THE

NATIONALISATION

OF

THE LAND.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE pamphlet which follows is a reprint of an Article which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* of December last, with the addition of some Notes, and a considerable Appendix, in the shape of a Letter from Mr. Alfred R. Wallace, the President of the English Land Nationalisation Society, and my Reply thereto. I thought it right to give this additional matter, as my article was mainly intended as a reply to the view put forward by Mr. Henry George in his book entitled *Progress and Poverty*. I may add that the utmost care has been taken to get accurate and reliable data; my only object being to set forth a true and dispassionate statement of the case.

SAMUEL SMITH.

Liverpool, January, 1884.

THE NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

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Up till recent years no such phrase as the Nationalisation of the Land was heard in England. It is doubtful if the idea it conveys was even intelligible to the mass of the people. In other countries it may possibly have been used as a symbol of extreme socialistic theories, but to all intents and purposes it is only within the last three or four years that the group of ideas indicated by this novel term has taken any hold of the average British mind.

It can, however, no longer be said that those ideas lie outside the scope of public discussion: though it is true that very few of our leading statesmen have deigned to notice them, and, though few publicists of any weight have lent their advocacy to the cause, it cannot be denied that they are making way among considerable classes of the community, especially the artizans of our great towns. This rapid progress is no doubt owing very much to the wide circulation of that remarkable book by Henry George, of America, entitled "Progress and Poverty," a book which I shall treat in this paper as the chief exponent of those views. It appears to me that our leading statesmen must no longer keep silence on this subject. Though it may appear to them too visionary to admit of serious

discussion, it is being diffused so widely among the masses as to forebode trouble in the future unless met by rational argument.

So far as I understand this novel doctrine, it is that the State ought to own the entire land of the country on the ground that it is the legitimate property of the whole community—that it ought never to have been alienated to private owners—that their rights are usurped, and must be brought to an end either by compulsory purchase, or by simple confiscation. Mr. George goes so far as to advocate the latter method, on the ground that private property in land is as immoral as slavery, and he extends his anathema not only to agricultural land, but to building-land in towns, and argues that even a freehold on which the owner has built a house is as much a robbery of the public domain as the largest estate of a Highland Laird. He condemns not only the great estates of our aristocracy, but the small properties of the French peasantry and the homestead farms of the American yeomen. In his eyes the possession of any portion of the earth's surface by a private owner is theft, and the stolen goods ought to be restored to the public that has been defrauded.*

I am not aware that any body of British opinion has endorsed these extreme views. When the Trades' Congress last year advocated the Nationalisation of the Land, I don't suppose they meant confiscation, and I question if they extended the term to property in towns. Probably their leading idea was the improvement of British agriculture; and I much doubt if they, or any of their sympathisers in

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* *From Henry George.*

"Though his titles have been acquiesced in by generation after generation, to the landed estates of the Duke of Westminster the poorest child that is born in London to-day has as much right as his eldest son. Though the sovereign people of the State of New York consent to the landed possessions of the Astors, the puniest infant that comes wailing into the world in the squalidest room of the most miserable tenement house, becomes at that moment seized of an equal right with the millionaires. And it is robbed if the right is denied."

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this country, have clearly thought out the subject, or perfected any plan for the acquisition of the soil or its cultivation after it was acquired. This phrase has a fine grandiose sound about it, like other well known catch words, which take captive minds that have not analyzed the question or grappled with the real difficulties of the case. It has a delightful vagueness, which covers many shades of meaning, and makes it no easy task to analyze or refute it.

I shall, in the first instance, deal with the form it assumes in Mr. George's book, where he boldly recommends confiscation on the ground of the immorality of private ownership. I do so because it is quite obvious that the State cannot acquire possession of the soil at full market value without to a certainty making a loss on the transaction, as was well shown by Professor Fawcett in his Liverpool address some two years ago. It is plain to me that as this agitation proceeds, it will develop more and more into Communistic lines, and tend to assume the form of naked spoliation.

