

LECTURE V.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH.

THE introductory remarks of the last lecture are equally applicable to the subject we now have in hand. It is needless to recapitulate them, though it may be as well briefly to remind you of their purport. We found that by acknowledgment of all political and economic parties, our civilisation in its social aspects is gravely defective, and that the one most striking defect which equally impresses itself upon the hearts of all is the extraordinary extremes of luxury on the one hand, and destitution on the other, characteristic even of the most prosperous states. Some social reformers—Mr. Henry George in particular—are in the habit of tracing the whole of this evil to the institution of private property in land. With this view I professed myself unable to agree. It is an exaggeration to say that the whole of our miseries are to be traced to this source. At the same time, I not only admitted, but strongly insisted, that our antiquated territorial system has become an anachronism wholly incongruous with the present age, and, like all institutions founded on falsehood, productive of enormous mischief. But surely another main source of the evils afflicting society is the defective and unjust distribution of the wealth produced by the alliance of capital and labour.

Let us suppose for a moment that our land laws were made ideally perfect, in whatever direction such perfection may lie. Still, of course, it is inconceivable that the whole

population should receive their sustenance direct from their own land. Even in a completely agricultural community this would be impossible. Land is incapable of infinite subdivision, and even if you started with a system under which every man should cultivate with his own hands his ten or twelve acres, twenty years would not elapse before a class of labourers would have arisen who would depend for their sustenance upon wages. But we are not specially interested in a purely agricultural community. In our country the population is about equally divided between agriculture on the one hand and manufactures or commerce on the other ; and even though we should succeed in restoring to the rural districts a larger population than is at present found there, yet it is probable that the commercial and manufacturing part of the nation would, in the meantime, increase in a corresponding ratio. No reform of the land laws, therefore, would directly and immediately affect more than one-half of the people. Its indirect and more remote effects would undoubtedly be universal. It would, I believe, tend to raise the standard of subsistence, to diminish pauperism, and to lead emigration into natural channels. Still, however much the standard of subsistence may be improved, so long as a man's whole income is spent in keeping it up, we can scarcely allow that he lives in reasonable comfort. It is evident, therefore, that the distribution of wealth has to be considered altogether apart from the land laws.

Whether any form of communism is necessary, or desirable, is a question that may be considered presently. Meantime it is more important to make plain the precise point we are to keep in view. "The distribution of

wealth" is a wide term, and might be taken to include a good deal more than I care to touch just now. For instance, it might embrace the devolution of property, the division of estates, the commercial currents set up by foreign investments of English money. But all that we are concerned with now is the mode in which the wealth produced by industry and enterprise from year to year is distributed amongst those who produce it. Let us take an imaginary case; and while I am stating it pray bear in mind that it is not the exact figures that are important, but only the principle illustrated. For the figures may be altered indefinitely, and yet the principle may remain the same.

Let us then suppose a capitalist to engage in an undertaking that requires him to invest £100,000 for a full year before any returns come in. Let us farther premise that the work is begun at a favourable time, and that it is fairly remunerative. In order to carry out the enterprise, he has to employ a considerable amount of labour, partly skilled and partly unskilled; and the wages he pays will be governed entirely by the state of the labour market. His skilled workmen may receive from £1 10s. to £2 a week; and unskilled labourers 18s. to £1 2s. I leave out of the question boys or women. Their lower wages would not much affect the argument, and would needlessly complicate the statement of the case. The men work, say, fifty weeks in the year, and receive their pay regularly. This is part of the expenses essential to the enterprise, as much so as coals for the steam-engine, or the cost of raw material. At the end of the year, taking the wages of the skilled workmen

at an average of £1 15s., each will have received £87 10s. for fifty weeks' work, and they have nothing more to expect. The labourers, allowing them an average of £1 a week, will have taken £50, and also have nothing more to expect. At the end of the year they are none of them one penny richer than they were at the beginning. The skilled workman might, no doubt, by thrift and self-denial above the average, have put £5 or so in the savings' bank. But how the town labourer with a wife and four children lives at all on £1 a week is known only to himself and his kind. In most cases, I presume, he must be content with a habitation of one room, that serves as kitchen, parlour, dormitory, nursery, and washhouse.

