

## THE SLAVERY OF MONOPOLIES

**A Complete Monopoly.**

Chattel slavery is the most complete monopoly which exists. It is a form of servitude in which the slave is fed, clothed and housed by his master, not as a just return for services, but because it is the minimum upon which a captive can exist and reproduce. Captivity not being conducive to longevity, the birth-rate is an important consideration for the slave-owner.

A mean master might cut the essentials of subsistence down below the standard of "healthy animality," but it would not be to his advantage to do so, because it is evident that the slave would become too weak to work, also his progeny, although they might arrive frequently, would perish early from malnutrition. Consequently a slave-owner cares for his slaves much as he cares for his horses or other domestic animals which have an exchange value.

The benevolent master might show great affection for his chattel, might shower gifts upon him, might dress him in the costliest raiment, feed him upon the choicest food, but the slave is yet a slave—a captive in a cage of gold. He has no right to himself, does not possess the product of his labour, cannot enjoy in security the pleasures of his family. He is restricted and monopolised entirely by his master, and he is not happy and contented.

Self-interest being thus circumscribed, it is obvious that little enterprise of a beneficent nature would be exhibited by the slave, who would devote his main energies towards the currying of favour with his master and overreaching his fellow-captives.

In such surroundings of hostility a small spark of annoyance might conceivably promote panicky and violent action, which would be repressed severely by an overanxious

master, against whom a feeling for revenge would be nurtured. In practice, our expectations that progress in invention would be meagre, except in channels of luxury, immorality and superstition, are fully borne out by past experiences which are recorded in history.

### The Wage Slave.

The act of receiving recompense in kind, in corresponding services, or in being paid a token in money which will command the labour of others to an equal amount, does not constitute slavery. Nor, because one man employs another for wages, is the employee a slave. But to the extent that the employee is paid less than the value of the services he renders to his employer, so he is enslaved. Conversely, if the employer pays more than the value of the services rendered to him by the employee, to that extent the employer is a slave.

There is no slavery when a just and equal bargain can be struck. There is nothing inherently immoral in the use of money, which is a labour-saving medium for the exchange of wealth, and in purchasing commodities in exchange for his money wages the employee determines the labour of others to the satisfaction of his needs.

The employee thus becomes in turn the employer.

But if the bargain for employment must be closed by the employee, who knows that the failure to close means the risk of starvation, then he is at a disadvantage, and is compelled in an extreme case to accept what will only command a bare subsistence. Similarly, if by reason of an artificially made "short" supply of commodities the consumer, i.e. the employer, is compelled to pay "profiteer" rates, then he is at a disadvantage, and in an extreme case may not be able to purchase sufficient for his daily needs.

Artificial "overpopulation," caused by the elastic steady pressure of forced migrations into NARROW SPACES, owing to its being superstitiously thought that land, which is the "means of life," may be monopolised by the few, is the reason why men and women are compelled to sell themselves cheaply and to cry, often vainly, in the markets of flesh and blood, "Who will buy us?" The slave-driver's whip is not so cruel as the pinch of hunger in the sight of

tantalsing provisions, hearing in one's ears the cry of little children for food.

The jostling "landless," hurrying and jumping upon each other, are being ground into poverty between the upper millstone of niggardly production and the lower millstone of forced labour sales. The "National minimum wage" represents the nearest possible escape from the sieve of starvation.

Wage slavery is based upon the restriction of output, on the one hand, and the ever-present reservoir of unemployed, living casually and dangerously, on the other. It is their clamour for work, and their competition for the jobs held for the time being by others, which operate so as to bring the wages of all the unskilled to the subsistence level. It is due to this fact that we see persons filling the most unpleasant or arduous occupations for the same wages as others receive for lighter and more congenial tasks.

Those who "must keep up appearances" and those whose higher skill or exceptional knowledge command a higher minimum do not escape from the consequences of the common hostile environment.

The slope is a slippery one, and all labourers of hand and brain are compelled to engage in the warlike competition of doing, so far as possible, without the necessities of the life they lead.

In the unnatural alienation of man from Mother Earth we find the explanation for the so-called "Iron Law of Wages" of Karl Marx, and we know, moreover, that the phenomenon is only the manifestation of a hide-bound superstition.

The wage slave is only different from the chattel slave in the limited freedom he is afforded in the society of his family, in the disposal of his wages and spare time. He runs less risk of flogging and imprisonment in leaving one master in the attempt to find a better one. Possessing no exchange value, however, the wage slave might even envy the lot of the chattel slave, who is cared for in order to fetch a good price when his master can no longer employ him.