Now the main ground on which Mr. George makes this startling proposal is, that the land originally belonged to the state or community, and that it was wrongfully granted away to favoured individuals, and he compiles a brief history of ancient civilization to prove his point. I will go with him so far as to allow that before the earth was peopled land was not appropriated, and while population was very sparse it was not worth the while of individuals to claim special plots of land. The origin of all communities that we know anything of was the tribal state, when a clan or tribe, under a chieftain of their choice, roamed over a wide tract of country, supported by the produce of the chase or by their flocks and herds. Agriculture, in our sense of the word, did not exist in the infancy of the race. Our ancestors

lived, as savage tribes now do, by hunting and fishing, and afterwards by pastoral pursuits; and so there was no motive for the private appropriation of land. But the point I wish to bring out is that usually private ownership of land arose when agriculture commenced, for the simple reason that no one would toil to raise crops which he could not enjoy. Indeed, so invariable has been the rule, that we may almost say that civilization has never made a commencement, or at least has never advanced beyond a rudimentary stage, till private ownership in land, or at least individual occupancy, was recognized by the law of the State. The necessary stimulus for cultivating and improving the soil was wanting, till security was given that he who laboured should enjoy the fruits of his labour.

But without going back to the dim and dusty records of antiquity, we have only to take a survey of the condition of the globe to-day to prove the truth of my assertion. We still have in active existence every form of human society, from the most barbarous to the most refined. We still see a large part of the earth tenanted by races as primitive in their habits as our forefathers were when they were clothed with skins of beasts, and possessed the soil of this island in common. Nearly all Africa, considerable portions of North and South America, a large portion of Central Asia, the interior of Australia, New Guinea, and many other islands of Polynesia are all in that state of primitive simplicity. In these regions the land is not appropriated, it is either the common possession of the tribe or the battle ground of contending tribes. Now, Mr. George gravely assumes that all our modern poverty and degradation are the result of private land ownership, that all would disappear if we reverted to the happy Arcadian times when land communism prevailed; and it is natural for us to ask if we find an absence of poverty and degradation among

those portions of mankind who have preserved the primitive tradition unimpaired.

Let us travel through Africa with Stanley or Livingstone, let us accompany our expeditions to Ashantee, or Abyssinia, or Zululand, in quest of the golden age of plenty—do we find anywhere even a trace of such social well-being as to be worthy of comparison with the worst governed country in Europe. Do we not find slavery, polygamy, the most horrid oppression and barbarous cruelty, the invariable accompaniments of this primitive state of existence. Do not famines and pestilences periodically desolate those tribes, while human life is scarcely valued more than that of the brutes. The Red Indians who once roamed over the North American Continent, and still hold large reserves in the far West, were all Land Communists; there was never private appropriation, nor, as a necessary consequence, was there any Agriculture worthy of the name. These rude tribes lived by the chase, and a province that will now support, in plenty, a million of Anglo-Saxons, could scarcely sustain a thousand of these roaming savages. Wherever we find the land unappropriated, whether among Zulus, or Red Indians, or Maoris, or roving Tartars in Central Asia, we find a savage and degraded state of mankind, and we find almost invariably that the first step in civilisation is coincident with the private appropriation and careful cultivation of the soil.

So far from the sweeping generalisation of Mr. George being true, that human misery and degradation have sprung from private ownership of land, we find from actual survey of the earth at the present time that precisely the opposite is true—that human misery is deepest where the land is not appropriated, and human happiness and civilisation most advanced where the land is held by private owners.

I am aware that it will be objected that other things

than agrarian causes account for the progress of the advanced races. Christianity, science and trade have elevated Europe, while Africa remains in primitive darkness. This is self-evident to any ordinary person, but Mr. George virtually ignores all moral causes for social progress, or treats them so lightly as to leave the reader to infer that the possession of the soil is the only vital question for a nation's welfare—that if this be secured to the State, all other things will right themselves, and social perfection be speedily reached. The retort is obvious. Why have those communities that have acted on his principles for thousands of years remained in primitive barbarism, while all advance has been made by nations that discarded them? The reason is plain—Because they are not suited for mankind in a civilized state. Whenever progress is made to a certain stage the land becomes appropriated, while at the same time arts and literature arise, cities are built, and laws are framed. At that stage of human progress, where slavery and polygamy prevail, where private rights are at the mercy of the chief or despot, where agriculture is unknown, and population is kept down by incessant wars and famines, we find the land unappropiated. Wherever these abuses disappear, and the garments of civilisation are put on, then private ownership of land appears. The pastoral or nomadic state is exchanged for the agricultural, and dense populations take the place of thinly scattered tribes.