Now what does the capitalist look for at the end of the year? He receives back, in the first place, his £100,000, with £5,000 additional as interest. This he does not reckon as profit at all. It is regarded as simply recouping money out of pocket. For if he had not employed his money in this way he could have lent it on mortgage at 5 per cent. In addition to this, it is supposing no extravagant gain in good times if we credit him with a real profit of 15 per cent., or £15,000. It might be very much more; but the precise possibilities of the case do not concern us. What we wish to examine is the question whether the principle of the absorption of all profit by capital is fair and right.

We need not be afraid of it. I fully acknowledge that it is a burning question; but it is not an explosive one. It affects only indirectly the unemployed and destitute, who are the real elements of revolution among us. Should the steady wage-earners come to the conclusion that a

change in the system is necessary, they will seek it only by moral pressure. It would not pay them to make a wide convulsion in the labour market for the purpose. The change, if desirable, can only be brought about gradually, by tentative processes such as will enable trade and commerce to adapt themselves to new conditions. It is a matter in which the Legislature cannot possibly interfere. We have long abandoned the notion that wages can be settled by law; and still less is it possible to settle by law the division of profits. There is, therefore, no reason why we should shirk the question; and we cannot do so; for if we would, it is being forced upon us by the imperative necessity for greater equability in the conditions of life.

Well, then, we put the question thus: Is it just and fair that the capitalist, in an enterprise such as we have outlined, should absorb the whole of the profit to himself? Observe, that the claim to reasonable interest on his money is not for a moment doubted. We may also put on one side as indisputable his right to an adequate remuneration for his labour and skill in superintendence. Let us say that is worth £1,000 for the year, and let us deduct it from the 15 per cent. of profit. There will still remain an amount of £14,000, which is clear gain, over and above the repayment of all expenses, salaries, and interest. I know it is commonly, though not universally, regarded as a matter of course that the whole of this gain should be appropriated by capital. But I confess it does not appear to me a matter of course at all. Here are a number of men voluntarily engaged in a common enterprise. A hundred of them contribute labour and skill; and one alone contributes the necessary money, together with the

general design and directing wisdom. There is evidently quite sufficient reason for his keeping the lion's share of the profit, and I quite admit that, were this not allowed, individual enterprise would be discouraged, and probably exterminated. But, if he brings money and oversight, the workmen bring labour. The second contribution is as indispensable as the former; and I cannot quite see the justice of an arrangement by which at the end of the common enterprise he is £14,000 to the good, and all the rest are precisely where they were at the beginning. Very few of them have even £5 between them and recourse to the pawn-shop. They have just been kept going; that is all. But they have made no profit. Now, suppose that the capitalist were to content himself with three-fourths of the clear gain, say £10,500. Then there would be £3,500 to divide amongst the workers. They ought not all to share alike, but in proportion to the value of their contribution to the common enterprise. And this would be best determined by the amount of their earnings in wages. But supposing the number of workmen were a hundred, there would be an average of £35 assignable to each as his share of profit over and above his wages, and he would be that much better off at the end of the year than at the beginning.

This is the system of "profit-sharing" advocated by Professor Sedley Taylor in a little volume of collected essays. It is not a mere dream. It has been practically carried out in principle, though with many differences of detail, in a variety of businesses, especially in France. M. Leclaire, a house decorator in Paris, was, I believe, the first to adopt it. He persevered in it to the end of a long life,

and nothing made him more angry than compliments on his generosity. For he declared that he was actuated by purely mercenary motives, or at least business principles, and to his dying day maintained that he had made more money out of his business by this plan than he could have done on any other. The reason he gave was, that as all workmen were directly interested in swelling the profits, there was less waste, more economy, and greater energy in work than would otherwise have been possible. I shall not pretend to judge whether M. Leclaire was precisely accurate in saying that he had made more money for himself by his scheme than he could have done on the ordinary plan. Yet this at least is true, that what he did make was worth far more to him than millions made by grinding the faces of the poor. But I am most anxious that his plan should not be misunderstood. You are not to suppose that the *wages* he paid were dependent on his profits. For he gave wages week by week according to the rate prevailing in other shops of the same kind. And then at the end of the year, after the balance-sheet had been made up, he distributed, in addition, a share of the profits, reckoned to each man in proportion to his wage-earnings. As might be expected, the dividends of the workmen were to a considerable extent invested in the business, and of late it has developed, I believe, into a practically co-operative partnership.

