

LECTURE IV.

THE LAND MONOPOLY.

IN the three preceding lectures we have traced the main causes which, notwithstanding the democratic temper and traditions of our race, made government by oligarchy an inevitable phase in our history. We have also seen how the revolt of the many against the few has been moderated and softened into a course of gradual political change. We have finally observed that changes in political forms have been very far indeed from improving, as much as was expected, the social condition of the people. We have found one reason for this in the fact that political reforms have never until now been carried far enough to make the people masters of their own destinies, except on condition of such general excitement and passionate resolve as ought not to be required. But we have also acknowledged that there are other reasons for our disappointment. For the position of the oligarchy is so firmly rooted in the constitution of society, that even the most extensive political changes do not materially affect it. And, on the other hand, amongst the million, ignorance, prejudice, spiritless indolence, and a low moral tone make many the dupes now of purse-proud patrons, now of impracticable dreamers, and again, of self-seeking adventurers. All such influences are against the common good.

But if the million are thus blinded to their best interests

the fault lies much more in circumstances than in personal character. "Much more," I say; not that I forget the importance of personal character, or would undervalue individual responsibility. I shall not dispute for an instant that if every man in our industrial army and among its destitute stragglers were a saint and a hero, a beneficent revolution would be accomplished in twelve months. And the fact that they are not, as a general rule, saints and heroes, is very properly a subject of regret, mingled with reproach. To this extent, and in this sense, we may rightly admit that our social miseries are caused by defects of character. But taking men as we know them, generally inclined to good, but not very eager about it, and more fond of pleasure than of work, common sense teaches that favourable surroundings are necessary to keep them right, and that average character will go wrong if circumstances are adverse.

In trying to influence individuals, we have a right to assume that every man will strive to be above the average, and to overcome circumstance. Every one whom we can inspire with this ambition is a hero won for the army of progress. But in dealing with the masses and their prospects, we dare not take this course. Dependence on such a slow process of redemption would drive us to despair. We must change circumstances if we would save the world. And yet the only powers at our disposal for this enterprise of changing circumstance are the million, whom circumstances make what they are. Reflection on this truth may well prevent Radicals from being over sanguine; but it should also make them the more earnest. For thousands of years cir-

cumstance and institutions have conspired to deprive the multitude not only of outward fortune, but also of the capacity for well-directed aspiration. Hence, the Nihilists cry "Destroy all institutions, and let us begin afresh!" But we say no; for that would be to sacrifice the hard-won experience of ten thousand years; and from the barbaric chaos thus created, you would have to start once more on the weary pilgrimage through all the stages of savagery, communism, feudalism, and I know not what, through which we have laboriously reached our present position. No; do not destroy; but make a valiant effort to change;—an effort impelled and guided by the discovery of the present generation, that political reform is of no use except as a lever to bring about organic change in our social conditions.

I know nothing more indicative of the oligarchic spirit, than the glibness with which successful and so-called practical men will meet all your complaints of social injustice with the heartless refrain that "the chances are the same for all." Here are two boys born in neighbouring cottages, and brought up under precisely the same village influences. The one becomes a railway contractor and a millionaire, the other a cadger, a drunkard, and a pauper. What would you have? The chances are the same for all. Of two boys attending on the same plough, one emigrates and becomes a great sheep farmer in Australia. The other turns poacher, is sent to prison, and comes out a criminal ready for felony. You may pity him and admire his brother, but the chances are the same for all. Throughout the thronging population that crowds the land ceaseless currents are flowing, as marked and

constant as those of the ocean. From every village there is a drain of human life to the squalor of our large towns, as perpetual as the descent of pure mountain rills to the shameful filth of our great rivers. But that is not the only current. From the dark places of labour and suffering, energetic souls force their way to the light of prosperity; and, on the other hand, from the high places of fortune, indolence, extravagance and dissipation draw their victims into the haunts of destitution. Is it not just? The chances are the same for all. And so, whatever you may urge as to the concentration of wealth and the diffusion of poverty, it will wring from your successful master of fortune nothing more than an acknowledgment that the world *is* hard for those who do not know how to manage it; but, he will add, the chances are the same for all.