But, equally with the victim of personal slavery, the enclosed wage slave has no title to himself and is the mono-

polished victim of restricted immediate environment, although he may be, and generally is, quite unconscious of the fact.

### **The Employer not more to blame than the Employee.**

The employer, in view of chronic unemployment, in the offering of minimum wages or less, is no more to blame for poverty than the employee, forced to accept. While he can, a wise employer may pay a degree more than the minimum or trade-union rate of wages in order to buy the pick of the market to his own advantage, but there is a limit beyond which he cannot go, because, as the "employee" of customers who employ him, his services may be dispensed with and the work placed with persons who can accept a lower price by paying minimum wages to their "hands."

The employer of wage slaves, therefore, is at best only a superior slave overseer. He is the warder of the enclosure made by land monopoly.

### **The Lesson of the Black Death.**

It should be scarcely necessary to remind the thoughtful reader that the miserable condition of a people is not fundamentally due to the oppression by certain of them, called rulers. It would be impossible for the few to tyrannise the many, were it not that the latter are persuaded that it is desirable for the common good.

Oppression is the resultant of all the oblique actions and reactions of the individuals of a society, which in general subscribes to some distorting superstition that causes the obliquity. There have been at different epochs in history occurrences, which in a marked degree have demonstrated how impotent man-made arrangements proved when the operation of a superstition was lightened temporarily and suddenly by changed circumstances.

The Black Death of the Middle Ages, brought about by the terrible insanitary conditions of the unprogressive peoples, who had condemned themselves to slavery and disastrous wars, was such an occurrence.

While the whole of Europe was affected, the sparse population of Britain was reduced suddenly to about one-half. We have already briefly alluded in a former chapter to the economic effect which followed before the land-

monopolists had time to close in the barriers upon the diminished population.

The lucid interval was enough to show how vain was the delusion that maximum and minimum prices of land, wages and produce could be fixed by legislation, or that there existed an "iron" law of wages on the supposition that it was a fund paid out of capital—bugbear of obsolete political economists.

Plague is no respecter of persons, and whole families of landlord barons, nobles and copyhold farmers were blotted out, along with thousands of hired freemen, slaves and villeins. Unclaimed land was taken possession of by the labourers, who refused to work for the surviving masters for less wages than they could make working for themselves. Many masters therefore entered into partnership with hired servants.

Slaves and serfs ran away from their lords and became free labourers. The competition, instead of being men for jobs, became one of employers competing for the services of employees. Wages rose rapidly, in spite of the Statute of Labourers and threats of severe penalties directed against the employers who offered and the labourers who accepted wages above a certain maximum.

In self-interest, employers were as ready to cheat the Government measures as the employees, and wages rose to the limit where their value was equal to the product of the labour expended. In self-interest all combined, and were encouraged because the reward remained theirs, to substitute profuse production for niggardly restriction of output.

Although wages were high, food, clothing, housing and other labour products were in comparison low in price, because they were plentiful. Profiteering cannot be carried out in the midst of profusion.

In the surroundings of general prosperity, which is a great emancipator, slavery melted away, and a hundred years after the pestilence not a serf remained in England. The end of the fifteenth century was the Golden Age of Labour: "A peasant could provision his family for a year by fifteen weeks of ordinary work, and an artisan in ten weeks." (Thorold Rogers.)

**How the Peasants were recaptured.**

But because the barriers of dominion were allowed to remain, the cordon was gradually drawn in, the peasants holding land themselves assisting in the process. Nevertheless, having had a brief experience of comparative freedom, the population could not be imprisoned at once and to the same extent as before, and struggled to escape as they felt their liberty curtailed.

Constituted authority in the Church and State made every effort to keep alive the superstition that one man could own another and that the State was entitled to tax what it chose. Anarchy and violence accompanied these aberrations of intellect.

In France, after the Battle of Poitiers, the attempts of the nobles to tax away the new prosperity of the peasants were met by a great revolt. It was at this time that the Black Prince, of sinister reputation, and Captal de Buche suspended hostilities and united their forces, composed mainly of peasants, in order to chastise the Jacquerie; just as in 1525 the French soldiers drawn from the peasantry under the Duke of Guise combined with Charles the Fifth of Germany to punish the cruelly oppressed boors.

