

## LABOUR QUESTIONS AND EMPIRE.

By WM. D. HAMILTON.

Reprinted from *Westminster Review*, July, 1901.

AMID all the changes consequent on the policy of one Government or another there is a question of perennial and paramount importance, the question of labour. Changes of Government hitherto have but accentuated the necessity for a thorough understanding of this great subject. Science and art daily add fresh laurels to the already great triumphs of man over the forces of nature, inventions multiply, and wealth is produced with an ease and rapidity incredible to the men of even a generation ago, yet poverty persists.

### What are the Conditions of Labour to-day?

For a generation labour has been politically enfranchised, having successfully overthrown, first, the tyranny of the king, and, secondly, the tyranny of the middle class. To-day it stands in possession of political freedom, and still the essential features of tyranny remain. Political freedom therefore is not sufficient: it is only the means whereby labour may achieve economic freedom, the complement of political freedom, and without which political freedom is a mere mockery. There are two classes of reformers at work endeavouring to improve the condition of labour—the social and political and the moral and religious reformers. The former class may very frequently embody the latter so far as the spirit of their work is concerned, but the latter class are unique and profess to effect all that is necessary without resorting to political action. The principal schemes of the social reformers are socialism, trades unionism, co-operation, and temperance. The moral and religious reformers rely, for the most part, on religious ordinance, but, as John Ruskin says, “the mistake of the best men in all ages has been the preaching of patience, and faith, and hope, and every other emollient, consolatory and otherwise, except that which God orders—justice.” They are likewise ardent and liberal supporters of organised charities, forgetful often of the stern, eternal fact that charity must ever be vain while justice is denied. The two great parties in the State are also by profession social reformers. It is generally the policy of Socialists to write and speak as if they alone were the true exponents of the claims of labour and the guardians of its highest interests. Socialists in spite of their noble aspirations, believe that men in a state of freedom would trample on and devour each other as they now do in a state of thralldom; consequently they look for salvation to the State ownership and regulation of all industry. But, given equal opportunities, men with their God-appointed faculties need neither bureaucrats nor aristocrats to lord it over them, and when Socialists perceive this truth in all its fulness they must change their policy, or become the conscious instead of being, as at present, the mere unwitting jackals of reaction.

The solution of the labour problem, if it is to be found, must be such that it applies equally to all men. It is not a question of what are the rights of a section of men, but *what are the rights of all men*. It is the ignoring of this fundamental proposition that has caused, and is causing, many sections of otherwise earnest social reformers to dissipate their energies in a thousand different directions, to secure measures which, in the very nature of things, can only remotely palliate the evils they desire to cure.

### Trades Unionism has at times been the means of raising wages,

or, at least, has been able to prevent a reduction in wages. This, however, is but on the surface of things. The truth is, that any increase of wages must come out of increased prices to the consumer, or be taken from rent or from increased production. If it comes out of increased prices to the consumer, it is quite evident that the wages of the general community are reduced to that extent; consequently,

viewing wages as a whole, it cannot be maintained that any improvement has taken place, other men being poorer just to the extent that trades unionism has increased for the time being the wages of a section. If the increase in wages, however, be taken from economic rent, the general benefit to workers of every grade is assured, economic rent being the toll which land monopoly levies on all industry for the use of natural opportunity. Natural opportunities exist apart from, and are independent of, the labour of men; they are the free gifts of the Creator to all, and until these become the equal possession of all men, wages cannot possibly be said to have increased; as a matter of fact, if we view the enormous strides which have been and are continually being made in the easy and rapid production of wealth, wages relatively have really fallen. The temporary advantages, therefore, achieved by trades unionism, often gained at enormous cost and suffering, are speedily absorbed by rent exactions of one kind or another. The monopolist sits tighter than ever, limiting increasingly the opportunities to labour, while his position becomes increasingly lucrative as wages advance. The source from which all other monopolies derive their strength is land monopoly; *it is the arch enemy of labour*, and, like a mighty sponge, it soaks up all the advantages of social, moral, and material progress.