The example of M. Leclaire has been followed by several other capitalists in France, and it seems likely to spread. In England, many employers give a bonus in good years to their chief assistants; and, on the other hand, a considerable amount of attention has

been excited by co-operative enterprises. But the division of profits between capital and labour on any fixed and definite system has not hitherto made any way amongst us. I am aware that it has been tried in some cases, and has broken down. The alleged reason in one or two remarkable instances was the unreasonable notion of the workmen that a division of profits was always possible both in bad years and good. If that were so, it is a fresh proof of the need of popular education, moral as well as intellectual. Self-control and fairness are as necessary to the emancipation of the million as an assertion of their own claims. Nevertheless, I cannot conceive how the present terrible contrast of luxury and destitution are to be moderated unless profit-sharing finds a place in our measures of social reform.

Before indicating how it might be expected to work, and how in fact it has worked to a certain extent in France, let me endeavour to anticipate the volley of objections certain to be made were this a meeting for debate. And, first, there are those who hold that workmen who have been paid the market rate of wages have already received their share of the profit from the common enterprise. They might as well say that the steam-boiler has consumed profit in the tons of coal that were burned under it, or that the horses have eaten so much profit in their oats. In a badly-managed business it is quite conceivable this might be true, because more coals and more oats than were necessary had been used, and therefore the really productive expenditure would have to recoup this waste; that is, it would be so much taken out of profit. But in the case of all expenditure absolutely necessary to

the production of work this is not true. It is no more a diminution of profit than seed cast into the ground and fructifying is a loss to the granary. All wasted seed is a loss ; but not that which sprouts and ripens. Just so, all needless expenditure is so much deducted from profit, and is, therefore, taken out of it. But not so with necessary expenditure. This comes back again with interest. It does not diminish the profit, but makes it.

Wages, therefore, are not the workman's share of the profit. They are part of the necessary expenses of the common enterprise. In the cotton states of America, when slave labour was employed, it was a fallacy to suppose that no wages were paid. The only difference was that they were paid in kind: that is, in food, clothing, lodging, medicine, and care, not only for the adults, but for their families as well. The standard of subsistence for a slave was very low, and therefore the wages were low: coarse food, rough, scanty clothing, and miserable lodging. As a consequence the returns in work were low; for it is well known that slave labour was wasteful, and made scientific agriculture impossible. But the point is that the keep of the slaves was an absolutely necessary expense; and will any one say this was taken out of profit? When we turn to free labour, the case is not so much different as might be desired. Wages are paid in money, and not in kind. The standard of subsistence is higher. But the rate of pay, though it fluctuates slightly, is always kept so near the standard of subsistence that wages really represent the necessary expense of keeping the labourer and his household alive while the work is going on. There is no question of profit here. It is not

taken out of the capitalist's profit, and it represents no profit to the workman.

Again, it is said, if the workman is to share in profits, he also ought to share in losses. This sounds very plausible, but, like a good many other plausibilities, will not bear examination. For out of what do the employer's losses come? Out of his capital. Of course, he may have reserve funds, or accumulations not actually employed in his business, and he may draw on these. But he does so to replace lost capital. Now, out of what is the workman's share of loss to come? Out of his bread basket, and his oven, and his cupboard, I suppose. Wages are so near the standard of subsistence that if they are seriously diminished this is what it comes to. When one man meets a loss by selling a carriage and horses, while the other has to pawn the coat off his back, they are scarcely on commensurable terms. Still it may be objected, if a hundred workmen received an average profit, as just now suggested of £35, in addition to their year's wages, at least a levy might be made on this if the next year turned out badly. But with what justice could this be asked? They will undoubtedly suffer by having no profit in addition to their wages at the end of the bad year. To that extent they will suffer and ought to suffer with the employer. If the depression be general also, the market rate of wages will be forced down, and they will suffer in that way as well. But to inflict any other fine upon them would be sheer robbery. The bonus given the previous year was part of a finished transaction. The next year's operations are another transaction altogether. They have no share in directing it, and if it turns out badly it would be monstrous to re-open

the business of the previous year, and ask them to refund. If indeed they have invested their savings in the business, then those savings are liable to the risks of the business, but not otherwise. It may be urged that in this case the workmen might cry, "Heads we win, tails you lose." Not quite so, for they lose their bonus, and their gain in prosperous years is utterly insignificant compared with those of the capitalist. In fact, it is only on condition of his accepting the losses in adverse times that it is at all possible to justify his absorption, in good times, of a half or three-fourths of the profit, in addition to interest on money and salary for superintendence. Such an advantage is quite a sufficient consideration for his risk. To recur to our supposed case: if he makes £10,500 one year—besides interest and salary, be it remembered—he may very well afford to lose £2,000 a year for three bad years, and still be the gainer in the end.

