

CHAPTER XX

THE WAY OUT

"There needeth not the hell that bigots frame
To punish those who err: earth in itself
Contains at once the evil and the cure;
And all-sufficing Nature can chastise
Those who transgress her law — she only knows
How justly to proportion to the fault the punishment it merits."

— Shelley.

"This is all very well!" exclaimed one of our friends to whom we submitted the manuscript of this book; "and I have read or heard much the same thing before. But what do you suggest as the first, immediate, practical steps towards the realisation of your ideals? In other words, what do you suggest as the easiest, safest, and most efficacious way out of our present difficulties and sorrows?"

To answer this most pertinent and suggestive question is the sole purpose of the present chapter.

In the first place, let us briefly recapitulate the conclusions our inquiry has compelled us to accept: they run as follows:

- (1) That men work in order to enjoy, in order to satisfy their wants, to minister to their desires, whatever these may be.
- (2) That of the means available men will always select the one by which they deem the desired end may be attained at the least cost of exertion, pain, or discomfort. In other words, men will always act on the line of least resistance or, what is equivalent, of greatest attraction.
- (3) That to the working of this fundamental principle of all Political Economy that is rational may safely be attributed, not only the adoption and continuous development of co-operation and division of labour, the extension of which marks every advance in social organisation; not only the invention and almost continuous improvement in tools, of all auxiliaries of production; not only the adoption and continuous expansion of that system of reciprocal exchange of services known as barter, trade, or commerce, but also the very existence of social life.

(4) That a reciprocal exchange of services is the animating principle of peaceful voluntary association, the inspiring principle of all social life.

(5) That men serve one another either directly, by direct service, or indirectly, by assisting in the production (including distribution) of material commodities capable of satisfying wants or ministering to desires.

(6) That all such commodities minister either directly to men's enjoyments, as "enjoyable wealth," or indirectly only, by aiding and facilitating future production, as aids to and auxiliaries of production, or "serviceable wealth"; and that this latter is the only real "capital" in the sense this most mysterious and mystifying term is generally used.

(7) That Nature and Labour, or, in other words, since the control of the land gives control of Nature, Land and Labour are the two sole indispensable elements or factors in the production of all commodities, of all "wealth," whether "enjoyable wealth" or "serviceable wealth."

(8) That hence the well-being and contentment of every community, as well as the equity or non-equity of the social relations of the citizens composing it, will necessarily be mainly determined by the equity or non-equity of those customs, laws, and institutions determining their relations towards the great natural and national home, workshop, and storehouse, the land of the country they are occupying and utilising.

(9) That their industrial habits and instincts are constantly impelling mankind to enter into social relations with their fellows, into social relations based upon a reciprocal exchange of services. That this reciprocal exchange of services beyond the more or less arbitrary and artificial limits of separated communities, known as barter, trade, or commerce, constantly tends to impel such communities to enter into social relations one with the other, and to weld the whole of mankind into one vast, harmonious social union, to the common benefit of all.

(10) That the influence of the Industrial Habits and Instincts, or, as they might justly be termed, the Social Habits and Instincts, are constantly checked and thwarted by certain opposing habits and instincts, impelling mankind to prey upon their fellows, to gain some control of the lives and of the fruits of the labour of their fellows, to be able to command services from them without being called upon to render equivalent counter-services; which instincts may justly be termed the Predatory or Anti-social Instincts,

(11) That, seeing that the Predatory Instincts were at one time the predominant Instincts, it is probable that some of the customs, laws, and institutions we have inherited from past generations may be attributable to these Anti-social Instincts. That they were never the products of reason or of necessity, but have been imposed upon the industrial classes, who form the majority in every society, by a conquering predatory class or caste.

(12) That at all times and in all places mankind have to choose between a Social Polity, or Constitution, or System of Customs, Laws, and Institutions, recognising and enforcing the equal claims of all to life, and all that this involves; and one recognising and enforcing the special claims of some. In other words, their choice is, and for ever must remain, between Justice and Privilege, between Liberty and License, between Freedom and Slavery.