Some time ago the labourers in the Admiralty dockyards made a demand for an increase of wages. Mr. Goschen, in replying to them in the House of Commons, said “that an increase of wages would not go to the labourers, but to the sweating landlord. The labourers recently had received an increase of 2s. per week, and rents had gone up 20 per cent.”

Mr. John Colville, in the House of Commons some time ago, said that “trade was good in Motherwell, and wages had risen, but the advantages did not remain with the working men of Motherwell, but had been taken by the landlords in higher rents. It was a crying shame and a positive disgrace.”

I merely take the opportunity of mentioning men of such divergent political views as Mr. Goschen and Mr. Colville to show that when any man, independent of political bias, faithfully addresses himself to the solution of the labour problem he cannot fail to see that so-called increases of wages are not what they are imagined to be by those who fight so desperately for them, and further, that when obtained they are speedily transferred to the pockets of the land monopolist.

Trades unionism has not only failed to discover and attack the arch enemy of labour, but it has also mistaken, and up to the present seems determined to mistake, cause for effect. For example, it holds as a cardinal principle that the easy and rapid production of wealth is an evil; it looks with suspicion on labour-saving machines, and frequently prevents its members from working them.

### Labour-saving Machines are not the cause of Unemployed Men.

If such were the case, then the labour problem could only be solved by reverting to the use of primitive tools. The wheelbarrow is a labour-saving machine for effecting the transport of goods more easily than it could be accomplished on the backs or in the hands of men. Between coin and barter, between the wheelbarrow and the mighty locomotive, what an enormous saving of labour has been effected in the exchange and in the transport of those commodities necessary for the use and convenience of man; yet notwithstanding this the demand for labour has increased a thousandfold. Wheelbarrows may have displaced porters who have hitherto transported goods on their backs, and locomotives may have rendered unnecessary the mail coaches and the carriers of a former day, but while these labour-saving machines have done this, they have done more: they have called into action the dormant activities of multitudes, and established thousands of industries which would have been absolutely impossible without their aid; and so it is with other forms of labour-saving machinery—the labour of some may be

displaced, but the final result must be the calling into productive activity of still larger numbers of men. All that men require is freedom to adapt themselves to the new conditions which labour-saving machines are constantly bringing about.

Trades unionism also limits in an arbitrary manner the amount of work which its members shall do. Although to the superficial observer the easy and rapid production of wealth by labour-saving machines is the cause of unemployed men, the real cause lies deeper. The real cause is the exclusive possession by a few men of that which is the heritage of all the generations of men—the earth, on which we live, and move, and have our being. Remove this cause, and the more machines a man can work the more wealth he will produce, while his wages will be the full product of his labour. But so long as the earth, or a part of the earth, is owned and held by one man, no man, no number of men, can supply themselves.

### Take the case of Lord Penrhyn.

Some 5000 men, until the past few months, have found a means of livelihood in quarrying out slates from a mountain, which Lord Penrhyn is pleased (and is permitted by the laws of this country) to call his own. The men desire some slight amelioration in the conditions of their labour; Lord Penrhyn refuses, and shuts up the slate mountain; and Lord Penrhyn, by virtue of his privileged position, can absolutely command the destinies of these 5000 men. The production of wealth, therefore, to the extent of several thousands of pounds per week is absolutely stopped by the will of one man. Lord Penrhyn, being able to determine production in this arbitrary way, is lord of trade; for it is quite evident that every week there must be several thousands of pounds less demand in the market for those commodities which are the products of the labour of other men; consequently trade to this extent is paralysed. Lord Penrhyn, however, belongs to that class which we reserve for our highest honours, and instal in hereditary legislative chambers, which control the destinies of the people. Before him and his class labour bows in grovelling and superstitious terror. Why? Because in the hollow of his hand he holds the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If a tax of even 10 per cent. were levied on the annual value of the natural opportunity which Lord Penrhyn holds, the Penrhyn strike would be settled, and settled on a sound and enduring basis, in less than a month. Lord Penrhyn could not possibly hold this great natural opportunity indefinitely idle and pay even this small tax.