I do not care to reply to other and more vulgar objections, resting on the bad uses often made of an occasional and accidental excess of wages. During the coal mania of a few years ago we were amused by stories of prosperous colliers drinking magnums of champagne, or feeding bull-pups on prime steak. So far as such stories represent truth, they showed that human nature in colliers is very much the same as in the golden youth of our aristocracy. But with such follies I have nothing to do at present. You are not to withhold just concessions from men because it is possible they may make a bad use of them. Our excessive social inequalities have undoubtedly depressed the moral tone, as well as the physical comfort, of millions. Correct the injustice with one hand, while

you sow the seeds of higher culture with the other, and in the long run the result will be unmingled good. The common-place virtues, that perhaps haunt by preference the middle ranks of our social grades, are certainly not owing to any superiority in the human nature found there. They are favoured by the happy union of constant occupation with a balance at the bank. If the golden youth of the London clubs had to work for their living, and if the millions of toilers had a little surplus over the barest necessary expenditure, middle-class virtues would gradually permeate both extremes. In saying this I do not wish to imply that character is solely the fruit of physical conditions. But making due allowance for cases of exceptional vigour of will, the average development of character is necessarily limited or stimulated by circumstances. And hence it is not merely for the spread of reasonable enjoyment—though that surely is worth something—but it is much more as a potent instrument in moral regeneration that I long for a juster distribution of wealth.

Suppose now that by some such apportionment of profits as has been suggested, and also by the subordination of land laws to popular needs, it became the rule, and not the exception, for the millions to have a margin of income beyond the mere necessities of life. All experience of human nature goes to show that habits of thrift would be gradually formed. It is of no use to urge against such an expectation the drinking bouts and vicious amusements and betting manias that follow a brief hour of prosperity. For the customs and institutions of five hundred years have induced in the average Englishman a habit of living from hand to mouth—not likely to be

surrendered except under a permanent change of conditions. A man who usually gets £1 a week, and for once makes £1 10s., is almost certain to spend the extra half-sovereign in some extravagant excitement to relieve the monotony of life. But if he get a permanent increase of twice or thrice that amount, supposing him young enough to change, and surrounded by suitable moral influences, he will accommodate his habits to his income, not in the way of self-indulgence, but in the increase of convenience and refinement.

The same principle applies to whole classes of men. Brief and exceptional gains induce extravagant indulgence; but a permanent increase of means inspires a better ambition. It would not come about all at once. A generation or two would disappear, and education, uncontrolled and unwarped by ecclesiastical vested interests, would have to do its work, before the full effect was seen. But little by little the decencies and elegances and safeguards, made possible by a margin of income, would win their way. Fashion is as mighty amongst the million as amongst the upper ten thousand; and when thrift had been made a general possibility, it would in time become the fashion.

But the growth of thrift is only one among the advantages that would spring from a better distribution of wealth, and the general establishment of a margin between income and bare subsistence. For capital and labour would enter into their true relation of alliance, instead of opposition. The increase of profit would be clearly to the interest of labour, as well as of capital, because labour would share it. The experience of the profit-sharing

system in France goes far to prove that under such circumstances the utmost possible economy, both of time and materials, is secured ; and as a result the total amount of profit is substantially increased. On the other hand, there has, I believe, been some apprehension amongst trades' unions that the sharing of profits might be made a pretext for depressing wages. But I do not think there is sufficient reason for such a fear. For French experience shows that, as a matter of fact, enterprises conducted on this plan have always paid the market rate of wages. And besides, the constituents of trades' unions would be much stronger than they are at present. At least it would be entirely their own fault if they were not. For as they could very well store up a reasonable portion of their profit-dividend, they could, if necessity arose, hold out better against unjust proposals to reduce wages. Nor can it be supposed that so uncertain and fluctuating an element as profit could, in the long run, interfere with the economic law by which average wages are caused always and everywhere to hover somewhere near the cost of subsistence. This is an essential expense, without which business could not be carried on, and it will always keep its place in the calculations of enterprise. For the labourer has to live, whether the enterprise succeeds or not.

