

III.

A PIECE OF LAND.

BY FRANCIS G. SHAW.

SCENE—*A Common.* LABOR *digging the ground with a stick, to plant potatoes.* CAPITAL *passing with a spade on his shoulder.*

LABOR. I say, Capital, shall you use your spade this year?

Capital. No, I'm going a-fishing.

Labor. Lend it to me, then.

Capital. Why should I?

Labor. As a good neighbor. You don't want it, and it would be a great help to me. I could plant more ground, and, perhaps, raise fifty more bushels of potatoes, if I had it.

Capital. That's a very one-sided reason. You'd wear it out by the end of the year. You'd have your fifty bushels extra, and I should have no spade. You'd be so much better off, and I should be so much worse off than I am now. There's not much good-neighborhood in that.

Labor. Oh, I'd give it back to you just as good as it is now; or I'd make a new one for you.

[NOTE.—This is the necessary maintenance or replacement of capital which is consumed by use.]

Capital. That's rather better, but still it's not fair. You'd have your fifty bushels more, which you couldn't have raised without my spade, while I should be no better off than I am now. No, thank you! I'll keep my spade. Go make one for yourself. It took me ten days to make this.

Labor. Yes, but this is the season for planting, and I haven't the time to spare; I want to use it now. I can't see why you shouldn't let me have it as well as leave it to rust, which it will since you're not going to use it.

Capital. It's not going to rust. I'll tell you what I mean to do with it: Farmer wants a spade as well as you, and offers to give a yearling heifer in exchange for this one. I'm on my way now to make the swap, and get her. I shall turn her out on the common, and by the end of the year I shall have a cow with, perhaps, a calf by her side. Don't you think she'll be worth a good deal more than the new spade you offer?

[NOTE.—CAPITAL proposes to take advantage of the active forces of nature which manifest themselves in growth as well as in the productiveness of land, and which can be made available by LABOR, or by CAPITAL, the result of LABOR.]

Labor. Certainly she will. I never thought of that! Yes; if you can swap your spade for the heifer, you've a right to as much return from one as from the other. But how much do you expect to gain if you do make the exchange?

Capital. I suppose quite as much as ten bushels of your potatoes will be worth when you dig them.

Labor. I'll take the spade and give you a new one and ten bushels of potatoes. Will that satisfy you?

Capital. I've rather set my heart on the heifer, and, besides, your crop may fail.

Labor. I hope not; it never has. However, there is

some little risk, I admit, and I'll give you twelve bushels instead of ten. What do you say?

Capital. It's a bargain! Here's the spade, and I'll go and see about my boat.

[NOTE.—Thus LABOR employs the wealth which CAPITAL has accumulated by his past labor, and as both are interested in the crop, LABOR and CAPITAL become partners. The ten bushels which CAPITAL is to receive for the use of the spade may be called interest, to which he is justly entitled, from his ability to exchange the spade for something which will give him an equal profit by its mere growth, and the other two bushels are for insurance against the risk of a failure of the crop.]

Enter LANDOWNER.

Landowner (leaning over fence). Hullo, Labor! What are you at work on that moorland for? The soil is much better on this side of the fence. You can raise fifty bushels more potatoes here than you can there, with the same work. You'd much better hire this lot of me; I wouldn't charge you much for the use of it.

Labor. It's true that the soil is better, and I should plant there if you hadn't fenced it in; but you know as well as I do that this common is free, and that everything I can raise on it is mine; while if I should plant on that side of the fence you'd clap me into jail for trespassing, or else you'd let me raise a crop and then take all away from me, unless I came to your terms. The laws seem to be made for you landowners! What right had you to fence in the best land? It was all common once. If you were cultivating it, I wouldn't have a word to say; your right to it is as good as mine, or that of anybody else; but it's no better, and I don't see what right you have to keep me off of it, when you don't want to cultivate it yourself.

Landowner. I did cultivate it for some years, and I

fenced it to keep the cattle away; I hauled off the stone and drained it, and got good crops.

Labor. Did the crops repay you for what you laid out?

Landowner. Pretty well, you may believe; you don't suppose that I was such a fool as to make the improvements if I hadn't been sure of that. But I've got some better land that I mean to till this year, and I should like to let this lot to you at a fair rent.

Labor. Yes; I suppose you have taken the cream out of this. But what do you call a fair rent?

