

LAND MONOPOLY NOT ONLY ABSORBS THE FRUIT
OF INDUSTRY BUT ALSO HINDERS ITS PROGRESS.

This system of allowing any one person to obtain absolute ownership of as much land as he can get, and to use it (or not use it) in what way he likes, not only absorbs the fruits of industry, keeping down employers' profits and labourers' wages, and making life, to all who have to live by work, a struggle for existence, but it also restricts the field of employment, locking up the greater part of our resources from full productive use, and so hindering progress; and it can only secure its profit by so doing.

It is claimed in favour of the system that once the land is appropriated to an owner, it becomes that owner's interest to see that it is put to the most productive use; and that rent is the test of productiveness, since that form of industry that can offer the most rent must be the most productive.

Never was there a greater mistake. The man who can afford to give the highest rent is not he who can make the land produce most, but he who can secure the largest share of the produce to himself; and he can often more easily do this by keeping other people off the land than by engaging them to make it produce more; for more produce generally implies more hands to produce it, and more hands imply more claims to a share in the produce.

If by one form of industry (say sheep) I can make the land produce £100, of which I can keep £70 to myself, I will evidently prefer it to another (say agriculture) by which I could make the land produce £200, but would have to pay away £150 to other people for their share in the work, and this none the less that it may take many times more land to produce the £100 than it would to produce the £200.

Here is an estate divided into five farms, each farmer employ-

ing two labourers the year round, and raising £400 worth of produce apportioned as follows :—

Direct assistance in the shape of wages to the two labourers, representing their earnings	£100
Indirect assistance in the shape of blacksmiths, saddlers, carriers' work, goods bought, and services hired of all sorts equal to the earnings of two men more	100
Rent	100
Profit to farmer	100
		£400

These five farms together, then, produce annually £2,000 worth of produce, and maintain 25 men with their families, viz., one employer, two labourers, and indirect assistants equal to two men more, to each farm; besides the landlord, who receives £500.

If now a stockbreeder sees his way, with the help of one man as shepherd and general assistant, to produce £800 worth of wool and fat sheep off the five farms lumped together, he can offer £550 rent (£50 more than the five agricultural farmers put together), and yet, after paying £50 to his man and £50 more for such goods and services as he may require (representing the maintenance of another man), keep £150 for himself (half as much more than any of the agriculturists). His offer of course will be accepted, and the five agriculturists with their retainers will all have to go.

The amount of produce raised from the land will be only £800 instead of £2,000, and the number of men (with their families) will be three instead of 25.

The productiveness of the land will have been reduced to less than half, and the population to about $\frac{1}{2}$.

But suppose the land, instead of being apportioned amongst five farmers, producing £400 and paying rent £100 each, had been divided amongst 100 cottier labourers, producing only £50 of produce and paying £3 rent each.

Then the land would have been producing £5,000 worth of produce instead of £2,000, and maintaining 100 men (with their families) instead of 25; but inasmuch as the landlord would only have been receiving £300 rent, this arrangement would have been even more certainly and speedily outbid and swept away than that of the five farmers.

“But the 100 cottier labourers could not have turned the land to account if they had had it.”

Could they not?

Here is a market garden, there an orchard. The owner in each case, a man of means, making a handsome income by the labour of a few men with common spades and hoes. Would the land yield any less, or the produce be worth less if these labourers were working it for themselves instead of for an employer?

Could they not buy all the tools they want by merely saving up a week or two's wages?

Could they not turn any proportion they liked of their produce into bacon, eggs, poultry, butter, things for which the demand is practically unlimited?

Could they not sell for less, if need were, than an employer, and yet thrive, seeing that wages alone would satisfy them, while an employer must make a good profit over and above their wages? But as we have seen, the whole surface of the earth (so to speak) is parcelled out amongst a body of monopolists, who will not allow the labourer to produce anything unless he produces a large surplus over and above for their enrichment.

While the landlord gets all the profit (so to speak) of the men's work, the occupier gets all the credit. *He* is the producer. The men are merely the tools he works with, like the spades and hoes.

Producer! He produces nothing. It is the labourers who

produce all, only, as he holds the land, he will not allow them to produce, except for his profit.

There is not a shilling of his income that is not due to their labour.