But another aspect of profit-sharing seems to shed the light of hope upon the fluctuations of trade. Let us go back to the case of a capitalist who in a good year makes 15 per cent. He is, of course, not alone ; there are hundreds around him making the same profit, or even more. Now what do they do with it ? They say, next

year will be like this, and much more abundant ; there is a wave of business prosperity coming, and we must be ready to take advantage of it. And so a large part of the profit is invested in new machinery, bigger engines, and a larger supply of the raw material. More and more goods are produced in a ratio rapidly overtaking demand. Then the market is glutted ; the new machinery stands idle ; wages fall ; half-time is proposed. Rich men with money locked up begin to curse the Government and free trade, while poor men with empty pockets growl about communism and Mr. Henry George. Now, suppose that some share of the profit in these prosperous years had gone to the workers in addition to good wages. Certainly there would have been a little less to spend on new factories or on the reckless extension of production ; and I do not think that would be a great disadvantage. But a very clear advantage would have been this : that so much more money in the pockets of the million would have tended to keep up the demand in the home market. There would, therefore, be a double influence at work tending to equalise the course of trade. Thus, there would be less money available for mere gambling on future chances. But there would be more money to keep up the home market, and the demands for this would lessen the danger of a glut abroad. It is not unreasonable, then, to presume that a system of profit-sharing, if generally adopted, would tend to prevent the violent oscillations from which commerce suffers, and to give a more even tenor to trade, as well as to diffuse comfort among the many. We might have fewer millionaires, but we should also have less destitution. In such a community moderate

riches would give a purer and nobler happiness than extravagant wealth does now. And, on the other hand, occasional failure, or exceptional poverty, would not be embittered, as it is now, by the glaring inequality of chances for the many and the few.

Once more I must guard myself against misapprehension of the views I have put forward on this subject. The principle is one that cannot possibly be enforced by law. Where it commends itself to a sense of justice it will, I believe, afterwards approve itself to practical minds by its commercial and social results. The land laws, of course, need the drastic hand of the Legislature; and their reform would do something towards a more equable diffusion of wealth. But this would be quite incomplete and inadequate apart from a more equitable distribution of the wealth produced by the alliance of capital and labour. This second reform is dependent wholly upon moral forces, and I cannot conclude without a word of profound regret that one institution, from which the needful moral inspiration might have been expected, has not only been indifferent to the question, but has set a most demoralising example.

That institution is the Church—not one sect or denomination only, not the Establishment alone—but the whole organised multitude of the professed followers of Him who said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” This saying, which obviously points to the blessedness of contentment with a little, and of loyalty to the divine order of the world, has been taken as a promise of wealth and security as the reward of a pious temper. Experience shows that every religious society, when once

maturely organised, tends to make its members prosperous. It has been so with the Quakers conspicuously; and to a smaller extent it is true of the Independents, the Baptists, and the Wesleyans. The result is that, with the exception of the Primitive Methodists, such societies, even if they originated amongst the poor, tend to become more and more "respectable" and exclusive. This is the reason why from time to time novelties, like the "Hallelujah Band," and the "Salvation Army," have to be invented in order to gather in ragged regiments from the streets. In fact, this tendency of religion to make its votaries comfortable is often dwelt on with much complacency. For it is said, and with good reason, that the success is assured by the moral qualities, such as industry and self-control—I am not sure about honesty—that are formed by church training. Now, all this may be true. Yet remembering the first Teacher of Christianity, and how all his longing was to seek and to save the lost, we cannot but regret that in ecclesiastical congresses the question of the distribution of wealth is touched so timidly.

But then we are told to contrast the example of the great Establishment. Here, at least, is a Church avowedly set for the defence of the poor, with sacred buildings planted everywhere, even in the poorest districts, and with an endowed gentleman in every parish to show a good example. The theory is capable of exhibition in very beautiful forms, but the practice somehow does not answer to it. That in itself would, of course, not be very surprising. But it is surely strange to hear men speak of the Church Establishment as a corrective to social inequalities, when the whole of its external organisation is dictated by