(13) That the former alone is in accordance with the civilising Industrial or Social Instincts; the latter with the brutalising Predatory or Anti-social Instincts.

(14) That the former is the product of Reason, and can be maintained by Reason; the latter the product of Force, and can only be maintained by Force.

(15) That Co-operation, Civilisation, Peace, and Progress are the typical fruits of the social or industrial instincts; Slavery, War, Devastation, and Poverty the typical fruits of the Anti-social Predatory Instincts.

(16) That the conception of Justice — based as it is on the recognition of the equal claims of others — is an ethical, rather than an economic or political conception. And that hence in the Science of Ethics it is that we have to seek the fundamental principle or principles of the Art of Economics or Politics, of the Art of Governing, of Shaping and Regulating the Social Relations and Inter-relations of Mankind.

(17) That hence, in order to conform our social customs, laws, and institutions to our industrial or social requirements, we must seek to ascertain what Justice, the Law of Liberty, the Law of Equal Freedom, or the Golden Rule of Righteousness, teaches us we may claim for ourselves as rights, and, conversely, it is our duty to respect in others, to concede to others, as rights also,

(18) That if we should obey the dictates of Justice, then:

(a) Each should be left free to dispose of his own activities as he may deem most conducive to his own happiness, provided only he in no way infringes on the equal freedom of others.

(b) Each should be left free to dispose of the fruits of his own activities, of his own exertions, of his own acquired or inherited capabilities and faculties, as he may deem most conducive to his own happiness, again with the above proviso.

(c) Each should be left free to avail himself of the bounties and opportunities of Nature, or, as some may prefer to express it, to share in those blessings and bounties the great Creator, the Father of All, has lavished upon His children; or, in other words, the claims of each to the use of land must be recognised as a right, and sacredly respected.

(19) That the fundamental principle upon which the Institution of Property is founded, and by an appeal to which, when attacked, it can alone be defended, is the desire and necessity to guarantee to each and every man the undisturbed possession and fullest and freest enjoyment of the fruits of his own activities.

(20) That though this applies to all commodities that have been produced by human labour, as well as to all improvements in and on the land, it cannot apply to what is not the result of human labour, viz., the natural bonnties and opportunities inherent in the land, which form the primary and indispensable element of all life and industry.

(21) That by extending the Institution of Property to things to which it does not apply [e.g., slaves and land), we thereby destroy those advantages that might accrue to Society by the Institution of Property itself. For by so doing we secure to some the control of the lives and of the fruits of the labour of others; or, in other words, by so doing we enable some to command services from their fellows, without rendering equivalent counter-services.

(22) That hence, though the Institution of Property has long, and, as we believe, correctly, been regarded as an indispensable condition of social life and social progress, yet, in so far as it has never been made to conform to the demands of the principles upon which it rests, it cannot be said to have had a fair trial, a proper opportunity of demonstrating the benefits to society which might accrue from strict obedience to its demands. In other words, seeing that, owing to the promptings of the predatory instincts of the race, the great Ethical Command, "Thou shalt not steal!" has never yet been entirely or strictly obeyed, that it has only been enforced on some, but not on all, it cannot be said to have ever been properly tried.

(23) That, under equitable conditions — that is, under conditions conforming to the dictates of the Law of Liberty, the Law of Equal Freedom — the revenues of a progressive community, as well as the advantages and enjoyments it could secure to

all its members, as well as the earnings of each and every individual citizen, that is, the services and gratifications each and every co-operating worker could command in return for his own labour and services, would be constantly increasing.

(24) That, under equitable conditions, the unimproved land value, or site value of land, due as it is to the presence, necessities, and united activities of all, would provide a common fund whence all necessary public expenditure could be derived by every community without infringing on the individual earnings of any of its members.