I am aware that some exceptions may be taken to this large generalisation. I cannot go into minute details in such a paper as this. The case of India will present itself as an exception to some of my hearers, regarding which I will only say that the State, from time immemorial, has owned the soil of India, and leased it to cultivating tenants; but so far from abolishing poverty, it has always been one of the poorest countries in the world. Speaking broadly, I

contend that the theory of human progress I have sketched is nearer the mark than that of Mr. George. I hold that in place of private appropriation of land causing the deterioration of mankind, it usually accompanies their upward progress, and marks the first great advance from barbarism to civilisation. If this be true, the main plank of the communist platform disappears, and the ground is cleared for looking at some other sides of the question.

But it will now be objected—grant that private ownership of land is the law of civilisation, the methods by which it was brought about were unjust; large grants of land were made by kings to courtiers and favorites, great estates were gained by conquest and confiscation, might took the place of right, and the descendants of those "land robbers" to-day should receive no mercy. This is an argument we constantly hear. What is the practical worth of it? No student of history will deny that there have been many cruel conquests, many displacements of population, as weaker races were subdued by stronger; and one incident that usually accompanied those conquests was the allocation of the soil to the conquerors. In this way the corpus of the old Roman Empire was transferred to the chieftains and warriors of the rude tribes that overran it—the Goths, the Vandals, the Huns and the Franks paid little regard to the rights of the subject populations. The feudal system of modern Europe arose out of those conquests, and the land was conveyed by the chiefs to their vassals upon military tenure. In this way the soil of England changed hands, first upon the Saxon, then upon the Danish, and lastly upon the Norman conquest, and that of Ireland some centuries later upon the English conquest. Very much the some process is going on at this day in all our colonies; the white race is gradually dispossessing the coloured races of their land in South Africa, in New Zealand, in Polynesia, while our

American kinsmen have pretty nearly completed the spoliation of the Red Indians of North America.

These processes have usually been cruel and unjust, but it is the work of an archæologist rather than a statesman to investigate the original titles by which most of the earth's surface passed to our ancestors. None but a dreamer could seriously think that modern titles should be impugned because Alaric, or Atila, or William the Conqueror acted unjustly. Modern civilisation is the web woven of the warp and woof of conqueror and conquered, and it is well for humanity that time, which wears away all things, covers with the mantle of oblivion the rough processes by which they were knit together. Nations that are wise seek to bury the hatchet: it is only worthy of children to be ever seeking to keep alive race injuries that are irreparable and hoary with antiquity.

Indeed those very processes by which the land of most countries has been transferred have been in truth the prelude to a higher civilisation. No educated man can doubt that the Norman Conquest has made England a greater nation than it would otherwise have been, and every historian admits that the warlike tribes which overran the rotten and effete Roman Empire paved the way for the far higher civilisation of modern Europe.

I dismiss, as the dream of Utopia, the idea that modern land tenures can be upset because ages ago they originated in conquest.

But again we are told that the feudal tenures of mediæval Europe were very different from modern property rights; they were conditional on military service; the holder of a fief had to appear in the field with his retainers when called upon by his Sovereign; and these obligations, we are told, were unfairly commuted when standing armies took the place of feudal service. I reply it is quite probable that the nobles made too good a bargain with their Sovereigns when

the feudal system broke up, and the military baron was transmuted into the modern squire; but it is far too late in the day to overhaul titles on the ground of dubious transactions in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. In all countries the statute of limitations bars enquiry into wrongs after a lapse of years. In England forty years of undisputed possession is adequate to give a valid title, and surely two or three centuries should be enough to satisfy even a legal purist. Further, the greater part of the land of Europe has changed hands by purchase since feudal times; much of it has been transferred many times over. The State has in all these cases recognised the title as indefeasible, and I could not conceive a grosser act of injustice than to confiscate the property of a modern purchaser of land in England, France or Germany because some dusty parchment threw doubt upon a transfer effected in the middle ages. Were States to act on such principles in all their dealings the world would be convulsed with strife; feuds between nations, between races and individuals would be endless; no settlement could ever be regarded as final, and modern civilisation would perish as ancient civilisation did in the smoke of internecine strife.