the worship of wealth. There is nothing in all our institutions, neither primogeniture, nor entail, nor the marriage market, nor even sweating shops—nothing that teaches such wicked and anti-Christian lessons on the distribution of wealth as the division of Church revenues. And for this reason, that it is poison where we expect medicine, corruption where we look for inspiration, a justification offered to our baser desires where we look for an example to our nobler nature. If that corruption is worst which affects what is best; if the defection of a saint or hero is more harmful than shameless vice; if treachery in the trusted guardians of a sacred cause is more fatal than open opposition, then surely injustice in the distribution, within the Church itself, of wealth appropriated to the service of religion is a worse evil than even dishonest greed in trade. The revenue from ecclesiastical estates and tithes is at the least £6,000,000 a year, and voluntary contributions, with pew-rents—the latter a bad source of income, but still available for the support of the clergy—probably add not less than another million. Taking the clergy actually engaged in the cure of souls at 20,000, this would allow an income of £350 a year to every one of them. An exactly equal distribution is for many reasons impossible. But remembering the number of young men in the profession with no one but themselves to keep, and for whom £200 would be sufficient, there is obviously margin enough to allow of reasonably large incomes in cases of exceptional responsibility and expense. I am not, therefore, suggesting an impracticable equality. Yet, surely, it would be but reasonable to expect that the richest Church in Christendom should give a salutary

example of at least moderate fairness in the distribution of wealth, or at any rate should not sanction by her authority the glaring inequalities, the unnatural extremes of splendour and misery, that distract our civilisation.

Every one knows how contrary to such a reasonable expectation are the actual facts. Two archbishops, and thirty bishops, between them draw £163,300, and this does not include the annual value of their official residences, reckoned at £13,200. Thus these thirty dignitaries divide among themselves £176,500 a year, or an average approaching £6,000. And at the other end of the scale you have hard-working curates grateful for old clothes and hampers of provisions. Nay, the case of the beneficed clergy is quite strong enough to prove my case. For a clergyman writing to the *Times* the other day explained that there were more than 8,000 livings with incomes of less than £300 a year, and out of this either a curate has to be paid, or a considerable part of the work must be left undone. The average for the whole country is stated by Mr. Martin at £285. Now, when it is remembered that a considerable number of benefices give the incumbent £1,000 a year or more, it will be seen that a very much larger number can yield little more than £100 to £150. But meantime the Archbishop of Canterbury has £15,000 a year besides his palaces; the Archbishop of York £10,000, and the Bishop of London the same.

It is of no avail to plead, as is sometimes done, that these revenues belong, not to the Church at large, but to "corporations sole," with a sufficient title to their property. For Parliament has repeatedly set aside any such claims, and has manipulated the revenues at its pleasure. The

bishops are now not owners at all. Everything is in the hands of commissioners. And the fact that this enormously wealthy Commission, with revenues constantly swollen through the increasing value of suburban land, should be so constantly engaged in works on episcopal palaces and grounds, while poverty, and sometimes even destitution, harass so many of the clergy, is surely a scandal that ought to make a deeper impression than it does. It is not the fault of the men concerned. They execute their commission faithfully. But that commission itself is the outcome of the Church's own teaching on the distribution of wealth. And never in all the history of Christianity was there a heresy more deadly than this. The notion is that spiritual dignitaries, to be respected, must be clothed in pomp like secular princes. If that be so, there can hardly be a surer proof that religion is dead. But I, for one, do not believe it. The priests of most immortal power have not been Wolseys, but men like Wyclif and Wesley, to whose transcendent earnestness food and clothing sufficient for the day were all the revenue wanted.

For some dangerous forms of extreme re-action against the present distribution of wealth the churches of all denominations are largely to blame. For through the excessive importance attached to money, whether in the shape of endowments, or pew-rents, or ostentatious subscriptions, they have themselves been infected with the commercial spirit. Prophets clothed in a hair shirt and a leathern girdle, content with locusts and wild honey, could address both tax-gatherers and merchants and soldiers with an authority altogether impossible to the pleasant social clubs gathered now by the attractions of

the pulpit. Neither learning, nor zeal, nor philanthropy are wanting. But the power of protest against the sleek complacency of commercial success has been for centuries in abeyance.