Now, here I join issue. It is not accurate to say that the chances are the same for all, except in this sense, that we all live in the same world. For the conditions of society may be so weighted as to give a special premium, not sanctioned by justice, to exceptional character and ability. If food, for instance, were made the prize of a three-mile race, it would not be true to say that the chances were the same for all. They are not; they are in favour, and disproportionately in favour, of the longest legs and the largest lungs. I say disproportionately, because in prescribing the progress of man, nature has not assigned such a value to legs and lungs as to make the right to live dependent on their superiority. But the case is very much the same in principle, if all conditions, for instance, are disproportionately in favour of parsimony, cool blood, exceptional endurance, or specula-

tive genius. Society cannot be justly constituted, unless, on the whole, it is favourable to an equable diffusion of comfort, knowledge and refinement amongst average men. Now, that society as we know it is actually so constituted will scarcely be maintained by anyone, Tory or Radical, Christian or Positivist.

I suppose that no part of Mr. Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" secured more general assent than his description of the evils uniformly attendant on the highest forms of modern civilisation. People may differ as to his proposed remedy; but as to the existence of the disease, any hesitation to admit it is scarcely consistent with candour, or, indeed, with sanity. It is of no use to tell us that poverty is an inevitable accident of progress. Exceptional poverty may be so; but not the existence of a million paupers. It is of no avail to sneer at impossible dreams of equality. Equality is not now in question, but only reasonable comfort. Let any one answer this as he would have it answered in his own case. Does reasonable comfort exist where the slightest raising of the standard of subsistence must destroy the balance between income and expenditure? Suppose a change of manners and ideas should add to necessary subsistence, as ordinarily reckoned, some article of refinement or decency, costing, say, three shillings a week: could it be fairly held that reasonable comfort was general, if it were proved that six-sevenths of the population were incapable of that expenditure? In the story of the French Revolution we hear a good deal about the *sans-culottes*, — destitute people who went without breeches for the simple reason that they could not afford

to buy them. True, they were used to it. They inherited squalid traditions, according to which breeches were unnecessary. But when different fashions came in, and a higher standard of decency was established, surely the fact that these poor wretches could not, by reason of poverty, adopt it, afforded a presumption that reasonable comfort did not prevail amongst them. On the same principle, I insist that the necessity for state-paid education, proves the absence of reasonable comfort amongst six-sevenths of our own population. In days gone by, our intellectual *sans-culottes* never dreamed of elementary education as a necessary of life. And when public opinion made it so, it was found that they could not afford it. This slight addition to the standard of subsistence (amounting, on an average, to probably three shillings a week) could not be made without calling in the assistance of rates and taxes for six-sevenths of the people.* If any

* This may seem like a condemnation of state education ; but what is really condemned is the unequal and one-sided distribution of wealth which has made it necessary. I have never concealed from myself that if every parent could have afforded to pay the whole cost of his children's schooling, state education would have been unnecessary, and open to all Mr. Herbert Spencer's objections. But it *is* necessary, imperatively necessary. The morbid distortion of progress has made it so. And now the one thing needful is to make it effectual, by abolishing fees, which, directly and indirectly, cost far more than they are worth. I must also guard myself against another possible misunderstanding. I have elsewhere often argued that poor parents do, *in the long run*, pay, through their rates and taxes, the greater part—in some cases the whole—of the cost of schooling. But then the cost is spread over the whole of their lives as ratepayers, perhaps forty or fifty years. This contention is quite consistent with the allegation in the text—that they cannot afford an additional three shillings a week out of current income.

apology is needed for my constant reiteration of this fact, I must plead the difficulty of getting it appreciated. We are so accustomed to rates in aid that we do not reflect what they mean. To my own mind, this acknowledged inability of so large a proportion of our fellow-countrymen is proof demonstrative of the extensive absence of reasonable comfort. Surely such a state of things as this is not to be accounted for by defects of individual character. Nor can it be justified by the fallacy that the chances are the same for all. It indicates, rather, a false, ill-balanced constitution of society. It suggests that the chances are weighted, as in the tables of a gaming-house, so that fortune inevitably gravitates to a few.