If he decides to apply manure, they fetch and spread it; if he keeps the ground clean and well worked, it is their arms that do it; when he sells his produce, it is they who gather and deliver it.

I count it nothing that he finds the tools; that he arranges the work; that he keeps the accounts; that he takes the risk. I count as nothing anything he does which the men could do just as well for themselves, and they could do all these things.

“Then why doesn't the labourer get the land and do it?”

Who will sell him the three or four acres he requires for any price within his means? Near a town the labourer would have to pay £20 to £100 an acre, in the country no estate owner will sell him what he wants except at an extravagant fancy price, hardly at any price at all. Owners do not like to cut pieces out of their estates, nor to have small independent settlers about them. They would rather sacrifice something generally to keep them out.

They will *let* the land no doubt sometimes, but not only do they usually ask an extravagant price as rent directly a small piece of land is asked for, greatly in excess of what they could make off it themselves, but they offer no security of tenure, no guarantee for improvements.

What heart will the labourer have in effecting the high cultivation which his system demands when he may be turned off at any time at short notice? How can he plant a tree when he has no certainty of ever gathering the fruit? How build himself a dwelling when he knows it can never be his home?

How can he throw his heart into his work with the shadow

of an irresistible hand ever over him ready to turn him out and confiscate his improvements whenever self-interest, caprice, or a change of ownership so determines?

Here is explanation enough why the labourer is not in possession of land, but there are other reasons still which it is not necessary here to stay to consider.

I shall be told, though, that the term "most productive" does not mean producing the greatest bulk or weight or even the greatest gross value, but the greatest net profit.

Quite true; but profit to whom? To one particular person only, or to all engaged in it?

Take the case of a farm—

The earnings of all the blacksmiths, saddlers, importers, carriers, etc., who assist the work, as well as of the labourers who carry on the work, are as much net profit as the earnings of the farmer who conducts the work.

All alike represent services rendered in furthering the work, the production of a crop; and for all alike there can be no return from the work till the work is finished, till the crop is gathered.

But as there would be great inconvenience if all had to wait for their returns till the work was finished, an arrangement has been naturally fallen into by which, while the work is divided amongst many, the control, the responsibility and the risk are concentrated in one, the farmer, who advances to each his share, by giving him what is supposed to represent the value of his service, and makes what he can out of the surplus.

The profit of the crop is the gross value of the crop less the seed, manure, and other goods consumed, and wear and tear of tools; all the rest represents profits apportioned amongst a number of people, some of whom receive their share in advance, and others have to wait.

The profit made by the manager of the enterprise (the farmer) no more represents the productiveness of the enter-

prise than the salary of Mr. Manager Kayser represents the productiveness of Mount Bischoff. All that the farmer's or manager's profit represents, is that share of the produce which the competition of his class for the office of farmer or manager compels him to be content with.

Our habit of estimating the productiveness of every industry by the profit of one person only out of the many concerned, viz., the employer, is about as sensible as if we estimated the size of a building by the size of a particular brick in it.

That industry is the most productive which converts raw material into finished product to the greatest value and in the shortest time, and the greater the number of people who are engaged in it, and the larger the share of the proceeds that each can get the better; but the tendency of land monopoly is to allow as few people as possible to take part in the work, and to let them get as small a share of the proceeds as possible; for in the eyes of the monopolist, whether owner or occupier, other people and their earnings are merely so many expenses to be kept down.

As the landlord's interest is for each to own as large a portion of the earth's surface as possible to the exclusion of other people, so that competition for its possession shall be stimulated and rents forced up, so the interest of the occupier is for each to cultivate as small a portion as possible, so that the field of employment may be restricted and wages kept down.

If each occupier were to put to full productive use all the land in his possession, the demand for labour would run wages up, and so, though the production of wealth would be enormously increased, it would be divided amongst a much larger number of people in much larger shares, leaving less for himself; but by shutting out say 9-10th of his land from full productive use and inviting employment on the 1-10th, only the field of employment is narrowed and wages are kept down.

It is true, as we have seen, that though he gets the profit of

this he cannot keep it, the landlord taking it from him. Still the necessities of his position compel him to try to get it, and in this way.