A tax on land values would prove to be, in short, the key of the door of nature. When men have free access to nature (and who shall deny them this access unless he is prepared to show his title-deed to the exclusive possession of the earth from God Almighty?) they can make as much wealth as they care to without hurting any one, and no man will work for another if he can make more by working for himself.

Another defect in trades unionism is that it is conservative in principle. It groups men in various rings with interests hostile to each other, and bitter demarcation disputes are, as a result, of frequent occurrence. These defects, like the others alluded to, are the products of a condition of tyranny, which will be speedily remedied when the real solution is truly apprehended.

Let us not deceive ourselves: we can only hope for a very slight and temporary amelioration of the condition of labour from trades unionism as it is to-day. I do not say that men should cease to be trades unionists; in fact, I cannot see what else they can do under existing conditions.

**But if trades unionism makes mistakes and at times is tyrannous, employers' unionism is no better.**

Instead of getting to the root of the matter, the employers, like the men, are content to deal with superficial matters only, and they mix up cause and effect in the most hopeless

manner. They are constantly groaning about an increase in wages, and the interference and dictation of union officials, but they accept as if Heaven had decreed them the ever-increasing exactions and interferences of the land monopoly that plunders them incessantly. Let the workmen be as unreasonable as they may, they, at least give a good return for the wages they receive or business would come to a standstill. What, however, does the landlord, the owner of the natural opportunity, give to the employer? Absolutely nothing that nature has not provided independent of him. The employers accept this extraordinary state of affairs without protest. If the men are not as wise as they should be, neither are the employers, and before they severally exhaust themselves and paralyse trade in the idiotic endeavour to cripple each other, they should conjointly put a period to the exactions of that class which fattens on them both and which is of no more use to society than Dick Turpin was to the society of his day.

I could multiply examples indefinitely.

### Take one small example

which was brought to my notice the other day. A manufacturing concern of moderate dimensions situated in the country, remote from town or village, leased a piece of ground and started business. Above the works, on a wild moorland worth little more than prairie value, there was a slight depression which, if dammed at one end, would form a convenient reservoir. The landlord agreed to let the manufacturer have the use of this ground, or rather the water which fell on it, for £50 per annum. The manufacturer built the necessary retaining walls and sluices, and laid the pipes to his works, some mile and a half distant. The works prospered, and lately the lease ran out. On the renewal of the lease the landlord raised the water rent from £50 to £300 per annum. This was the price for allowing that industry to continue—and he got it. The manufacturer did not go on strike against the landlord, or ask his fellow manufacturers to federate against such an exaction. Had the operatives made a demand for a 5 per cent. increase of their miserable wage, the machinery of the federation would in all probability have been requisitioned, and a ruinous strike provoked which might have paralysed the industry, but the land monopolist may increase his demands by 500 or 600 per cent., and against this privileged system of highwaymanry the employers as a class make no befitting protest.

Talk about the corrupt exactions of an oligarchic gang at Pretoria or anywhere else! What is this which is done everywhere daily, in the name of law and religion, and which we bow to as if it were the will of God? Surely the employers, so far as a proper knowledge of the basic principles which underlie all trade and industry are concerned, are quite as foolish as the men. When will trades unionism and employers' unionism alike turn their attention to the operations of that land monopoly which eventually swallows up the fruits, not only of the industry of private manufacturers and traders, but of productive and distributive co-operation?

### The Workers may secure great benefits from organised co-operation,

but they will only be allowed to enjoy these so long as the operation of co-operation is sectional. Let co-operation become general, and under existing conditions, the advantages will be transferred to the class which possesses absolute lordship over natural opportunities. In a word, should co-operation become general under existing economic conditions, the people would manage for themselves the work now undertaken by the private trader, but the saving effected thereby would not go to the people; like all other public advantages it would be confiscated by the land monopolist and be registered in higher rent or land charges. As the owner of the wild moorland exacted toll from the private manufacturer, so the ground lords will increasingly exact tribute from the co-operators.