The question thus raised is a very complicated one, and I have not the presumption to suppose I can give a complete solution. But there are two causes of social injustice that seem to me so plain and palpable as to require instant consideration, not from us only, but from the whole nation. I refer to the land monopoly, and also to the present apportionment of the profits arising from production. Our immediate concern is with the former: the latter will be considered when we come to speak of the distribution of wealth. But the land monopoly has a great deal to answer for, especially when we bear in mind the means necessary to maintain it. For it converts into a luxury of the few what is really the most necessary of all raw materials. It minimises the number of tillers of the soil; it lessens production; it maintains barbarous sports totally inconsistent with high cultivation. It tends to redundancy of population, and turns that redundancy into a curse. It drives into overcrowded markets the

children whom it produces. It depresses the standard of subsistence, and thus operates doubly to keep down wages. Over a great part of the country it creates a state of things in which it is positively no one's individual interest to improve the land. It robs the nation of a just revenue from the soil, and thus unfairly increases the burdens oppressing trade and commerce. Now, if this accusation can be made good, as I believe it can, surely we are justified in tracing no small part of our social disease to the land monopoly.

We are often told that the phrase is altogether an improper one. For "monopoly" means an exclusive right of sale vested in some favoured person or company. But there is no such exclusive right in the sale of land. Every one may legally buy and sell it, whenever he can get the chance, provided of course that he observes the form and conditions imposed by law. And this, no doubt, is true. Yet it is equally true that the forms and conditions, together with other restrictions imposed by law, operate practically to reduce to the lowest possible limits the number of men possessing territorial interests, influence, or power. And to such a condition of things the word monopoly may very properly be applied, if not in its original literal meaning, at least in an obvious sense very commonly understood.

The extent to which this monopoly prevails may be very easily disguised. Thus a return issued in 1873, gives the total number of landowners in Great Britain and Ireland as no less than 1,173,724. When we remember that the number of separate families in the three kingdoms cannot be much more than 7,000,000, it is, at first sight,

rather gratifying to find that about one-seventh of all the fathers of families would appear to be landowners. But our satisfaction is lessened when we find that in this return, individual and also corporate owners are multiplied by as many holdings as they happen to possess in separate districts. Thus, the estates of the ecclesiastical commissioners are counted as held by forty-nine owners, and the crown lands by an equal number. A noble Duke is returned as fourteen landowners. The same source of error exists in a great many other cases. But farther, every one is called a landowner who possesses the freehold of any building site, however small. In fact, out of nearly 1,200,000 alleged landowners, it turns out that upwards of 852,000 hold possession of less than one acre each. Now the whole area of the United Kingdom is more than 77,000,000 acres. Deduct 500,000—a fair allowance for the 852,000 owners with less than an acre each—and you have 76,500,000 acres to be allotted, with due allowance for commons, to the remaining 348,000 owners. The total amount of land still subject to common rights is probably little more than 2,500,000 acres. Deducting this, you have 500,000 acres at most, owned by 852,000 people; and, on the other hand, 74,000,000 acres owned by 348,000. Such a state of things is at least suggestive of something very like land monopoly.

But the case may be put more strongly still. The owners of about half the United Kingdom could probably be accommodated with seats in Exeter Hall. The area of England and Wales is a little over 37,000,000 acres, and as nearly as possible one quarter of this is in the hands of 874 men. The case of Ireland is

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still worse ; for 744 men possess nearly half of it. And Scotland is worst of all ; for almost one quarter of it is comprised in the estates of twelve men ; and about one-fourteenth of the whole of that ancient kingdom is now the domain of one nobleman. It would be absurd to suppose that this concentration of landed property in a few hands is the result of any natural and legitimate process. There must be in our history and laws some reason for this abnormal state of things ; and I will first give my own opinion of what the causes have been, in order that we may be the better prepared to estimate its bearing upon the conflict of oligarchy and democracy.

In every settled and prosperous country of course the possession of land must confer some special advantages not offered by other forms of property. Its security is necessarily greater than that of gold or jewels. And if it does not rival commerce or manufacture in profits, it is at any rate generally increasing in value without any effort of the owner. In addition, it is usually considered, whether rightly or wrongly, a specially honourable form of property, and even where landownership is most widely diffused it confers the social consideration due to a settled and substantial citizen.