**The Armed Resistance of the Peasants under Wat Tiler.**

The first poll-tax made during the French Wars of Edward III was easily collected, because the deluded English people imagined that their taxes would be paid by the foreigner, but the second tax, imposed when Richard II came to the throne in order to pay back war loans to money-lenders, was not popular when this mirage had dissolved.

The brutal methods of the tax-gatherers fanned into flame the smouldering discontent against the heavy tolls, market dues, and the vain attempts which were made to keep down wages and to perpetuate slavery. But the mistaken violence of the uninstructed mob under Wat Tiler, a returned soldier, did not accelerate liberation: it only prevented them from seeing the road to freedom. The useless appeal to direct action ended in the murder of Wat.

Instead of the fulfilment of promises probably made in

good faith by the youthful king, the landlords, during the period of demoralisation which followed, took a bloody revenge. After spreading tales of the atrocities which the mob had perpetrated, or were about to perpetrate, the monopolists had hundreds of insurgents and their leaders slaughtered as a terrible example.

#### **The Cordon tightened.**

In spite of legislation backed by cruel penalties, wages continued to rise and the relative cost of living to fall. The landlords dimly saw at length that in order to increase custom or tenancy dues they must make a "corner" in land.

Many of the vacated estates had been already resumed by the king, ostensibly as crown trustee, but really for the benefit of himself and favourites. This royal example was not lost upon the noble lords and their smaller imitators. The claim of the latter was not, however, esteemed so valid when the larger grabbers began to eat up the small holdings.

The robbery and corruption which went on as the cordon was drawn in upon the people was the subject of unceasing protest, but it was ineffective because it was not accompanied by any practical solution. Although the country gentry and the peasants under Jack Cade defeated the royal forces, the distracted victors were put off with empty promises by Constituted Authority, and the movement collapsed when Jack Cade was assassinated.

Long after the legislation introduced, during the reign of Henry VII, to prevent further enclosures, the scramble proceeded, until in the end the landlords quarrelled over their spoils and began to steal from each other. It was this which in reality brought about the long Wars of the Roses and established the supremacy of the kingship. The moral power of the barons, backed by the commons, which in the time of Simon de Montfort had limited the power of the king, was swallowed eventually by Divine Right and Passive Obedience.

#### **Poverty reappears.**

The land monopolists, in order to evade the payment of higher wages, now converted arable land into pasturage

and raised sheep in large quantities. In the sixteenth century the new fashion of sheep-farming had proved so remunerative that, in spite of the export duty on wool to replace the diminishing fees of feudalism, the landlords could not resist the temptation to enclose the pasturage of the commons and to seize the lands of the copyholding freemen when the latter resisted the payment of higher custom.

Whole villages were depopulated, churches fell into ruin, and although attempts were made by Parliament to limit the number of sheep, so as to provide elbow-room for men, and although legislation was passed to prevent further tillage from being converted into pasturage, it met the fate of all such futile legislation.

Two or three herdsmen being employed where formerly two hundred yeomen found happiness and plenty in agriculture, it is not surprising that men were idle and hungry; that poverty made its appearance once more; that homeless wretches wandered in the highways ready to beg or to steal.

### **The Struggle of the Estates.**

The narrowing of opportunities to the possession of land imposed by the feudal system produced a state of things, as decay set in, which resolved roughly into the Three Estates—the Crown, the Church and the Commons. The two first named gradually became competing monopolies as trusteeship became corrupted into ownership.

By the Statute of Merton, 1235, the Crown and Church vassals were allowed to enclose at will any "waste" lands attached to manors. The thin edge of the wedge was finely pointed by the provision that the commons were left with "sufficient" pasture, and that means of access thereto were ensured. Considering that in the reign of Queen Anne three million acres of common lands were enclosed, and that in the first half of the nineteenth century six million acres more were added, which altogether is one-third of the whole cultivable surface of England and Wales, the Commons Estate, it is plain, was originally very great, probably greater than the other two Estates combined in area at the time of the Conquest.

The survival of the commons was early imperilled by the primitive allodial conditions of tenure, and to that is fundamentally due the ease with which they were crumbled and assimilated by the predatory lords of the manor.

In order to escape feudal obligations to the crown, many crown tenants had alienated their land to the Church, receiving it back again as Church vassals. In 1279 this was forbidden by the Statute of Mortmain, but in the meantime the Church had become a very rich and powerful ecclesiastical combine and "owned" about one-fourth of the most fertile land of England.

At various times before Henry VIII's reign the crown and Church land monopolies had devoured the best common lands, and then they proceeded to war upon each other.