### Take the case of the great productive works at Shieldhall.

When these works were laid out, it was resolved that they should be model works of their kind. Grass lawns and flower beds were beautifully worked into the plan, while recreation and dining-rooms for the managers and men were got up on a scale hitherto practically unknown in ordinary industrial concerns. "Away you academic dreamers who talk of basic principles! Away with your theorising and vain speculation! Give us the practical man or men who will take things as they are and make the best of them, and you will find that things are after all just as they should be! Behold Shieldhall!" Yes, behold it! Already they have commenced to build up their flower beds, already they are extending their buildings skywards; flowers, lawns, air, sunlight, skyline and recreation-rooms will go before long under sheer pressure of necessity if Shieldhall progresses. Why? Because they cannot get an acre of the idle land around them under £1500 per acre. When they went to Shieldhall a few years ago it was £500 per acre, and even that price was a swindle. Now because they have done so well, the landowner demands £1500 per acre, and so they find it necessary to build up on the flower beds in the middle of the country. Co-operation, therefore, is as powerless as trades unionism or employers' unionism, as at present conducted, to deal with the dead hand of land monopoly or solve the labour problem.

What shall we say to these things, and what shall be our attitude? Are we to go on eternally, as at present, rolling up the hopeless hill of so-called social and political progress the stone of Sisypheus, or shall we assert our rights as men and demand our birthright?

The rulers and leaders of public opinion are to-day loudly calling upon all to immolate themselves on the altar of sacrifice, as by this means alone can the social salvation of the masses be found. We must press our conquests abroad: we must find an outlet for our "surplus population"; when these things are achieved, the social elevation of the nation will have become an accomplished fact. It is the old trick exposed long ago by Shakespeare, when he caused Henry the Fourth to say to his son:

"I had a purpose once to lead out many to the Holy Land,  
Lest rest and lying still should cause them to look too near  
unto my state;  
Therefore, my Harry, be it thy course  
To busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels,  
So that action hence borne out may waste the memory of  
the former days."

### The Old Trick has been Resurrected in the Name of Empire.

We hear a great deal of empire in these days. It seems to be on everybody's tongue. Monarchs, Ministers of State, dukes, earls, lords, members of Parliament, lord mayors, lord provosts, bailies, aldermen, councillors, presidents of chambers of commerce, learned professors, ministers of religion, from the humble street preacher to the Pope of Rome, politicians and stump orators of all shades, and very shady some of them, men of rank and men of no rank; in fact, from the occupant of the throne to the ragged newsboy on the street, empire is the one-and-all-absorbing theme. Feeling has run high, very high, on this question of empire, and yet amid all this Niagara of talk, and inflammation of feeling, I have not met two men who could give an intelligent definition of what empire really is. Even one man may have many definitions. Take Lord Rosebery as an example. Lately he was in our midst delivering his Rectorial Address to the students of Glasgow University. Speaking of empire he says: "If any word can be invented, which as adequately expresses a number of states of vast size under a single sovereign, I would gladly consider it." Evidently this is one of Lord Rosebery's definitions—"a number of states of vast size under a single sovereign." If Lord Rosebery had stopped there, we might have reasonably

concluded that the definition was about as good as any we could possibly get, and in discussing the matter under such a definition we should have been able at least to make some progress towards an intelligent conclusion. Immediately, however, he proceeds to say: "And in the meantime the word empire represents to us *our history, our tradition, our race*. It is a *matter of influence, of peace, of commerce, of civilisation*, above all a question of *faith*, but it is also a *matter of business, a practical affair*. You have received from your forefathers this great appanage; no one outside an asylum wishes to be rid of it."

The inmates of asylums have always had our sincerest sympathy, but it would seem on the authority of Lord Rosebery that this is quite uncalled for.