But certain features in the history of our country, as described in outline at the beginning of these lectures, have rendered the association specially strong between landed possessions and social dignity, as well as political power. For the feudal system was not in our country, as in most others, merged in the one all-absorbing despotism of the royal overlord. Even the Tudors did not succeed in bringing this about. And the revolt against the arrogant

incompetency of the Stuarts ended, not in a democracy, but in the substitution of a social for a military feudalism. The old baronage having been all but extirpated by its own violence, the new aristocracy sought to better the example by substituting a peaceful social domination for the old military rule. The position of the lord of a manor in the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century was one of very great local power, which he exercised without any of the vital risks that harassed the ambition of the old barons. As justice of the peace he administered the law, without much danger of inquiry as to his interpretation of it. He had special rights over all common lands, and sometimes stretched those rights at his pleasure. As owner of the village and its fields, he could compel everyone to obey his will on pain of banishment from the neighbourhood. He could dictate both the politics and the religion of all his tenants. His only equals were neighbouring magnates, and his assistance was sought at election times with much flattery and many promises by his superiors in the state. Farming had to be conducted with due regard to the interest of his lordship's sport. But if he thus entailed roughness and waste on agriculture, he was protected from loss, not only by the one-sided laws affecting landlord and tenant, but also by an almost prohibitory tax upon foreign importation of food. He was the ultimate heir of all the industry and enterprise of the neighbourhood. For whatever was done to improve the land or attract custom to the village, the ultimate profit gravitated into his pocket. If a farmer knocked a post into the ground it became the landlord's. If the poor man were fool enough to put in drains, or erect

a pump, or build a shed, he simply made a present to the landowner, who might turn him out on six months' notice, and keep his goods. Whatever creditor came short, the landlord was safe so long as he did not let arrears accumulate beyond the value of the tenant's furniture and stock. For if the farmer were bankrupt, the lord must first be satisfied in full, even though not a farthing was left for anyone else. When to this it is added that the landed gentry formed a caste amongst themselves, and looked on any contact with shopkeepers or commercial men as an American would regard an invitation to dine with a negro, we have said enough to suggest strong reasons for a very stiff Conservatism amongst the territorial gentry.

But Conservatism does not always mean simply keeping things as they are. Where the instinct of self-preservation is aroused in a privileged caste, there is no novelty which it will not sanction professedly for the prevention of change. Hence there are no revolutionists like your Tory demagogues, who, rather than concede equal rights, will pauperise a whole nation with doles. At the end of the seventeenth century new customs began to prevail in regard to the devolution of land, customs as disastrous as they were novel, but, like many other Conservative innovations, intended for the preservation of privilege. The law of primogeniture is, of course, as old as feudalism, and was perhaps justified by the necessity then existing for a territorial army. But for the preservation of the territorial social system of later times, the operation of primogeniture was found to be uncertain. Any spendthrift heir when he came into possession might sell the land, or, being made bankrupt, might

be deprived of it; and thus the family would lose its territorial position. This difficulty was met in part by the legal permission to entail estates, so that each successor should only be a tenant for life and not absolute owner. The obvious inconveniences to the public interest of such an arrangement were corrected by another provision enabling each "tenant in tail," as he came into possession, to execute a deed which, when enrolled in the Court of Chancery, constituted him owner of the fee simple. But such a provision exposed the continuity of territorial families to all the dangers just indicated. To meet this the system of settlement was invented, and came into vogue toward the end of the seventeenth century. The law does not allow any estate to be settled for a longer period than twenty-one years beyond the expiry of existing lives. But as each successive heir to an estate comes of age he can join the tenant for life, usually his own father, in cutting off the previous entail, and resettling the estate for his own life and twenty-one years afterwards. The settlement, usually includes arrangements providing a charge on the estate for the support of other members of the family. But its chief effect is to make the property inviolable for the lifetime of the heir in tail and twenty-one years afterwards. The heir and successor may be a spendthrift and a gambler hopelessly bankrupt. Yet that does not affect the continuity of the estate. The income may be sequestrated, and the hereditary mansion may be let. But nothing disturbs the settlement. The estate cannot be sold by the creditors, because it is not really the bankrupt's property. He is only a tenant for life. Thus the estate is kept together for the next heir in

tail, and he, if he marries a rich heiress, may restore all things as they were in the days of his forefathers, with the addition, probably, of many acres to his paternal inheritance.