(25) That, under equitable conditions, Competition would ensure, not only that all material commodities or services should exchange one for the other, according to the amount of labour they respectively represented, and thus, that any improvement in any branch of industry would be distributed among all the co-operating workers, but also that the earnings in all branches of industry should tend toward a natural level, viz., toward the level of those engaged in the primary industries, in producing direct from Mother Earth.

(26) That thus, under equitable conditions, there would be a constant and irresistible tendency toward a condition of social equality, or rather toward an equality of social conditions.

(27) That, under equitable conditions, what is called "Interest," i.e., the premium now obtainable for the use of "Wealth," would disappear, and solvent borrowers would only be called upon to repay the thing, or the exchange value of the things, they had borrowed.

(28) That, under equitable conditions, the present system of burdening the industry, and pledging the fruits of the labour of future generations, known as National Debts, would not be necessary nor tolerated, save under the pressure of very exceptional circumstances.

(29) That the remediable social evils that are the inevitable accompaniment of our present civilisation, including the deepening of poverty, with its attendant train of misery, brutality, immorality, ignorance, vice, and crime, are due exclusively to our ignoring the demands of Justice, to our disobeying the dictates of the Law of Equal Freedom.

(30) That they can be removed only by removing the cause to which they are due; in other words, by conforming our social customs, laws, and institutions to the demands of Justice, to the dictates of the Law of Equal Freedom.

Thus, then, as it seems to us, the question our friend asked has already been sufficiently answered. The first necessary step toward the establishment of the reign of Justice, or, as some may prefer to express the same idea, toward the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, is to recognise and respect the claims of all to the use and enjoyment of the earth; and to frame social conditions that will secure to all opportunities of applying their labour on equitable terms to the great natural storehouse, the land. Thus, and thus alone, can we commence the reformation of our social customs, laws, and institutions in accordance with the demands of the Law of Equal Freedom; thus, and thus alone, can we hope to harvest the blessings of Justice, social peace, harmony, contentment, well-being, and true civilisation.

As we have already shown, this could be secured by gradually appropriating for public purposes that which is essentially the creation of the whole community, the annual unimproved rental value of land. The first practical step in this direction would be, of course, to have the whole land of the community carefully valued, its unimproved annual rental, or site, value, or its capitalised or selling value, estimated, and to impose a uniform tax of, say, either two shillings in the pound of annual rental value, or of, say, threepence or sixpence in the pound of selling or capitalised value, on all land, whether occupied or vacant, whether in use or withheld from use. And let it be publicly and solemnly proclaimed that it is intended that this tax shall be increased, say, every ten, twenty, twenty-five, or even every fifty years, until the whole unimproved value of the land is appropriated for the joint and common benefit of those to whom in equity it belongs, of those to whose presence, necessities, and united activities it is due, viz., the whole community.¹ As we all have to use land, from such a system of taxation, no one would be exempt, and each would be called upon to contribute in exact proportion to the value of the special privileges conferred on him, i.e., according to the value of the national inheritance, the land, he was being permitted to occupy, utilise, or to engross. Simultaneously with the inauguration of such a system of taxation, an equivalent amount of such taxation as now hampers industry, burdens trade, and reduces the earnings of the workers, could be abolished; and thus some of the injury and injustice of the old system be swept away concurrently with securing the advantages of an equitable system of taxation. It should be unnecessary to add that any such National Valuation of Land could be accepted by Local Rating Authorities as the basis of all assessments for local purpose. And that, whatever the amount of the tax or rate may be, it should also be imposed upon all minor artificial monopolies, on all those special privileges, such as the power to run tramways, railways, to erect water-works, gas-works, and so on, that have been granted either to individuals or to corporate bodies.