It is an undoubted fact that the first conditions of all national progress are security for life and property. Till those are attained no wealth can be accumulated, or no material prosperity enjoyed by the mass of the people. The wretched condition of the people of Egypt and Turkey to-day arises from the circumstance that no man feels secure in the possession of his property, consequently few will take the trouble to produce wealth of which they may any day be robbed. Now in all countries that enjoy settled government the first property to claim protection of the laws is that in land. All other industries hang upon it, and so long as it is liable to violent seizure there will be no

industry, and no trade of any moment. I defy anyone to point to a country where the title to the soil is violently attacked, where any trade or industry flourishes. In the South and West of Ireland, where land agitation constantly goes on, there is virtually no commerce, nor will there be any real revival of industry till there is a general acquiescence in the land settlement.

I could not conceive anything more destructive of the social welfare of any old and peaceful country than to tear up the foundation of all property by disputing existing titles to the soil. There have been times in past history when long continued and cruel wrongs have furnished a partial justification for dispossessing a ruling caste of its property and privileges. Such a time was the first French Revolution. The old French *noblesse* had shockingly abused its power for ages. The ancient *régime* was rotten to the core, and the down trodden people tore the rotten fabric to pieces, and shocked the world with their frightful excesses. The land system of France was remodelled as a consequence of that Revolution, and, no doubt, a much healthier system arose out of the ashes; but no one, save a madman, would wish to see a repetition of that carnival of blood. Nothing but the most desperate agony of a nation could justify or even palliate such a convulsion, and it would be absurd to suppose that there is any analogy between the just constitutional Government of England now and the grinding tyranny of the ancient *régime* in France.

But I pass now to consider another argument by which the Nationalisation of the Soil is advocated. It is said that land differs from all other forms of wealth because it is limited in quantity, and not the product of human labour—it should, therefore, not be the monopoly of the few, but the property of the many. I reply that the productiveness of the soil is mainly the result of ages of careful cultivation. In ancient times most of this country

as of the Continent of Europe, was covered with dense forests, and it has been transformed by untold expenditure of labour into the smiling garden it now appears.

I can conceive no equitable reason why this form of wealth should not have the protection of the law like all other kinds. All wealth may be called stored up labour, and none is more valuable to the community than that which makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before. What was it that induced the hardy emigrant to settle in the wilds of North America, to hew down the primeval forest, and with intense labour and privation to turn the wilderness into a fruitful field? What, but the hope that he or his family after him would own a comfortable homestead. Could we conceive that no private property in land had ever been permitted, how would the continent of North America have been settled? How would the Anglo-Saxon race have been spread over the globe? What would have drawn the emigrant ship to the desolate shores of Australia and New Zealand? No magnet would have charmed the hardy pioneer of civilisation but the hope of bequeathing a freehold to his posterity. And now, after vast regions have been settled on the faith of the solemn sanction of the State, it is coolly proposed to rob these people or their descendants of the land on which they have spent their life blood, on the ground that it should never have been granted to them. Could human folly go further? Well, the process by which the wilds of North America were reclaimed within the past two centuries is just the process by which our own and other countries were settled at a still earlier period. You will always reach a point in which human labour gave its first value to land, and without that labour it would have been as worthless as the soil of Kamskatgha is to-day.

Then we are told that it is the industry of the whole

community which gives its high value to land, and that the community has a right to take back what it gives. On that ground the late John Stuart Mill advocated the retention by the State of what he called "the unearned increment of the soil."

I grant that in all old and settled countries land rises in value just as the community prospers, but so do most other kinds of property—railways, canals, house property, the public funds, and nearly all good and sound investments rise as the nation flourishes; and I cannot see in justice why one form of property should be singled out for attack. The motive that led the settler to clear the primeval forest was partly the expectation that population would follow in his track, and raise the value of his investment. But for that hope he would hardly have forfeited all the comforts of civilised life. Would it be fair, after he has cleared a pathway through the jungle for more effeminate followers, to deny him the legitimate fruit of his enterprise. Surely one of the greatest stimulants to material progress is just the knowledge that good orderly government will increase the value of property. It affords the strongest inducement to all the propertied classes in a community to avoid warfare and civil strife. Take away from the owners of property all hope of improving their position, and you abolish one of the greatest safeguards of peaceful progress.

