begun to utilise the forces and methods of modern production, there is no necessity for want. There is no good reason why even the poorest should not have all the comforts, all the luxuries, all the opportunities for culture, all the gratifications of refined taste that only the richest now enjoy. There is no reason why any one should be compelled to long and monotonous labour. Did invention and discovery stop to-day, the forces of production are ample for this. What hampers production is the unnatural inequality in distribution. And, with just distribution, invention and discovery would only have begun.

Appropriate rent in the way I propose, and speculative rent would be at once destroyed. The dogs in the manger who are now holding so much land they have no use for, in order to extract a high price from those who do want to use it, would be at once choked off, and land from which labour and capital are now debarred under penalty of a heavy fine would be thrown open

to improvement and use. The incentive to land monopoly would be gone. Population would spread where it is now too dense, and become denser where it is now too sparse.

Appropriate rent in this way, and not only would natural opportunities be thus opened to labour and capital, but all the taxes which now weigh upon production and rest upon the consumer would be abolished. The demand for labour would increase, wages would rise, every wheel of production would be set in motion.

Appropriate rent in this way, and the present expenses of Government would be at once very much reduced—reduced directly by the saving in the present cumbrous and expensive schemes of taxation, reduced indirectly by the diminution in pauperism and in crime. This simplification in governmental machinery, this elevation of moral tone which would result, would make it possible for Government to assume the running of railroads, telegraphs, and other businesses which, being in their nature monopolies, cannot, as experience is showing, be safely left in the hands of private individuals and corporations. In short, losing its character as a repressive agency, Government could thus gradually pass into an administrative agency of the great co-operative association—society.

For, appropriate rent in this way, and there would be at once a large surplus over and above what are now considered the legitimate expenses of Government. We could divide this, if we wanted to, among the whole community, share and share alike. Or we could give every boy a small capital for a start when he came of age, every girl a dower, every widow an annuity, every aged person a pension, out of this common estate. Or we could do with our great common fund many, many things that would be for the common benefit, many, many things that would give to the poorest what even the richest cannot now enjoy. We could establish free libraries, lectures, museums, art-galleries, observatories, gymnasiums, baths, parks, theatres; we could line our roads with fruit trees, and make our cities clean and wholesome and beautiful; we could conduct experiments, and offer rewards for inventions, and throw them open to public use.

Think of the enormous wastes that now go on: The waste of false revenue systems, which hamper production and bar exchange, which fine a man for erecting a building where none stood before, or for making two blades of grass grow where there was but one. The waste of unemployed labour, of idle machinery, of those periodical depressions of industry almost as destructive as war. The waste entailed by poverty, and the vice and crime and thrift-

lessness and drunkenness that spring from it; the waste entailed by that greed of gain that is its shadow, and which makes business in large part but a masked war; the waste entailed by the fret and worry about the mere physical necessities of existence, to which so many of us are condemned; the waste entailed by ignorance, by cramped and undeveloped faculties, by the turning of human beings into mere machines!

Think of these enormous wastes, and of the others which, like these, are due to the fundamental wrong which produces an unjust distribution of wealth and distorts the natural development of society, and you will begin to see what a higher, purer, richer civilisation would be made possible by the simple measure that will assert natural rights. You will begin to see how, even if no one but the present landholders were to be considered, this would be the greatest boon that could be vouchsafed them by society, and that, for them to fight it, would be as if the dog with a tin kettle tied to his tail should snap at the hand that offered to free him. Even the greatest landholder! As for such landholders as our working farmers and homestead owners, the slightest discussion would show them that they had everything to gain by the change. But even such landholders as the Duke of Westminster and the Astors would be gainers.

For it is of the very nature of injustice that it really profits no one. When and where was slavery good for slaveholders? Did her cruelties in America, her expulsions of Moors and Jews, her burnings of heretics, profit Spain? Has Great Britain gained by her injustice toward Ireland? Did not the curse of an unjust social system rest on Louis XIV. and Louis XV. as well as on the poorest peasant whom it condemned to rags and starvation—as well as on that Louis whom it sent to the block? Is the Czar of Russia to be envied?

This we may know certainly, this we may hold to confidently: that which is unjust can really profit no one; that which is just can really harm no one. Though all other lights move and circle, this is the pole-star by which we may safely steer.



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