Sometimes, if we speak of this practically unlimited power of settlement as a defect of the land laws, legal experts smile at our simplicity, and assure us that this power of settlement is not confined to land at all, but is equally applicable to stock or railway shares; and that as a matter of fact, it is constantly exercised in the case of heirlooms—such as pearls, or diamond necklaces, or ancient plate. Precisely. And with what object is the settlement made in such cases? Manifestly to keep the precious articles in the exclusive possession of one family, and to guard them against the ordinary vicissitudes of fortune. Now in regard to gold and jewels it is of little consequence to any one, save the creditors of a bankrupt heir, that such articles should be kept out of the market. But the case is very different with the land. Here the commonwealth is as directly interested as any creditors can be in maintaining freedom of trade. And therefore it is no defence whatever of settlement as applied to land, to say that it is equally applicable to other things. It does not do as much harm in the case of other things as it does in the case of land; and therefore we are perfectly justified in asking that its application to land may be more stringently limited.

It is obvious how these laws and customs bear upon the land monopoly. The national constitution, class traditions and social habits have long combined to exaggerate in this country the advantages everywhere attendant on

possession of land. These advantages have been precisely such as would naturally stimulate family pride and make the parting with an estate equivalent to extinction. No wonder, therefore, that careful provision has been made to prevent the dissipation of estates by their temporary holders. The general nature of that provision we have seen. Its effect has been, that while most of the usual courses of sale or partition have been barred, each great family that held out for half-a-dozen generations has had many opportunities, by intermarriage and otherwise, to increase its estates. But other reasons for accumulation exist. The cumbrous title-deeds, with their tiresome recitations, have been encouraged or necessitated by our territorial system, and have reacted so as to confine the possession of land for other than commercial purposes to the territorial hierarchy. And again, our traditional land system, with its game laws, its hunting raids, its want of security for farmers' investments, its stereotyped rotations of crops, and landlord dictation in general, has so kept down the returns from agricultural land that no one cares to have it, except for purposes of social ambition. None but a very rich man, or a man of daring enterprise combined with genius, can afford to hold agricultural land in England. This necessarily co-operates with all other mentioned causes to confirm the land monopoly.

From this sketch the relation of these abuses to some of our social difficulties ought to be tolerably plain. And, first of all, I hope I have made clear what was meant by saying that these abuses convert into a luxury of the few what is really the most necessary of all raw materials. For, as we have seen, the absorption of land by our oligarchy is not

to be accounted for solely, nor even mainly, by greed of gain; but rather by social ambition. Landowners have often urged it as a merit that they are content with a return of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the capital supposed to be represented by their estates. But the fact is that they have taken out the other $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in sport, in patronage, in political influence, in ecclesiastical dictation, in local supremacy. In other words, the possession of agricultural land is not a business investment; it is a luxury which only the rich can afford. Now pray remember, that notwithstanding the enormous spread of manufactures, the part of our national territory assigned to agriculture, pasture, or sport is still enormously preponderant. And then ask yourselves whether in all your reading you have ever met with another instance of a nation making its domain practically the pleasure ground of a rich oligarchy?

Yes, there was something like it in ancient Italy when the Roman republic, gorged with conquest, degenerated into the Roman Empire. In the century preceding the Christian era there had been enormous accumulations of land in the possession of a few rich men, who cultivated it by hordes of slaves. In the Italy of that day, as in the England of this, poor men could hardly afford to hold land. There, as here, large sections of the country were depopulated of freemen, while Rome swarmed with a horrible population of half savage paupers, who were only kept in good humour by doles. Then, as now, charity was more fashionable than justice, and rich men distributed every day at their doors baskets of food. Then, as now, bread was distributed at public expense, and conservatives

were ready to charge the revenue with any amount of pauperising gifts to the people in a desperate attempt to avoid fundamental reforms. But all injustice is only an embodied lie, that carries within it the elements of conviction and destruction. As the overthrow of the Western Empire was prepared by the pauperism, wretchedness, vice, and crime that festered in the overcrowded population of Rome, we may very well believe that it was begun by the huge solitudes of luxury from which the people were repelled into the city.

I am not going to press the analogy too far. We live in a different world. Thanks to that "enthusiasm of humanity" which, let Positivists say what they will, we owe to Christianity, we have resources of moral recuperation and political reform such as not the noblest Roman of them all could imagine. We shall not meet the fate of ancient empires. We shall not be the fools of a stolid conservatism, nor the dupes of suicidal violence. Still, it is surely an ominous fact that such a conversion of the central domain of the empire into a luxury for the few, as exists among ourselves, can hardly be paralleled anywhere, except in the system that sowed the seeds of ruin for the Romans.

