

REVIEW OF THE SITUATION.

Let us review the situation.

Here, in the primary industries, are farmers running rents up to the point at which they can barely make both ends meet; temporary outsiders—men who have been outbid, vainly looking out for a farm for months, and forced to take one at last on almost any terms; permanent outsiders—men brought up to farming and thoroughly understanding it, but squeezed completely out of the competition, who are now dealers, butchers, one thing to-day and another to-morrow, scraping up a living as best they can.

And as profits in the secondaries are determined by profits in the primaries, the state of affairs is the same in these.

Here are traders, half as many again as are wanted in every township, running each other down in prices, touting for custom with travelling agent and flaming advertisements, giving reckless credit in their scramble for customers, and every now and then the weakest breaking down and falling out of the ranks only to be succeeded by fresh aspirants trying to force themselves into the throng, and each with capital more or less, which he is eager to invest in the business he is trying to secure.

This in a country not a century old, containing barely six inhabitants to the square mile, a country with resources that its press and public speakers are never weary of extolling, a country containing more natural resources than countries with ten times its population, with tens of thousands of acres fit for cultivation and untouched, with timber in such quantities that we pile it in heaps and burn it to get it out of the way, with minerals in abundance, with fish in our seas, with an equable climate, with everything in our favour;

and yet men struggle for employment and capital bids for investment.

Surely if we saw half a dozen men in a 10-acre field struggling for room and gasping for breath, we should think it a strange spectacle, and wonder what it meant; and yet it would not be a bit more strange than our own condition, and not half so interesting.

For the production of wealth there are but three factors required, land, labour, and capital. Strictly speaking, two only; land and labour (=matter and force), for capital is but the product of labour accumulated. Still it is customary to reckon the three, so we shall continue to do so.

Which of the three is it that is wanting to us?

Is it land? The question is absurd. The land lies all around us crying out to be used.

Is it capital? There is not an enterprise put forth offering good promise for which capital is not forthcoming in abundance. Whether it be a brewery, a trusteeship company, or a mine, the shares are snapped up at once; not to speak of that other capital without practical limit across the water ready to pour in at the slightest encouragement.

Is it labour? Why, the very essence of our complaint is that people are struggling for work to do, not work languishing for want of people to do it.

What are chiefly the resources that we talk so much about? Surely not the untrodden forests beyond the farthest roads; not the minerals we suspect but have not yet located; not the inaccessible and the undiscovered; but the resources that lie all about us, visible to the eye and palpable to the touch; the occupied lands with roads through them and houses on them of which a mere fraction has been cleared, the cleared lands of which a mere fraction is cultivated, the cultivated lands that, tilled in the roughest fashion, yield but a fraction of what they might be made to yield.

It is not the want of land on the one hand, or of labour and capital on the other that is the matter with us, but the artificial barrier of monopoly that keeps these factors apart.

We spend vast sums in roads and railways to open up new land, and as fast as we open it up we sell, for a paltry £1 an acre or so to anyone who applies, the right of shutting it all up again if he likes, with the certainty that he will like to shut up the greater part of it.

We try to import labour and entice over capital. Labour and capital! into a country where labour (that is people trying to earn a living) is struggling for every opportunity to live, and capital has burnt its fingers so often by rushing into rash ventures that it hangs back disheartened.

Labour and capital! As if the way to ease the pressure of a crowd was to squeeze more people into it.

Break down the barrier that confines the crowd, and let it spread, and then if there is room for more, more will come of itself, more both of labour and capital, only too glad of the chance.

How can labour or capital find employment when every national resource is in the hands of some monopolist who has got hold of other people's shares as well as his own, and puts the greater part of it to the mere mockery of a use, while for the rest he either frightens enterprise away by his extravagant demands, or forcing competition, runs his blackmail up to the uttermost the user will give, so that new-comers, if you had them by the thousands, would not offer more; and if they did, could only get in by displacing others.

Take any natural advantage you like to name—extent of area, mineral deposit, or commanding situation—and what is not in reasonable use already is either locked up for sheep or barred by extravagant demands for royalties or paid-up shares; or, if in use, is let out for the uttermost it will fetch.

We have now reached the point at which we can take up the objection, previously postponed, that "all farmers are not tenants," and the implication that were they all to own the land they occupy, objections must vanish.

But it ought to be clear by this time that if all existing landlords were swept away and all the land in use confirmed absolutely upon the occupiers, things would be no better than they are now.

For the evil that weighs upon society, hindering progress, forcing down earnings, and making life to all who have to live by work a struggle for existence is the monopoly of the land; and whether it is A or B who monopolises it, is of no consequence to anybody but A and B.