#### **The Crown consumes the Church Estate.**

The Church and guild lands were tilled generously with plentiful labour, and much of the distress caused by the forced unemployment was ameliorated as labourers were absorbed by the monasteries and abbey lands. The Church grew richer upon wage slavery, but increased production from the Church lands had a lowering effect upon food prices, and incidentally saved the country from famine.

The greedy manipulator Henry VIII envied the wealth of the ecclesiastical vineyard, and many, seeing the luxury and display of the ambitious churchmen, ignorantly attributed the growing poverty in the country to their acquisition of riches. The king and his henchmen, therefore, taking advantage of the passions aroused by the so-called Reformation, proceeded to dissolve the monasteries and to confiscate the abbey lands. Many of the guild endowments were also taken in Edward VI's reign, but the London commoners saved those of the City.

Needless to say, these fertile lands were not resumed as a public domain; they were given away to royal favourites, if not by Henry himself, at any rate pilfered during the reign of the baby king Edward VI.

The Duke of Somerset, protector of the young king, pitied the labourers turned out by the despoilers, and demanded by proclamation "that they who had enclosed any lands, accustomed to lie open, should under penalty

before a day assigned lay them open again." The patriotic duke was indicted for high treason and beheaded.

### **The Attempt to re-establish Chattel Slavery.**

As though they were themselves responsible entirely for their misfortunes, the unemployed were very harshly dealt with. During the reign of Henry VIII seventy-two thousand "great and petty thieves" were put to death, and there were sixty thousand prisoners for debt rotting in gaols throughout the land.

An Act was passed against idleness and vagabondry by a Parliament of landlords, which provided, "if any man or woman able to work shall refuse to labour and shall live idly for three days, he or she shall be branded with a red-hot iron on the breast with the letter V, and shall be adjudged for two years the slave of any person who shall inform against such idler."

Masters were empowered to feed their slaves on bread and water, to beat and chain them, to sell, bequeath or hire out, and to put a ring of iron about the neck, arm or leg for the more knowledge or better surety of keeping them. An escaped slave was to be branded on the cheek and become a slave for life. On a second escape he was "to suffer pains of death, as other felons ought to do." Such was the attempt made by a Protestant Government three hundred and seventy years ago to re-establish chattel slavery in England, and a few years later, in 1562, Hawkins began the English slave trade between Africa and America.

### **Agrarian "Rebellions."**

The Pilgrimage of Grace in the North and agrarian Anti-Protestant disturbances in the South were revolts in protest. Blind resentment is often discharged in "religious" bitterness and strife, neither side seeing the true common cause of their misfortunes.

At Norwich in 1549 Robert Kett, a landowner, supported by twenty thousand labourers, was the first "leveller" of the fences and ditches round the enclosures which had been made by the monopolists. This "rebellion" was finally repressed by means of the aid of German mercenaries.

Kett and his brother were hanged in chains and ten thousand country people were put to death that year.

Gangs of "broken men" and "sturdy beggars" held whole tracts of country in terror. It became the sport of the profiteer gentry to capture and hang fifty of these outcasts at a time, and complaint was bitterly made to the Government of the needless delay in waiting until the assizes for trial.

Elizabeth's reign was marked by measures of palliation, such as poor law maintenance. It was directed by the queen that each labourer's cottage built should have assigned four acres of ground, in the penalty of "a fine of 40s. per month the cottage is so continued." The effect was similar to that experienced at the present day, when good intentioned legislators proceed to pave the earthly hell of manufactured "overpopulation."

As one might reasonably have expected, few cottages were built, and the housing question became a burning one. Labourers left the hostile country-side and crowded into the towns and cities for security, where they made rookeries and established slums on a large scale. Elizabeth thereupon proclaimed against the building of any new houses within three miles of the City of London and against "letting or setting any more families than one only to be placed in any one house."

#### **The apparently Miraculous Escape of the Landlords.**

Remembering by transmitted association their escape from the danger of ruinous feudal obligations, based upon the principle of "ability to pay," the vassals of the crown, attending, as they fancied, to their own preservation, had in general little real pity or sympathy for the evicted peasants. They were quick to notice how short-sighted the dispossessed were, and how ready the discontented mob were to blame each other.

Says Professor Thorold Rogers: "There is nothing in the history of civilisation more odious than the meanness of some English landlords, except it be their insolence. They have been abetted by the foolish farmers, who ground down their labourers, and have finally sacrificed themselves to the rent-rolls of profligates and gamblers."