Again he asks: "What is this empire?" and answering himself, continues—"The last calculations seems to be this, that *its area is between eleven and twelve million square miles*." Then he proceeds to say: "It is already beyond comprehension," and adds that "but for a small incident this empire might have been incalculably greater." Finally, so far as his definitions go, he says: "And what is empire but '*predominance of race*'?"

Let us recapitulate in the sequence that Lord Rosebery observed in his Rectorial Address his definitions of empire:

- 1st. A number of states of vast size under a single sovereign.
- 2nd. Our history.
- 3rd. Our race.
- 4th. A matter of influence.
- 5th. " " peace.
- 6th. " " commerce.
- 7th. " " civilisation.
- 8th. Above all a question of faith.
- 9th. A matter of business.
- 10th. A practical affair.
- 11th. Its area is between eleven and twelve millions of square miles.
- 12th. Predominance of race.

Now, how an empire could be one and all of these things at the same time puzzles me. It has puzzled a good many smarter men, and perhaps it accounts for the extraordinary discussions let loose on the subject.

### Lord Rosebery says we have received this "great appanage" from our forefathers.

Perhaps this accounts for the yearning we have at times for our forefathers, so that we might kick some of them. It comes over us in waves when it is peremptorily demanded that we shall take our houses for twelve or eighteen months, although next month, or next week for that matter, we may be heaven knows where. We don't seem to think then that this extraordinary legacy amounts to much. Or when we go a-prospecting for a mere rood of these "twelve millions of square miles" for a garden, a house, or a factory, and find that it is in the hands of the trust lawyers or speculators, and that our only legacy is to "pay! pay! pay!" we feel in spite of all the tall talk of "heritage" and the glowing periods of Rectorial rhetoric that our forefathers have swindled us. When we walk over a wild moorland, or attempt to fish in a loch or river of this glorious appanage, and an armed man reinforced with sleuth hounds orders us on to the highway, on pain of prison, fine, or personal violence—well, we—feel that if this is what our forefathers bequeathed to us, we wish we never had forefathers, or having them that they had lived long enough for us to rid ourselves of them.

When we reflect that in the very heart of this "great appanage," in London, close upon a million beneficiaries under the will live in crowded conditions worse than beasts, and that 80,000 women on an average nightly have no place to lay their heads, that in our Glasgow 439,000 out of 700,000 live in one-roomed or two-roomed tenements, and that all our large towns and cities have a similar proportion of squalor, suffering, and disease, if we have the hearts of



men we must refuse to rejoice at such a heritage; and, finally, when we see, as happened but a day or two ago, some thousands of poor old sandwich men entertained at a charity dinner, and discover that some nine-tenths of these had served their Queen and empire—that is to say, they did the murdering part of the work, we are driven to the conclusion that not only did our forefathers swindle us in their legacy, but that they who seek to perpetuate this state of affairs are swindlers in the councils of the people.

### Lord Rosebery's Empire, no matter how he seeks to conceal it,

is an empire based on force, an empire of military dominion; his confusing definitions are merely resorted to so that the ignorant and thoughtless may be enlisted to support a scheme which has for its primary object not the subjugation of alien peoples alone, but the subjugation of the very people who are foolish enough to toil and sacrifice in building it up. To realise a Roseberian empire it is necessary to create a strong public sentiment of national and race superiority. The two most powerful agencies for moulding popular thought are requisitioned for the propaganda, the press and the pulpit, and in due time the whole of society is infected with the deadly poison, until even the most degraded victims of misrule here are shouting for that misrule to be extended to territories where a freer and a wider life is possible. We are a peculiar people, a holy people, an imperial and conquering race, and under God it is our bounden duty to go forth and slay and subjugate the peoples who fail to be impressed with either our holiness or our institutions!

The conditions and the institutions of the peoples we are invoked to make war upon are misrepresented. A portion of the truth may be told, but the remainder of the truth is judiciously suppressed, just as with reference to our own affairs great poets or authors are quoted with a flagrant and shameless ignoring of the context. Lord Rosebery asks us to remember how incomparably Shakespeare described the seat of empire:

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself,  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy brood of men—this little world—  
This precious stone set in the silver sea.