¹We deem it unnecessary to refer to the proposal known as appropriating the future "unearned increment" only. In the first place, the whole rental value of land has

annually to be re-created by the energies and activities of the people; and any such proposition would be an admission of the right of some to appropriate as much of such value as they have been accustomed to do; securing only any surplus, which may or may not come into existence, to those to whom in equity the whole belong. Moreover, the difficulties in the way of the adoption of any such proposal are, in truth, far greater than those in the way of the inauguration of the Taxation of Land Values; whilst its moral and economic effects would be infinitely less. As we have already said, from such a system of taxation no one would be exempt, and each would contribute according to the value of the special privileges he was enjoying. Needless to add that such a system of taxation would at once effectively put an end to land monopoly, to the withholding of land from use, to all "investing" in land, save by those who desired themselves to put it to use. This would, of course, be a hardship, or at least a financial injury, to those modern representatives of the old-time Predatory or Conquering Classes, who have so long claimed the privilege of controlling the lives, and of appropriating to themselves the lion's share of the fruits of the labours of their fellow-citizens: of commanding service without rendering equivalent counterservices. And yet it would really advantage them as part of the community, on whom it would confer incalculable benefits. For, in truth, Injustice benefits no one; Justice would benefit all.

We are well aware that at the present day most land users pay in Rents, Rates, and Taxes much more than the natural or economic value of the opportunities they are enjoying. Under the new system they, one and all, would soon be called upon to pay much less, as part of and eventually all that they have now to pay to private individuals as Rent would be appropriated to pay those Rates and Taxes they have now to pay in addition to their Rents. Of course, under such conditions, those now living upon Rents, or rather their descendants, would have to learn to earn their own livelihood; in other words, would have to prepare themselves to render service to their fellows if they desired to be able to command counter-services. And this is only just, natural, and right; for so long as some can command service without rendering a full equivalent counterservice, so long must those who are rendering services to the community be deprived of some portion of the fruits of their labours. To supply the Land, "the source of all wealth, and the field of all labour," is, indeed, rendering mankind the greatest service possible; but this service was rendered, not by any one man, or class or caste of men, but by Nature, or by God, who asks of us no service — at least, no mere lip-service, but simply obedience to her commands. For, indeed, "Nature is not conquered save by obedience."

The inauguration of this system of taxation, or rather of appropriating public values for public uses, would at once tend to reduce the present inflated, artificial monopoly value of land, and to reduce the value of all land to its true economic level. Of course,

so long as those who now claim to control the use of the land gain monopoly rents for such portions of the land as are in use, so long it can equitably be assumed that all similar land still under their control, whether in use or not, has a similar value; and hence they can equitably be called upon to pay toward the public expenditure according to the value which their own monopoly of land artificially creates. When they relinquish their claim to control such land as they are not themselves putting to use, such monopoly values would at once be destroyed, and all land would fall to its true economic value: i.e. the value of the advantages any piece of land offers over the worst land in use, which latter would pay no, or a mere nominal, tax.

Moreover, during the transition period, any local self-governing body could by Act of Parliament be secured the power to take over any land that may be required for any public purposes at the value at which it is assessed for taxation purposes. Or, inasmuch as all land holders are both in law and equity but tenants of the State, the people, through the mouths of their representatives in their National Assemblies, could publicly declare that henceforward they would refuse to recognise any claim to the control of their land, any so-called "property" in the land itself; and hence, that when land is required for any public purposes, be it for docks, water-works, to develop mineral resources, housing, or any other purpose, they would regard themselves as liable to compensate only for any improvements in and on the land, and for any pecuniary damage or loss involved on land holders by the taking over of such land. By such means, though the annual rental value of land would remain unimpaired, much of the speculative selling value of land would at once be destroyed. At the present time, though when in the market land may be regarded as worth but twenty to thirty years' purchase — that is, twenty or thirty times its estimated annual value — yet land holders often claim, and what is worse obtain, prices equivalent to 100, 600, or even 1,000 years' purchase, the burden of which necessarily falls upon the industry of the community at large. Such things only demonstrate the absurd length to which the predatory claims of those who today claim to control the natural and inalienable inheritance of all have been carried, under cover of artificial laws made by these few in their own interests, regardless of the rights and conveniences, and of the injury they inflict on their disinherited fellow-citizens. Surely it is high time that the pendulum should commence to swing in the other direction, towards the recognition and enforcement of the claims of all to the use of land upon equitable terms; in other words, towards Justice.