All the movements that have been made by mankind towards slavery have been made in the general belief that freedom, that is, the preservation of self and of others, was only to be obtained by the sacrifice of liberty. The landlords, who believe it is the liberty of others which should be sacrificed for their freedom, are a product of unregulated self-interest. They are creatures of circumstances for which all are responsible.

The mental blindness of the labourer, blaming the farmer or the manufacturer for elbowing him out of natural rights, is as reprehensible as that of the farmer or manufacturer, who complains that he is squeezed on either side. The smaller profiteer in injustice is as anxious to prop up a system ruinous to himself as the greatest monopolist, because others seem worse off and his faith is weak. All attribute their misfortunes to the persons nearest to them, and refrain resentfully from questioning the superstition which puts all in duress.

In this fact of mental blindness lies the explanation for the apparently miraculous escape of the landlords and their sycophants. It was only apparent, however, because they did not escape the consequences, nor have they ceased to suffer.

Those living dangerously, knowingly or unknowingly, are conscious they are enveloped within surroundings possessing potential hostility. It was believed that the third generation of robbers died out, and so fearful were the landgrabbers of the vengeance of God that, in signing an agreement to enclose portions of the public domain, they signed in a circle in order that no man might appear to sign first!

#### **The Divine Right of the King becomes the Divine Right of the State.**

The fratricidal struggle of the Parliamentary Wars, in which so many monopolists, including Charles I, lost their lives, followed inevitably. Protector Cromwell, descendant of Henry VIII's chief instrument in the confiscation of the monastic lands, now abolished the military obligations of the crown tenants, which doubtful service was almost all that survived of the feudal conditions of land tenure. A standing army was introduced, supported by taxation upon

articles of consumption, levied by a landlord Parliament. The landlords owned the State, and claimed divine right and passive obedience.

When Lieut.-Colonel John Lilburne, a leading "leveller," was sent to the Tower, and Gerrard Winstanley's "diggers" had been shot down by the New Army, Cromwell piously thanked God for a great deliverance. The divine rights of the people were trampled down by the joyless Puritan.

The public of the sham Commonwealth were beginning to be taught, by those who rob widows' houses and make a pretence of long prayers, that poverty was due to "over-population." Minister Moore of Leicestershire, in a pamphlet which he entitled *The Crying Sin of England in not Caring for the Poor*, exposed the hypocrisy of this hardy blasphemy.

He wrote: "How great a shame for a Gospel magistracy not to suppress make-beggars, in countries, cities and towns. I mean the unsociable, covetous, cruel brood of those wretches that by their enclosure do unpeople towns and uncorn fields. 'Alas! master,' says the beggar, who with his wife and children goes from door to door, 'we were forced out of such a town when it was enclosed, and since then have continued a generation of beggars.' The excuse given by the rich is that unless they enclose, the poor, like flies and lice, will eat them up. They usually, on enclosure, treble the price of their land, and this they get by flaying the skin off the poor."

The Commonwealth brought forth only sour grapes, and it was no wonder that, with their teeth on edge, the surfeited nation welcomed Charles II and indulged with that licentious cynic in an orgy of evil-living, until sobered by the Plague of 1665.

#### **The Theft of the Immature Fruits of Liberty.**

Cromwell and the landed aristocracy feared the "levellers," who demanded "true and perfect freedom in all things," because it was seen that if they were successful the "corner" in land would be destroyed, and rents would fall from the height which users in their extreme necessity had to pay the landlords. Not only this, but a new variation in lucrative profiteering had been discovered, which before had not been so generally exploited in England.

Besides the disappearance of bondmen and serfs as a result of the Black Death, there were other signs of slow progress which had surely taken place in the general well-being of the European nations. This progress was not unlike the improvement which takes place in the health and credence of a prisoner who has enjoyed a measure of freedom for some little time. Advancement in better methods had taken place in agriculture and in the fisheries; invention had been busy in textiles, and shipbuilding had greatly progressed. The trader, for whom there was little room in the feudal system, had been set free to some extent.

In these circumstances the people were now more desirable as slaves. It was the immature harvest of the fifteenth-century liberty which the profiteers of the post-Reformation were impatient to reap for themselves. Greed frequently overstepped itself, and it was found, when slavery of the person was attempted, that owing to advance in credence such bondage was no longer possible.