Where land is a luxury, the luxurious find its enjoyment heightened by solitude. "Woe," cried the ancient prophet, "to them that lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" But is not that what has been done in the north of Scotland for half a century past? And, to a smaller extent, it has been the policy in England for even longer. Why have so many cottages been pulled down? Why have labourers to walk

five or six miles before beginning a weary day's work ? Surely it is because the old law of settlement started a policy persevered in now for other reasons. No one must reside on the estate but those who are absolutely necessary to the great owner's convenience. And the tendency has been to diminish these in number. Fewer hands are now needed, I suppose, in proportion to acreage than ever before. It is no justification to urge that in this way the largest revenue is obtainable. That system is best, not which brings in most money, but which plants most men on the soil in remunerative employment. But whatever may be said about the superior productiveness of English land as compared with that of France, for instance, the experience of some few tillers of their own land is very suggestive of the possibility of a large increase. Yet, so long as the landlord's sport is as important as the farmer's crops, so long as trim fields may be ravaged, and fences broken and gates smashed by the galloping of a hundred horses at the tail of a fox, it is not likely that the exactitude and order and neatness of high scientific farming will be extensively attained.

But farther, the influence of the oligarchic system of society in our rural districts has not been morally, any more than materially, beneficial to the scattered millions there. The ideal of a jovial squire and a gentlemanly parson, patronising and cultivating their humble neighbours, is rarely attained ; and, when attained, it is not a high one. People receptive of blankets, soup, and tracts, receiving on authority a religion they do not understand, and meekly obeying orders as to baptism, vaccination and catechism, are not likely to develop much independent

manhood. And, without independent manhood in the million, social reform is impossible. Fathers and mothers, taught to rely on charity, bring children into the world by the dozen, and then know no more what to do with them than "the old woman who lived in a shoe." The end is, they are drafted off to the thronging towns to look in vain for labour, and then to cadge for charity there. Such a state of things must necessarily depress the standard of subsistence, on which the general market rate of wages so much depends. For while the millions at the base of the social structure live on charity and chance, the million next above them are liable to a very demoralising, because unnatural, competition.

Now if by some fantastic doom of invisible powers this land system with all its curses were made a necessary accident of national prosperity, we might resign ourselves to fate. But national prosperity does not mean the riches of a few hundred thousand men and the poverty of the rest; and it is demonstrable that by the working of this system the land itself is impoverished and the nation robbed. For, as we have seen, the owners of all great estates are only life tenants, and whatever they expend on improvements is deducted from their personal income without hope of adequate return. Besides, the settlement has in many cases so saddled them with rent charges, that they have hardly enough left to keep up their dignity. The farmers, liable, mostly, at any moment to disturbance and spoliation, have no inducement to put money in the land. The heir in tail watches jealously lest any changes should interfere with his rights or threaten his prospects of sport. The effect of all is to keep drainage,

fencing, and manuring far below the level necessary to the best scientific methods. And at the present moment neither life tenant nor occupier, nor anyone else, has his individual interests so engaged as to prompt him to enterprise.

Finally, so far as the evils of the territorial system are concerned, it has favoured the land owners in throwing off their legitimate burdens. I do not believe either in the practicability or the efficacy of Mr. Henry George's plan for taxing all land up to its full annual value. But, on the part of those who are necessarily excluded from the possession of land, it is a very fair claim that the national territory should, through its privileged occupiers, pay a very large share of the expenses of government. In fact this was acknowledged in 1692, when land owners agreed to pay one-fifth of the annual value, or four shillings in the pound. But having previously got rid of their feudal obligations, the territorial oligarchy found it easy to manipulate the money charge. And whereas at the present day four shillings in the pound would produce nearly thirty-five millions, the actual amount received from the land tax is very little over one million.