Yet it is not a little remarkable that social reformers outside the Church should seek their precedent in the fiery days of primitive Christianity, and should advocate a system of communism once tried in Jerusalem and found impracticable. In spite of the contradiction of her professed followers, the original bent and natural inclination of Christianity is in the direction of communism. For he that loves his neighbour as himself cannot be happy if he fares sumptuously every day while Lazarus lies at the door in rags. But then this passion for equality was, in the primitive Church, somewhat like the wild justice of modern revolutionists—a generous but impossible dream. It was most valuable—it would be most valuable now—as a corrective of unrestrained individualism. But, as in the solar system centrifugal force is, equally with gravitation, an essential condition of orderly movement, so in any advanced stage of human organisation individualism is as necessary as socialism. Nomads, or savages, or Russian peasants, may live contentedly in communism, because the organisation is simple, and the sense of individuality is small. But humanity rises to higher and more complex organisations just in proportion as individual character and energy are independently developed. This development has its dangers, and needs correction. But to think of extirpating it is to propose a return to barbarism. Individual development needs individual aims, motives,

and ambitions to stimulate it. And, constituted as we are, such excitements are not usually possible apart from the institution of private property. It must be limited by, it must be subordinate to, the common good. But its total suppression would paralyse the energies of progress.

And I am sure that this is felt and believed even by many who use the word communism as a spell. The present ill-regulated distribution of wealth bears upon millions so heavily that the speculative amongst them are ready for desperate schemes. Yet, if by some unimaginable change every father of a family were to receive to-morrow a house, garden, furniture, and stock-in-trade, he would certainly wish to keep them to himself. The idea of holding them on sufferance would be intolerable; and if the institution of private property had been abolished, the new nation of happy cottagers would very soon restore it. In other words, it is undoubtedly to the interest of the many that more equal chances should be given to all. But to destroy private property would be to deprive all alike of the independence, and self-reliance, and security for the sake of which those more equal chances are desired. And the same principle applies to land. Land itself, indeed, cannot be individual property; but the tenure of it can, and must be, if enterprise and industry are to have a solid basis. But if you once grant this fixity of tenure—and even Mr. George does not deny the need for that—you have immediately a merchantable property, which no possible exaction of rent to the State can wholly deprive of value. For, say that the whole land value of a particular site were paid to the State in rent. An enterprising holder who establishes a flourishing

business there would soon confer on the site itself an additional value altogether apart from the buildings on it; and of this additional value conferred by his own industry it would be monstrous to rob him. If he sold his tenure, he would get that value. If he preferred to let it—and there is nothing in Mr. George's proposals to prevent that—then he would get annual payment for the special eligibility he had conferred on the site. But this is private rent over again. And the fact that all taxes were paid out of land revenue would set free a good deal of money to compete for advantageous tenures such as we have supposed. This would go on all over the country; and in fifty years preferential rents would be a common form of property.

After all, men have not been wholly fools even in the bad old times; and amongst the relics of ancient wisdom is the saying that, if you pitchfork nature out at the door, she will come in by the window. All reforms ought to recognise this truth. I would not be sparing of abuses. I would insist that the common good should be paramount over every consideration of law, custom, rank, or privilege. But I do not believe that the common good would really be served by making a bee-hive or an ant-hill the ideal of a human republic. The soul of man wants scope for personal character and power. In the heavens above us the story of eternal order and progress is illuminated by the stars. For astronomers show us the beginning of systems in the faint light of incoherent nebulae, where there is neither sun, nor planet, nor satellite; nay, the chaotic mass has not yet developed chemical distinctions of matter as we know it. There is a molecular communism, where everything is

alike all through. Then, at the other end of the scale, astronomers point to our own solar system with a complicated equilibrium of moving order, each orb complete in itself, yet dependent on all the rest. And we are told that very probably myriads of the stars we see are the bright centres of systems like our own. The constellations that divide the sky are composed of them.

Heaven mirrors itself in the lower world. Here too, we see at one end of the scale simple, incoherent societies, where all characters are alike, and there is little division of labour or distinction of property. Separate, independent consciousness hardly exists. Even women and children are held in common. There is only a vague, feeble shimmer of that glory we call human life. But, at the other end of the scale, we see, or we anticipate, civilisations of complex movement in delicate equilibrium, where each individual man is the centre of a little world of his own. His family move around him as the planets round their sun. And though he is as nothing compared with the vast political constellation to which he belongs, he has his own domain, his own character and influence. This individuality, as well as his subordination, is governed by an eternal law of progress; and its suppression would threaten a return to primitive chaos. Perhaps the old prophet was a believer in evolution who said, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." The systems of separate worlds are nobler than the confused nebulae. And it is possible to give a scientific interpretation to the prophetic utterance, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."