Some new slavery had to be tried, the effect of which was beyond the understanding of the average worker. By a process of elimination wage slavery was arrived at, the people as a rule seeing no wrong in the buying and selling of land, upon which immoral principle wage slavery, or so-called capitalism, is founded.

#### **The Desirability of Thinking in Terms of Labour instead of in Terms of Money.**

In thinking of wages, rent and interest, it is desirable to forget about money, which is only an exchange medium, and avoid confusion of thought by thinking in terms of labour.

All wealth being the product of labour applied to natural resources, included in the comprehensive term "land," it follows of necessity that all who labour by extracting raw materials from the earth, converting them into new forms by manufacture, transporting them to where they are wanted, warehousing, recording, superintending, managing, or in any way serving themselves and others as chemists, engineers, doctors and so forth, by mutual free exchange should be wealthy. It also follows that none should be poor save the wilfully idle and wasteful, because the most extensive

needs of man and his dependents cannot in the nature of things outrun the limitless means of their environment.

But a different state of affairs arises when it is superstitiously believed that certain "idle" people, *qua* landlords, own the earth, and in virtue of this assumption are allowed to demand from those who labour a contribution of their labour as rent for permission to live upon the planet.

So long as the "idler" can be entrusted to permit rents to assess automatically by free competition for territory among would-be users of land, a modicum of harm may result, because the collection of the economic rent tends to equalise opportunity and preserve just relations. But experience shows that landlords, claiming "divine right" or dominium, are not disinterested agents, and therefore cannot be trusted, either as private individuals or in the form of an oligarchy affecting to control the "freedom of the earth" for the public good by selecting its tenants.

In every case, since it is to the special interests of the "idlers" to divert to themselves as large a proportion of other people's labour as they can, it is found that land is always withheld from use in order to intensify competition for the land permitted by the "controllers" to be used. In this way the idle "controllers" extort a monopoly contribution of labour as toll from users struggling with each other for existence.

It is clear that from this original profiteering many forms of intermediate monopolies may extend, growing into monstrous shapes, tending to overshadow and obscure the root injustice from which they really spring.

#### **The Philosophy of Ownership.**

It is an everyday application of the Golden Rule that the producer of wealth has the premier title of use to what he produces. Our own rights in this regard are respected when we respect the rights of others to determine how they shall devote the proceeds of their labour, to consume the product themselves, and/or to exchange it for the premier use of the wealth of a different sort produced by others.

Capital is a portion of the wealth produced and put aside by the labourer in tools, buildings, stock, seeds and other commodities used for the production of further wealth.

Obviously, it is absurd to say that "Capital employs labour," because labour employs capital in the correct sense. Also it is nonsense to speak of the physical strength of the manual labourer as his "capital," and similarly of the mind of the scientist or the voice of a singer as his "capital." These errors of thought are survivals of an age when men and women were regarded as "capital."

It is equally wrong to say that land, which is not a labour product, is capital. Capital, unlike land and labour, is not a necessary factor in the production of wealth. It forms only a small proportion of the total wealth which man, assisted within Nature, produces.

Since the whole includes the part, it follows that capital belongs of right to the labourer producing it, to use it himself or to exchange any surplus of one kind with that of a fellow-labourer who possesses a surplus of another kind, of which the former is in need. The labourer may also freely co-operate with one or many other labourers, using the combined capital of all in partnership.

Some forms of wealth laid aside as capital, as, for example, timber, preserved fruit and wine, improve with age up to a certain limit before deterioration sets in. Other forms, like fruit trees and farm stock, tended by human labour, come to maturity slowly, then seed and multiply after their kind before returning to the earth. Such increase or interest is deferred wages and due to the labourer tending and maintaining the capital.

All wealth in process of time, and no matter how permanent it may appear, decays and returns to the earth from whence it came. In absolute fact, therefore, we own nothing and only possess rights in usufruct. That part of wealth which for convenience is called capital also depreciates and crumbles away. It has to be continually maintained and renewed by the application of human labour, performed by individuals singly or in partnership.

Capital of the non-reproductive type is endowed with interest-bearing, while it is being used, in virtue of the exchange continually going on between it and different forms of improving and reproductive capital. This interest also belongs to the labourer using the capital, because it is part of his wages. Free exchange provides for all cases where

labourers possessing varying shares are in fellowship as regards interest and depreciation of capital.

Those who talk of abolishing interest are thinking only of necessitous usury upon loaned money or commodities, which is not interest, but is the tribute paid to an adventitious monopoly battering upon wage slavery. Natural or economic interest cannot be abolished any more than depreciation of capital can be stayed. The fruit grower who plants fruit trees and sells the fruit and the peasant who keeps cows and sells the dairy produce receive interest upon every transaction.