By these means, while the exclusive individual possession of land would remain untouched, yet what is known as "property in land" would receive its death-blow; and the natural opportunities, resources, and forces would become available to industry on equitable terms, and at their lowest economic value. Thus, over-population and over-production, those bugbears of superficial thinkers, of those swift logicians who are

never weary of worrying their fellows with the inane products of their own muddled thinking, would cease to trouble men's thoughts and distort their ethical and social views. For the phenomena attributed to their working would cease as soon as we place the whole of mankind in equitable relations toward the great natural sources whence all necessities and conveniences of life can alone be derived. Thus, too, the fallacies of Protection would cease to charm men's ears and disturb their understanding, and true Free Trade, which means freedom to produce as well as freedom to exchange, would necessarily be established as the only equitable policy, as the only policy possible to a truly civilised community, who would gain all necessary public revenues without infringing on the rights or on the earnings of a single individual citizen. Thus the interests of all the different members of the community would be made identical, as also the interests of all the different separated communities: the natural and acquired advantages of each would benefit all the rest. Thus the direct causes of all internecine and international troubles and disputes would be removed; Wars and Rumours of Wars would trouble mankind no longer; and all men made truly human by equitable social conditions, might combine jointly and severally to enjoy and rejoice in all those benefits and blessings Nature has so lavishly placed within their reach, but which can only be secured to all and enjoyed by all under the sheltering aegis of Justice.

A dream, you may say. Be it so; but a dream easily and speedily to be realised, if only each one of us, each for himself, would earnestly strive to shape his own actions, his own desires, in accordance with the demands of the only rational foundation of Social Ethics, the one fundamental principle of rational Economics — the Law of Equal Freedom.

Though it be true that men are but the inevitable products of their antecedents and conditions, and though to alter our antecedents we have no power, yet is it indisputably true that individual reformation must precede, though it will also necessarily accompany, social reformation. For, as we have already pointed out, our social conditions, our artificial, man-made customs, laws and institutions, do but reflect the personal character and desires of those who have power to formulate and enforce them. Today, in every constitutionally governed country at least, this power is well within the reach of the majority of every community; and this majority is composed of the now disinherited workers, who bear the burden and are crushed beneath the injustice of our present civilisation. So long as these merely desire to take the place of their task-masters, the privileged classes, so long as they individually desire to seek refuge only on the alluring but soul-killing sand-bank of privilege, so long will they maintain privilege, even though they themselves may fall crushed, maimed, and bleeding beneath its weight. But when they individually and severally desire only to do unto others as they would have others do to them; when they

individually and severally demand for all, and are prepared to concede to all, everything they demand for themselves; when, in short, they truly and honestly desire only to do Justice, to obey the Law of Equal Freedom: then, and then only, will the social customs, laws, and institutions, determining their own destinies, be based on this benign, bracing, restoring, health-giving ethical or social principle. For it is everlastingly and universally true that "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." More especially is this spirit to be cultivated by all those who venture to come forward as teachers and leaders of their fellows, whose praiseworthy desire it is to be greatest amongst them, and consequently the servants of the rest. On such men it is incumbent that they should study the laws of social health before they venture to pronounce judgment as to the remedies for the prevailing social diseases. Above all, let these be true to themselves, for then they cannot be false to others. Let them fearlessly proclaim the truths that study may have revealed to them, even though these may as yet be neither popular nor fashionable, and those who voice them may find no favour in the eyes of those they would fain lead down the paths of righteousness, justice, and truth toward individual and social salvation.

To sum up: A little honesty — honesty of study, honesty of conviction, honesty of expression, honesty of thought, of word and of deed, in each individual member of society — this is all that is needed to create a New Heaven and a New Earth wherein Justice and Righteousness shall dwell. All that we can teach, all that we can proclaim, is summarised in the following words of one who suffered for preaching social truths over nineteen hundred years ago:

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."