The case is too strong to need farther argument. And though it is not half stated, it may well fill us with amazement that such a land system has been tolerated so long. The explanation lies partly in popular ignorance, and partly also in the fact that in the brief intervals of lucidity between our fits of war fever and panic, we have had enough to do to get parliamentary reform and free trade. But now we have, or are assured of having, parliamentary reform

enough for all practical purposes, if only we have sense and self-control to make use of it. I well know how many abuses and nuisances await the radical besom. But I declare I know of nothing Parliament can touch that would be so pregnant with good to the people at large as land-law reform. I do not wish to exaggerate. I do not for a moment expect that this alone will suffice to extinguish pauperism or crime. But I am certain that it will do very much indeed to raise the standard of subsistence and to extend reasonable comfort.

We hear a great deal in these times about "land nationalisation," and, if the phrase is reasonably understood, the idea is a very good one. In one sense, and that a very real one, a sense emphatically sanctioned by lawyers, the land is national property already, and cannot possibly be denationalised. For lawyers will tell you that neither individuals nor corporations can have more than a *tenure* in land. Absolute property in it, they say, is impossible, except to the crown—by which I understand the nation. The case, then, is this, that holders of land under the crown have abused their tenure by various innovations and corruptions, until their tenancy has become an intolerable nuisance. The true remedy would seem to be neither wholesale confiscation, nor any impracticable communism, but a repeal of the various innovations, or abuses, or effete privileges, that have turned the necessary institution of private land tenure into a huge land monopoly. The main purpose in land tenure, as in everything else, should be the common good; and all accidents of land tenure opposed to the common good should be swept away. We have seen how primogeniture, and entail, and strict settlements

tend to monopoly. They should, therefore, be abolished by the first democratic parliament. We have seen how the power of eviction makes a landlord a despot. It should, therefore, be greatly limited, and, in the case of farmers who pay their rents, should be as difficult as in Ireland. Agriculture is continually subordinated to sport; and for this reason, as well as because of the bad blood, and crime, and cruelty they cause, the game laws should be erased from the statute book. In a word, take away the accidental features of land tenure which make land a luxury instead of a business investment. Make it impossible for any one to ensure the continuity and integrity of a landed estate beyond his own lifetime. Deprive landlords of their despotic and popish powers. Raise honest tenants beyond their vengeance, by fixity of tenure. Compel owners to sell on reasonable terms when land is wanted for places of worship, or study, or amusement desired by a sufficient quorum of inhabitants. Take away all inducement to waste good land on sport, by leaving hunting and shooting free to all, till there is nothing left to hunt or shoot. In a word, this is a case for levelling down rather than levelling up. Take away all privileges that make land a luxury; substitute a public register for cumbrous title-deeds; impose a sufficient land tax; and then you will find the distribution of land accommodate itself to the requirements of general enterprise—that is, of the common good.

If any man would go farther I would invite him to consider some arguments in the next lecture. It is impossible now to give all the objections I feel against any system of land communism. Nor, indeed, is it necessary. For, in the

stage of progress we have reached, the thing is as much out of date and as impossible as the clan system in the Highlands, or the septs of Ireland. Talk about it is, in my conviction, sheer waste of time. But, lest I should seem guilty of intolerance towards any earnest friends of progress, I shall hope to say something on the subject when dealing with the distribution of wealth ; for that, to some people, naturally suggests communism.

Indeed my object now is not so much to advocate or to condemn any detailed projects of reform, but rather to urge the overwhelming importance of the issue. Conservatives, or whatever may be the name of the new party that is to succeed to the inheritance of the dead—will do their utmost to distract attention from this subject by schemes of relief out of rates and taxes, or by projects of emigration. But that is a cruel kindness which, by way of compensation for past injustice, robs people of self-respect and the power of self-help. I do not want to see a peasantry with houses built out of the rates ; I want to see them build houses for themselves, and on their own land. Emigration is the natural means by which a strong and enterprising race asserts its vitality and extends its life. But to crush people into pauperism, and then send them out to battle with wild nature, is not the true method of emigration. A contented and prosperous population are soon aware when they are too thick upon the land, and they are all well able to arrange emigration for themselves. But to make solitudes for wealthy luxury, to drive labour into the towns, and then cry out that the country is overcrowded, does not seem like rational statesmanship. Let us insist that our land laws accommodate themselves to the needs of the

time. Let us set before us as our aim, not the greatest profit in money, but the sustenance of the largest number of people on the land. And if other co-ordinate measures secure the fruits of industry to the right owners, we may be sure that, in the long run, emigration will take care of itself.