I do not say that either landlord or occupier acts in this way of set design. Each simply acts for his own interest in what he would call a "practical" way; that is, he guides his conduct by results, without troubling himself how the results are brought about.

The landlord, for instance, lets his land in such sized pieces as he finds fetch most rent (that is in large pieces) without caring why pieces of such size fetch most rent, and, therefore, without being conscious that the reason is that by this means its character as a monopoly is kept up and competition for it stimulated, though of course in particular cases it may be his interest to do the opposite.

Similarly the occupier keeps most of his land under natural pasture, and only cultivates a small part, the best, because the larger part so used, though it yields much less, costs him nothing; and so he gets all the profit there is, and does not see, or care to see, that it is his keeping this larger part out of cultivation, that by restricting the field of employment and so keeping wages down enables him to secure to himself the fruits of the labourer's toil on the part he does cultivate.

In Great Britain this abuse by which the rights of the many are sacrificed for the profit of one has been carried to such an extent that whole counties have been nearly depopulated; and districts in the Highlands that, as Geo. Macdonald tells us, once turned out 1,000 fighting men, now only carry a few gamekeepers.

The children of the soil have had their dwellings burnt down before their eyes, and they themselves have been driven forth in thousands to emigrate to distant lands, to crowd into the already overcrowded cities, or, as in some cases, to die on the mountains; not because they could not pay their old

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accustomed rent, but because a foreign millionaire offered the landlord more for the privilege of turning the country into a wilderness to shoot deer in than they could give for the bare permission to live.

A system that permits such atrocities is self-condemned.

As to Ireland, her population has within half a century sunk from 8 millions to 5 millions, though knowledge and invention have within that period so increased the productiveness of industry that it ought to have risen to 16 millions; and yet the cry is still that it is over-populated, and her sons have to emigrate by thousands yearly.

But to see the fruits of land monopoly in hindering industry and keeping down population we need not go out of our own island.

Within five miles of this is an estate that was once called the granary of Tasmania. It is now a sheep run.

First came the absentee landlord, who, living 12,000 miles away, cared nothing for his estate, but to squeeze all he could out of it.

Next came a worse form of landlordship still, a landlordship of trustees, in which the very possibility of a personal interest was destroyed, and under which the estate fell into worse and worse condition, houses in ruins, fences falling to decay.

Last came the kind of landlord, on whom so many pin their faith, the occupying landlord, and he swept all the farmers off the land, and turned it into a sheep-walk.

I am not blaming him. He acted on his strict legal, and in one sense equitable, right. The law allowed, and we may say encouraged, him to buy the land in absolute possession to do with it absolutely as he liked, and he naturally liked to do with it in the way that paid him best.

It is the system, not the individual, that we denounce.

But to judge of the system by such cases as these is to get a very inadequate idea of the evil of it. To get a true idea of

this we have to consider the cases not only of cultivation stopped that was already in existence, but of cultivation prevented where it has never been allowed to come into existence at all. The holders of such lands are only doing what everybody else does, and has a recognised right to do, making the most they can for themselves out of their capital; and their land, though land is not capital, is *to them* the same thing as capital; it is what they have exchanged so much capital for, and from which, therefore, they have a right to draw the best profit they can in the way that seems best to them.

The wrong was in allowing them to acquire this right—in selling the people's birthright for a mess of pottage—in giving over, for the trumpery consideration of £1 an acre or so, to any purchaser the legal power to exclude the whole human race from as large a portion of the earth's surface as he chooses to buy.

William I. was considered a cruel despot for turning all the inhabitants out of what was afterwards called the New Forest to make himself a hunting-ground, but the landlords in this free self-governed country could do the same thing to-day with the whole of Tasmania if they liked, and call in the officers of the law to help them to do it.

I am myself a representative of the system I denounce. I might sell, no doubt, and so get out of it; but what good would that do? that would be only to change one landlord for another, a landlord who at least sees and deplores the evils of the system for one who probably does not recognise or care about them at all. I can serve the good cause better in a number of ways by staying in than by going out—amongst other ways, by affording one standing example of a landlord pleading for land nationalisation and offering his own land, or so much of it as may be wanted as the first to be taken for the purpose at its actual value, as may be decided, on whatever system may be adopted.