The principle of capital is similar to the principle of population. If assimilation exceeds dissimilation, that portion of wealth put to the purpose of capital increases, and, vice versa, if dissimilation exceeds assimilation the fund of capital decreases in quantity. Political economy is more nearly allied to biology than to physics.

It is evident that in free production and exchange such forms of capital increase for which there is scope, that is, where in freedom labour for the time being obtains the better reward in wages, including interest. With production and exchange free in voluntary co-operation there would of necessity always be a natural tendency towards a just and symmetrical distribution of wealth, and consequently of capital and interest.

#### **The Constitution of the Modern Capitalistic System.**

Just as in an enclosed space it is rendered increasingly difficult to conform to the rule of the road as the space is narrowed or becomes overcrowded, so in the economic enclosure, created by the tightening process of land monopoly, it becomes increasingly difficult to observe the Golden Rule, upon the observance of which our preservation depends.

Property rights and titles being thus deranged by false philosophy, the larger number of wealth producers, for the reasons already stated, do not receive the equivalent return for their services as wages. They cannot, therefore, put aside as capital much of the wealth which falls to them, and become capitalists.

Of the difference between the wages of slavery or minimum wages and what should have been their share, much is

passed on by the overseers to the lords of the enclosure, who are consumers only, and who get a greater share of labour products according as they can restrict the production of total wealth. A similar quantity of labour products is consumed ostensibly, and partly, for the benefit of the whole community by a costly expert controlling bureaucracy or Government, the individuals of which are paid for their services accordingly. The remainder of the difference is retained by the aforementioned industrial overseers, who are wealth producers themselves. This latter portion is "the diminishing returns" of the system, because the monopolists, including the Government, take greater and greater shares.

It is these three classes, loosely called capitalists, from whom in the present abnormal circumstances wealth in the main is laid aside as capital, to be used as a tool by the wealth producers in the production of further wealth.

But because the system is founded upon iniquity, the modern capitalistic system is a diseased and waterlogged growth. What the capitalists call their capital is largely fictitious value, because things are called capital which are not capital or else have no existence except as debt.

### **The Rise of the Farmer Capitalists.**

If the landlords cannot be judged for what others would have done in their place, and for what Professor Rogers calls "meanness" and "insolence," still less can the tenant farmer of the seventeenth century be censured for taking advantage of the reservoir of the unemployed made by forced migrations from the enclosed commons and the subjugation of the Ecclesiastical Estate. In self-interest they were wise in their generation, and benefited others while benefiting themselves.

To the example of the Dutch farmer capitalists we owe in England the introduction of continuous crops in place of barren fallows and the discovery of true rotation. It was they who initiated the methods which improved the quality of domestic cattle and sheep and increased their size so enormously.

The success of the Hollanders in this, and in navigation and commercial enterprise, aroused the emulation of enterprising Englishmen and the envy of the snobbish land

monopolists, who boast that they do not soil their hands in anything so mean as trade. These latter quarrelled with the House of Orange at the time of the Commonwealth, irritated because the Dutch, tolerant in all things, gave sanctuary to Charles Stuart, who later as Charles II, at the Restoration, characteristically repaid his benefactors by an attempt to ruin them.

But in James II's reign a truce was negotiated, and in the subsequent peaceful intercourse the improvements made by the Dutch in shipping and agriculture were largely adopted in England. A transient period of prosperity for capitalistic farming followed.

### **The Decline of the Farmer Capitalists.**

The chequered career of the agricultural industry between this period and the nineteenth century is a miserable history of parasitism.

Whereas in 1500 a week's wages would keep an agricultural labourer's family for a month, in 1600 the purchasing power of the labourer's wages was only half, and would only keep the family for fourteen days. But the farmer was not for long allowed to retain the plunder, because the landlord continually raised the rent and absorbed what the Government did not take in rates and taxes.

It was this experience, repeated many times, which taught the farmer to avoid progressive methods and seek protection in poverty-stricken appearances. Instead of increasing production, he took the line of least resistance. With their backs to the precipice of unemployment, the farm labourers had to accept less wages, until in 1760 the week's wages would only keep the family for nine days.

Successful in their ca' canny policy, farmers in the eighteenth century were paying less than the economic rent. They could also no longer disguise the fact that they were restricting output. They refused to take advantage of the reforms in stockbreeding and in the cultivation of cereals and special grasses like clover, which enrich the soil and are good for hay.