But again we are told by Mr. George that private property in land reduces the labourers to the condition of slaves; that it keeps down their wages to the lowest minimum on which they can exist, and that its tendency is everywhere to reduce the masses to a deeper and deeper degree of degradation. He says that modern civilisation must perish as ancient civilisation did, because it ensures the steady descent of the great mass of the people to a condition of hopeless servitude.

It is really difficult to meet such outrageous assertions. One would suppose that any competent acquaintance with modern history would show that the facts were all the other way. Nothing is more absolutely certain than that the condition of the great mass of the people in all civilised countries has been steadily improving at least for a century back. Let any one who doubts this read any impartial account of the state of our manufacturing districts during the Chartist agitation forty years ago, when the chronic condition of most of the operatives was semi-starvation; let him carefully examine the state of England during the Napoleonic wars, when the State took annually in taxation fully 20 per cent of the entire national income against about 6 per cent which it takes now;* when, as Sydney Smith said, every act of a man's life from the cradle to the grave paid toll to the tax gatherer.† Let him remember that before the era of free

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* The average amount of revenue drawn from the United Kingdom in the period 1800 to 1815 was 55 millions sterling, against an estimated total income of 250 millions; the amount of revenue received last year was 89 millions, or deducting post-office and telegraph receipts, which are not taxes, was 80 millions, which is in round numbers 6 per cent on the present estimated income of 1300 millions. It should also be remembered that while in 1800 to 1815 we were adding to the National Debt at the rate of 20 millions a year, we are now paying it off at the rate of 7 millions a year.

† *Sydney Smith on British Taxation.*

"We can inform Jonathan what are the inevitable consequences of being too fond of glory:—Taxes upon every article which enters into the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under the foot. Taxes upon everything which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell or taste. Taxes upon warmth, light and locomotion. Taxes on everything on earth, and the waters under the earth; on everything that comes from abroad, or is grown at home. Taxes on the raw material; taxes on every fresh value that is added to it by the industry of man. Taxes on the sauce which pampers man's appetite, and the drug that restores him to health; on the ermine which decorates the judge, and the rope which hangs the criminal; on the poor man's salt, and the rich man's spice; on the brass nails of the coffin, and the ribands of the bride. At bed or board, couchant or levant, we must pay. The schoolboy whips his taxed top; the beardless youth manages his taxed horse, with a taxed bridle, on a taxed road; and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine, which has paid 7 per cent, into a spoon that has paid 15 per cent, flings himself back upon his chintz bed, which has paid 22 per cent, and expires in the arms of apothecary, who has paid a licence of a hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then immediately taxed from 2 to 10

trade the average wage of an agricultural labourer did not exceed 7s to 8s per week, which only sufficed to buy one bushel of wheat, whereas now it is 14s to 16s, while the bushel of wheat is 5s to 6s, that is to say, a labourer can earn 2½ times as much of the staff of life as he could then.* Let him read Mr. Bright's speech at Birmingham, where he compared the wages paid in his factory now with those paid in his boyhood, showing about 80 per cent advance.† Whatever test of national progress we adopt we see a prodigious increase of well-being since the beginning of this century. I believe I am within the mark when I state that the income of every class in the community has at least doubled in the last eighty years. The national income has increased from about 250 millions to 1300 millions, while population has increased from 16 to 35 millions.

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per cent. Besides the probate, large fees are demanded for burying him in the chancel; his virtues are handed down to posterity on taxed marble; and he is then gathered to his fathers, to be taxed no more."

* *Extract from* THE LANDED INTEREST AND THE SUPPLY OF FOOD, *by Sir James Caird, F.R.S., the greatest living authority in this country on all questions connected with Agriculture.*

"The general condition of the agricultural labourer was probably never better than it is at present. Compared with that of 300 years ago, in the time of Elizabeth, wages have risen sixfold, while the price of bread has only doubled. Two centuries later, in 1770, the farm-labourer's wages was 1s 2d a day, when the price of wheat was 46s a quarter. In 1846, immediately before the repeal of the Corn Laws, wages were 1s 7d, when wheat was 53s. At the present time wages have risen 60 per cent., while wheat has diminished in price. In other words, the labourer's earning power in procuring the staff of life cost him five days' work to pay for a bushel of wheat in 1770, four days in 1840, and two-and-a-half days in 1880."