Wherever one man is allowed to acquire more land than he can use by his own labour for the purpose of preventing other people from using it by their labour except for his profit, that man is master of the situation, and the class of which he is the representative has the world at its feet. And whether the monopolist turns his monopoly to account as an occupying owner by working the labourers for his profit directly, or as a non-occupier by selling to somebody else (called a tenant) for a yearly payment (called rent) the privilege of working them, is a difference not worth talking about.

Indeed, if the system is to go on, it is better, in some respects at any rate, for society at large and the labourer in particular, that the owner and the occupier should be separate persons.

For where the land is in the hands of a mere tenant he is forced to put it to sufficiently effective use, to make it realise enough to pay his rent over and above his own profit, whereas, as experience shows, when he has no rent to pay, he is often tempted to take things easily, and, working enough of the land to keep himself comfortable, put the rest to very poor use indeed in order to save himself trouble, expense, and risk.

This is by no means an unusual result of occupying ownership. There are many occupying owners who, having no rent to pay, yet make no more off their farms than other men not more competent, who have a good stiff rent to meet, and this merely because finding themselves able to make enough easily to keep themselves in the style they have been accustomed to, they do not trouble themselves to earn more.

And the easier the occupier takes matters, and the less use he makes of his land, the less employment there is for labour; the more wages and profits are kept down, the less raw material is there raised for the secondary industries to concern themselves with, the more difficult it is for carriers, artizans, tradesmen, and workers of all sorts to get a living, and the keener the struggle for existence all round.

No. King Log is worse than King Stork. The whole thing is a wrong from top to bottom; a legalised system of obstruction and blackmail; and what is wanted is to abolish the system, not merely change its representatives.

In Ireland they are trying to set matters right by simply changing the representatives. The existing landlord is to be bought out, or otherwise got rid of, and the existing tenant take his place; but the tenant, having superseded the old landlord, the monopoly of the land is to continue as before.

What difference will that make to the labourers who will still have to compete for the privilege of working for their employer's profit so much of the land as he graciously allows them employment on?

What difference to the thousands who have no land nor employment on the land, but are forced to struggle for existence because the land is not put to its full use?

What difference to the country whose natural resources are still left in the absolute power of a class whose interest it is to hold back the greater part of those resources in order to

narrow the field of employment, and so force wages and earnings down, and their own profits up?

Moreover, in about a generation, half the new landowners will have retired and become mere parasitic rent-chargers like the old ones, only of a much worse type.

A noble lord with the lingering sense of semi-feudal duties attached to landownership, and some responsibility for the welfare of his tenants, with the pride of an ancient line prompting him to scorn to do a mean action, with (frequently) the desire to be generous, and the long purse enabling him to be so, is far preferable to the new type proposed to be introduced—(the American and Colonial type) — the man who looks upon the land as a mere commercial speculation to make money out of, charging the very highest rent he can get, spending not a shilling more than he can help on repairs and improvements, recognising no more responsibility in regard to the land than in regard to his watch chain, and, being generally not over rich, not well able (even if he thought it at all incumbent) to make any remission in a bad season.

If we are to have landlords at all, let us keep up the old type of landlord, the noble lord with his wealth, his sense, however dim, of some responsibility, and his feeling of “noblesse oblige.”

There is but one remedy for this great wrong, the NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

We in Tasmania, like our co-thinkers in other parts, have established a society for this purpose, *viz.*, for “the gradual nationalisation of the land as opportunity offers and public opinion ripens”; and my whole purpose in these pages has been to lead up to the elucidation and advocacy of our views, and to give notice and opportunity to all who may wish to join our ranks.

The State, gradually resuming possession of the land on equitable terms, is to apply the ever-increasing unearned

increment to the reduction of taxation, and the multiplication of public benefits. The occupier is to become a State tenant, but on a tenancy that, while it secures to the State the full value of the land from year to year, and provides for its *bona fide* use, yet assures the tenant a perfect security of tenure and of the fruits of his labour, as if the land belonged to him.

The occupation of large tracts by a single person (except for temporary use in places where it is not yet wanted for other people) will be done away with, and the land eventually made so accessible to all that every person, even the humblest, shall have the opportunity, if he wishes it, of acquiring, within accessible distance of a market, enough land to make himself a home, and for the exercise of his own personal labour.

OUR PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS.

Our principle is that the legitimate use of the land is as an instrument of production, not as a means of extortion, and its possession to be permitted to secure to its possessor the fruits of his own labour, not the fruits of other people's.

Our aim is to break down the barrier that keeps the two factors of production, land and labour (the matter and force of industry), apart, and throw open to full productive use the resources of the country, to abolish the accursed monopoly that lives upon industry as the tick lives upon the sheep, sucking its juices and hindering its growth, and thrives, not by doing a hand's turn, or contributing a penny's worth for the good of society, but by getting possession of the means of existence, and making people pay for the permission to live; to appropriate the unearned increment of the future to the State, taking its vast and constantly accumulating wealth