It was necessary to speed up production, and in 1772 a great agitation was set on foot to make agriculture a fashionable hobby for the "landed interests." Arthur

Young, who travelled all over the country, vehemently urged landowners to raise rents, in order to force tenants to use improved methods of culture so as to get better yields. Once awakened, the parasitic "interests" duly resumed operations upon their unfortunate hosts.

There is some reason to believe that this policy had some effect in stimulating better farming, but, taking into consideration the discouragements given to cultivators in the past, it is not surprising that some farmers persisted in attempting to make a precarious livelihood by inefficiently cultivating large areas, employing little labour at the lowest wages possible.

The farmer was not exceptionally ignorant because he believed it to be a calamity when harvests were remarkably good and prices were so low that he found it difficult to pay the rent and get a fair return for himself after paying rates and taxes. Nor, on the other hand, could he be held to be specially callous that when harvests were very poor he was as elated as a farmer can be, and did not notice that the industrial wage slaves and their children were hungry because they could not buy bread, made artificially dear by the profiteers taking advantage of the shortage.

The "landed interests" and the farmers considered that the country was prosperous when bread was dear and rents were paid freely. It is for this reason that they show such hostility to the small-holders, who farm intensively, and that they object to town-dwellers possessing allotments. It is also for this reason that landlord Parliaments imposed "protective" duties upon food, and sought to perpetuate starvation, high rents and high prices.

The agricultural labourer got no advantage from these manipulations. His wages were soon insufficient for the subsistence of his family, owing to the high prices, and the benevolent monopolists found it necessary to subsidise wages at the expense of the taxpayer. Poor Law relief was given proportionately to the price of bread and the size of the family. Many wretched farmers then further reduced wages paid to their helots, so that they were enabled to claim more relief from the parish, just as at the moment many employers are taking advantage of the returned soldiers' pensions.

The landlord only in appearance contributes to the

burdens of taxation. All rates and taxes, direct or indirect, are taken in the last resource in labour products from wealth producers, or in services performed by labour of "hand and brain." The landlord *qua* landlord, not being a wealth producer but a much consuming "idler," does not himself pay taxes, but acts in the capacity of tax-collector from those who are industrious.

Although in mediæval Europe the bailiffs for the great agricultural crown and Church tenants kept excellent accounts, and were adepts at bookkeeping, it was taught in the enlightened nineteenth century that it was impossible for farmers to keep accounts, and therefore they could not know what their income was. When the income tax was imposed, the farmer was taxed at a fraction of the ordinary rate upon a nominal assessment based upon the rent he paid to the landlord.

But neither in the case of the parish doles to augment wages nor in the favourable treatment as regards income tax was the farmer for long able to benefit. In his capacity as the "owner" and monopolist of the enclosure, the landlord was able to make the overseer of the wage slaves disgorge the plunder in higher tribute by withholding the land from use except at his own terms. If the farmer offered opposition he was evicted and his improvements were confiscated by the land profiteer, who let the land to an incoming tenant at the highest rent he could obtain.

#### **The Disaster to the Capitalist Farmer.**

A great disaster befell the capitalist farmer. He was paying an uneconomic speculative rent, based upon the artificially high price of corn, bolstered up by the import protective duties. The evil was unseen in its real malignity until the abundant harvests of 1835 and 1836.

Profiteering being impossible in the midst of profusion, the farmers had to sell at a natural price, while they were expected to pay an inflated rent. But the consequences did not end there.

The wage slaves throughout the country, after satisfying their usual humble needs in the three great requisites of food, shelter and raiment, found that, owing to the low price of food, they had means beyond this minimum, represented by

a few shillings a week. This they spent in determining labour to the production of utensils, of which they were sadly short.

It was an illustration showing the interdependence of the members of society one upon the other, and it showed that what was a real benefit to the community in general was reflected in the general better health and prosperity. The slightly better distribution of wealth to the extent of a few shillings a week among the millions of those who produce the wealth, stimulated further wealth production. All other industries had a short run of comparative prosperity because the market demand had been widened.

The experience made men think, and a great agitation arose, led by Cobden and Bright. Instead of the vague harangues of noisy and designing demagogues, there was a sober consideration of facts, and conviction bore fruit. The Corn Laws were abolished in deference to public opinion by a Government of "landed interests," impelled to act justly because the eyes of the nation were momentarily opened.