† *Quotation from Mr. Bright's Speech at Birmingham, comparing Wages paid in* 1841 *with those paid in* 1881.

Workers mostly women.

"Those who received 8s per week, now receive 13s. The next case is a class that received 7s 6d, they now receive 15s. The next is a class of workers then receiving 8s, they now receive 14s. The next was a class of boys, who then had 5s 6d a week, and they now have 9s 6d. The last class were women in those days, but the employment is in the hands of men now. The wages were then 17s 6d, and now are 35s 6d. The hours of work are also much shorter."

No better test of a nation's material progress can be given than the consumption of food per head and the annual death rate. I give the following table of consumption :—*

	1840.	1880.
"Tea..... ozs.	22	73
"Sugar.....lbs.	15	54
"Wheat ..... ,,	269	358
"Meat ..... ,,	84	118

With regard to the death rate no accurate return was made for England before 1840, but in London the mortality in the first half of last century was estimated at about 40 per thousand (per Mulhall). Since then it has been steadily diminishing, till now it stands at 21.7 per 1000. No doubt this is a fair index of the whole country. Then, as compared with the great Continental nations, our country shows a decided gain. I take from the Registrar General's report the following figures. Average for 20 years:—

"England	21.9 ℔ 1000
"France.....	23.7 ,,
"Germany	26.9 ,,
"Austria	30.9 ,,
"Italy	30 ,,
"Spain	29.7 ,,

The only countries that surpass us are the thinly populated and healthy Scandinavian States, which is not to be wondered at.

Now, to return to Mr. George, his allegation is that rent eats up all the increase of a nation's wealth, that whatever labour and capital succeed in adding to the national production is immediately consumed by the idle and bloated landowners. I ask is this true, or even partially true? The facts are just the reverse; the rent of land has increased far

* Taken from article by Mr. M. G. Mulhall in the *Contemporary Review.*

less than any other form of wealth.* The rent of Agricultural Land in the United Kingdom in 1814 was £49,000,000, now it is £69,000,000; the national income is supposed to have increased in the same time from 250 to 1300 millions,† or fully five-fold, *i.e.* rent has increased 41 per cent while general income has increased 520 per cent; in other words, landlords instead of taking about 20 per cent of the whole income of the community now only take 5⅓ per cent, and if their whole property were confiscated and divided among the people it would only add about 1s in the £ to their income. Again: the rent of the land is only about half as much as is spent annually upon intoxicating drink; the working classes alone spend considerably more than the agricultural rent of the United Kingdom. A temperance reformation would put more money into the pockets of the people than the confiscation of the land, and it would do so without staining the national conscience or convulsing our social system.

One further remark I would make. Even if all the rent were confiscated and paid to the State in relief of taxation, the only effect on the poorer classes would be that they would get their alcohol, tobacco and tea cheaper. They pay scarcely anything to the State except through taxes on these three articles. Would any one be insane enough to

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* It may be said that rent was inflated by the war prices then ruling. This is partly true, but even in 1798 Pitt estimated the rent of England at 25 millions, or say 33 millions for the United Kingdom, which would give 16½ per cent on a supposed income of 200 millions.

† Mr. Giffen, Chief Statistician to the Board of Trade, estimated, a short time ago, the aggregate income of all the people of the United Kingdom at 1300 millions, but this is something quite distinct from the national production of wealth. Large classes of the population are not direct producers, though most useful members of society, and their incomes are drawn from the producers. For instance, clergymen, lawyers, doctors, literary men, schoolmasters, &c. and the whole class of distributors, such as shopkeepers; also innkeepers, publicans, domestic servants, army and navy, &c.

It will be seen at a glance that the national income thus estimated is something entirely different from the net production of wealth, which cannot be estimated at more than a thousand millions.