Landowner. Let me see! The land is still a good deal better than the common, and easier to work than when I inclosed it. The drains are there, and there are no stones on the ground; besides, the fence is good for three years, and you'll have to fence your common lot if you want to make a crop. That's something for you to consider. These are real advantages.

Labor. Yes, that's so. Well! I think it will be fair if I agree to give you one-third the value of the fence; say, ten bushels of potatoes, and five bushels more on account of the other improvements.

Landowner. Will you keep the fence in as good repair as it is now?

Labor. No; fifteen bushels is as much as I can afford to give.

Landowner. And how much will you give for the use of the land?

Labor. Nothing whatever. I pay you so much for the use of your improvements, and that's so much gain to you, for you've already been well paid for them by the crops you've taken off, which have diminished the fertility of the soil. I'm willing to pay for the benefit I shall derive from them, and nothing else. If you won't let me have the land for the fifteen bushels, I'll stick to the common; I can do about as well here. But you haven't told me

what right you had to fence in the best land, and call it yours?

Landowner. The king gave it to me.

Labor. What right had the king to take away the people's land, and give it to you?

Landowner. No matter whether he had the right or not; he had the might. The land is mine, and you cannot cultivate it without my permission.

Labor. Well! We won't discuss the question of right just now. Will you let me have the lot for the year at the price I offer?

Landowner. Yes; you may have it. It's so much gain to me; but if it wasn't for that confounded common you should pay more.

ANOTHER YEAR.

(In the meanwhile LANDOWNER has succeeded in getting through Parliament an Act authorizing him to inclose the common, and has taken possession. He has accordingly fenced in the whole of it. Not against cattle this time, but against LABOR.)

Labor, going to Landowner. Please, sir, as the common is inclosed, I've now no free land to work upon, and I should be very glad to hire that same lot of you for another year.

Landowner. Humph! You did pretty well on that lot last year, didn't you?

Labor. Yes, sir! I was able to give Capital a new spade, besides paying him for the use of his; and I had enough over to keep my family in comfort after paying you the rent.

Landowner. And you expect to get the land for the same rent this year?

Labor. I hope that you will let me have it on the same terms, sir. If I'm obliged to pay more I shall not be able to give Capital so much for the use of his spade, and my family will suffer for want of the comforts to which they have been accustomed.

Landowner. That's none of my business. Capital must be content with a smaller return, and you must reduce the expenses of your family. There's no common for you to cultivate now, or for him to pasture his heifer on. You must both of you cut your coat according to your cloth, and wear your old clothes when you have no cloth.

Labor. I'm aware of that, sir, and can only hope that you will consider my circumstances.

Landowner. What I shall consider will be my own interest. I shall manage my estate on strictly business principles. You paid me fifteen bushels of potatoes on account of my improvements last year. We agreed upon that as fair, didn't we?

Labor. Yes, sir.

Landowner. Well! I'll be easy with you and charge you no more this year; but you must keep the fence in repair.

Labor. It will be very hard on me, sir, taking so much from the support of my family; but I suppose that I must do as you say; and if I must, I must.

Landowner. Now how much will you agree to give me for the use of my land? Last year you wouldn't give me anything, and I had to come to your terms, because you had the common to fall back upon. This year there's no common, and you've got to come to mine.

Labor. I hope, sir, that they will be such as to enable me to live and keep my family comfortably, which will be hard work enough now, with the additional work I'm obliged to put upon the fence.

Landowner. Comfortably! I don't know and I don't care. You ought to be satisfied with the necessaries of life, and not talk about luxuries. But there's no use in wasting any more talk about the matter. The rent of the lot for this year is fifty bushels in all.

Labor. But, sir,—

Landowner. But me no Buts. That's the rent.

Labor. We shall starve, sir, and then your land will be of no use to you. You must have somebody to cultivate it.

Landowner. There's something in that; but, as I said, fifty bushels is the rent. You know that you must take the land at my price, and I know you'll make the shift to pull through. If you can't, and I find that you really haven't enough to live on, perhaps I'll not exact the whole of the rent, but let a part remain in arrears, for you to make up when you have an extra good year, and I will give you some of the small potatoes in charity, to keep you alive and out of the poorhouse—where (*aside*) I should have to pay for the whole support of you and your family.