\* \* \*

This blessed spot, this earth, this realm, this England."

To stop the quotation here is to misrepresent Shakespeare, and to misrepresent him for a purpose. Shakespeare causes John of Gaunt to describe in these words an England which he has known, but which had passed away. Here is the conclusion of John of Gaunt's speech so conveniently left out by Lord Rosebery. Let me as conveniently put it in:

"This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,  
Dear for her reputation through the world,  
Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it—  
Like to a tenement, or peddling farm.  
England, bound in by the triumphant sea,  
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,  
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds:  
That England which was wont to conquer others,  
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself,  
Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,  
How happy then were my ensuing death."

### This is the England and the empire

which Lord Rosebery and his class are seeking to extend and perpetuate, an empire "bound in with shame, with inky blots and rotten parchment bonds."

They have succeeded from the time of John of Gaunt until now. It is for the people of "this dear, dear land" to say whether the classes shall continue to deceive them longer. Such an empire as these men conceive cannot last; Salisburian rifle clubs and "burghers of the Queen" will be

as impotent to save it as the sneering and inflated impudence of a Chamberlain is to lend it dignity. Such an empire means the increasing enslavement of the workers, their concentration and degradation in cities and towns which are but an aggregation of pest houses in the East End and of unbridled luxury and wantonness in the West, while the country, God's own country, our heritage, is held up for speculation or for the selfish pleasure of the few, who with loud mouths call us to sacrifice ourselves to obtain open doors for trade abroad, while they shut hard upon us the only door to life and trade at home—the land.

A thousand city men—operatives, clerks, and tradesmen—volunteer in a crisis to serve what they, with the best intentions, think their country; only one hundred of these on examination are found to be physically fit. What does this mean? It means that not from without, but from within, are the forces which shall compass our destruction.

I have pointed out the forces which are robbing us continually of the fruits of our labour and of all the benefits of social, moral, and material progress. The chief defenders of this condition of things are the chief exponents of empire—Salisburian empire, Chamberlain empire, and Roseberian empire: they fatten on us to the extent of £200,000,000 or £300,000,000 per annum in land charges:

"They know no interest but their own,  
They shake the State, they shake the throne,  
They shake the world, and God alone  
Seems safe in his Omnipotence."

But there are not wanting signs that the people, the sovereign people, are at last beginning to understand the game. They have fought and bled and paid for empire, and now they wish to enjoy some of it. The value of empire is the value of territory, or land value; this for some hundreds of years has been the appanage of a class, not the appanage of the people, as Lord Rosebery would make us believe.

### The Taxation of Land Values,

opposed by the privileged classes and the speculators, will, in the early future, if the people slumber not, secure empire to all who work for it.

When territory is no longer private property, then, but not till then, shall we have a real empire where labour "meets delight half way," and where every noble impulse shall have scope to grow.

For such an empire who could not be relied upon absolutely to make every sacrifice? But for a Roseberian empire, based on twelve more or less mutually exclusive or destructive definitions, who but the unwise could support it?

Wife—Here's an advertisement in the paper that you'd better look into. It says a man is wanted, and he won't be worked to death, and he'll get paid enough to live on."

Husband—Says he won't be worked to death, eh?

Wife—Yes; and they promise pay enough to live on.

Husband—Some catch about that!—*London Fun*.

We deeply regret to have to record the death of Mr. John Colville, M.P. for North-East Lanarkshire, Scotland, which took place after a short illness at his home, Cleland House, Motherwell, on Thursday, 22nd August. Mr. Colville was an enthusiastic follower of Henry George, the only M.P. who openly declared himself as such. Henry George, he said to his constituency, had given society a solution of the social problem based on a true conception of justice, he had shown the true natural source of revenue for the upkeep of government, and the true path in social progress. In the death of Mr. Colville the Single Tax movement has lost a valued, uncompromising supporter, and a blank is left in the progressive politics of the country that is already keenly realised. We extend our sincerest sympathy to Mrs. Colville and her family.