I take the estimate of national income in 1800 to 1815 from Leone Levi and Mulhall.

hold that cheap whiskey, beer, tobacco and tea would extinguish poverty, or even reduce it perceptibly?

It is singular that so acute a reasoner as Mr. George entirely overlooks the main reason why rent is restrained from rising indefinitely in such a country as Great Britain. I refer to our free trade policy. He argues as if a country must subsist exclusively upon its own produce, and so as population increases and presses upon the resources of the soil, landlords may exact more and more rent from a starving people. No doubt this is what would have happened had our old system of protection continued; had we prohibited the importation of Corn, at least till Wheat rose to 60s a quarter, we should seldom have had Wheat below 60s, and sometimes at 80s or 100s, as happened repeatedly in the early part of this century; in such a case the growth of population would have brought us nearer and nearer to famine; indeed it is impossible to imagine how 35 millions of people could have lived in these islands on home produce alone. But we have acted for 40 years on the principle of taking all the food the world can send us, and the whole increase of our population during that period may be said to be fed with foreign food. The British landlord has no longer a monopoly of the means of subsistence, he shares it with the grain grower of Illinois and Manitoba, of India and California. To all intents and purposes the soil of Western America is annexed to Great Britain, so far as food supply is concerned, and the price of the quartern loaf in London is really governed by the price of Wheat in Chicago. We now import about two-thirds of the Wheat consumed in this country, and more than one-third of our total food supply. This is the reason why rent does not increase as all other forms of wealth do; every one knows that of late years rents have considerably fallen, and it seems to me that as means of transport are always being improved, we may expect cheaper and yet cheaper

food from abroad, and lower and yet lower rents for Agricultural Land; instead of the land of this little island being limited and a monopoly, it is virtually coextensive with the vast regions of the New World, and is as much affected by their food supplies, as if it was towed across the Atlantic and moored alongside of New York.

In this connection I would also refer to the idea vaguely entertained by many that another system of land tenure would marvellously increase the supply of home grown food. Mr. Joseph Arch puts this possible increase at eighty-seven millions sterling, and the Trades' Congress seemed to agree with him. No doubt this would come true under the principle of protection; the excessive price of food in that case would admit of the profitable cultivation of much land that is now in pasture—just as the iron and cotton industries of America have been much increased by protection, that is by a tax levied on the rest of the community, so would agriculture be stimulated by artificial prices, which would be a tax levied on the consumer; but it puzzles me to see how under a system of free imports of food we can force cultivation beyond the point at which it is profitable. Surely farmers and proprietors of land know best how to get the largest profit out of the soil; if they grow less wheat year by year, it is because wheat growing will not pay in face of the enormous imports at lower and yet lower prices. If more of our land is going into pasture, it is because we cannot raise crops as cheaply on poor land as we can import them from abroad. No doubt it is true that much of the soil could be improved by drainage; but the question that every sensible agriculturist asks is, Will it pay? It can hardly be expected that men will court bankruptcy, in order to please speculative writers who have no practical knowledge of the subject. Any trade when left to itself finds the most suitable ways of working. Men who have

spent their lives in trying to get the most out of the soil are as likely to understand their business as mere theorists, and I assert that it is nonsense to suppose that any vast increase of food can be got out of our soil, in such a way as to compensate the labour and capital employed.*

I have no doubt that it is possible to grow eighty millions more food in Great Britain, but it would probably cost 100 millions to accomplish it. You can hardly expect that any class would sacrifice twenty millions a year for pure patriotism. So long as wheat can be imported at 40s a quarter, it is vain to expect that it will be grown on land where it costs 50s. The cost of production settles this question just as surely as the law of gravitation settles how water will flow.

If the commercial history of this country has taught us anything it is the futility of fighting against the laws of nature, and the folly of trying to override economical laws by legislation. A great deal of what is written on the subject of land reform is just on the lines of the old protectionist theories, which demands that the State should compel a nation's industry to be turned to whatever direction it thought best. We hear it constantly said that there is a vast extent of waste lands that ought to be reclaimed, that the State should either buy or take them itself, and

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* *Extract from* THE LANDED INTEREST AND THE SUPPLY OF FOOD, *by Sir James Caird, F.R.S.*

"A system is best tested by its fruits. Compared with all other countries, our threefold plan of landlord, farmer and labourer appears to yield larger returns, with fewer labourers, and from an equal extent of land. Our average produce of wheat is 28 bushels an acre, as against 16 in France, 16 in Germany, 13 in Russia, and 12 in the United States. We show a similar advantage in live stock, both in quantity and quality. We have far more horses, cattle and sheep in proportion to acreage than any other country, and in all these kinds there is a general superiority. Our most famous breeders of live stock are the tenant farmers. The best examples of farming are found in the same class. The improved breeds of cattle, the Leicester and Southdown sheep, and the extented use of machinery, manures and artificial foods is chiefly due to them. And the neatness of the cultivation, the straight furrow, and the beautiful lines of drilled corn, the well-built ricks and docile horses, exhibit at once the strength and skill of the labourers."

cause them to be cultivated. The simple answer is that they are not cultivated because it does not pay. Many landlords are great improvers. Many spend annually a third or a half of their rent in improvements, but so far as I can gather very few of them earn even 3 per cent on these improvements. Indeed, I have rarely heard of a case where full commercial interest was obtained. Before the State enters on the gigantic task of cultivating several millions of acres of waste land, let it buy a few thousand acres, and work them as best it can. If the experiment pays it can attempt more, if it fails, as I feel sure it will do, this foolish agitation will be silenced. The cry for the Nationalisation of the Land is a reversal of the policy which all civilised states have been following for many years, viz. the liberation of private enterprise from state control, and the restriction of the state to those functions which properly belong to it. There was a time when the state claimed monopolies of various trades; these it either carried on in a most slovenly manner, or jobbed out to privileged individuals with great political corruption. The India and China trade was once a monopoly of this kind, and the sale of tobacco and management of railways is still a government monopoly in some Continental countries.

Experience always proves that governments cannot conduct ordinary business so well as private individuals, and all sound and cool thinkers have for long urged the exclusion of the State from the sphere of private industry. The Nationalisation of the Land would overturn every sound principle that nations have painfully learned by experience, and it is truly humiliating to all lovers of progress to see old fallacies of the crudest kind again raising their heads, as if mankind must for ever revolve in a vicious circle of error.

But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the

scheme has been somehow carried out, and consider briefly some of the consequences; and I will suppose that the State acts honestly in the matter, and expropriates the owners of land at the full value of their property. I will make the concession that the State possesses the abstract right to effect compulsory purchase of any property that is necessary to the national well-being—just as land is taken compulsorily for railroads and other necessary purposes, and streets are widened or demolished in towns when necessary for the public good. I admit that there exists a power in the community to purchase, at a fair price, the land of the country, if a clear and valid reason can be shown for so doing.

Let us, however, point out, in passing, what a ruinous investment it would be. The price to be paid, Professor Fawcett assumes, is two thousand millions. It is hard to believe that even so wealthy a country as ours could raise all this money; but if it went even so far as to compel the landowners to take assignments of Consols, paying interest at 3 per cent, in lieu of money payment, it would lose at least ½ per cent on the operation, for the land of this country does not yield a net return of more than 2½ per cent. Indeed I doubt if it yields so much. Now ½ per cent on two thousand millions is ten millions a year, which would be a dead loss to the country, and must be raised by adding so much to the taxes. It is obvious that such a scheme would not work; the loss would have to be recouped somehow, and the first thing that would be thought of would be to raise the rent of the farmers so as to make up this deficiency. Now I have little doubt that the land of this country, if put up to auction, and let to the highest bidder, would yield ten millions more rent than it pays at present. Most British landlords take less rent than they could get in the open market. Many of the large estates are rented 20 per cent below

what could be extorted by open competition; the tenantry are seldom changed, and a kindly relation exists between the landlord and his tenantry which has continued for generations. All this would be reversed. The system of rack-renting which we have put down with infinite labour in Ireland would be fastened on Great Britain, and would soon raise up in this country a storm of indignation at the cruel treatment the farming interest was subjected to. It seems perfectly clear to me that the position of farmers would be far worse under a national system than under one of private ownership. There could be no abatement of rents in bad seasons, no permission of arrears to stand over, but a hard and rigid system of merciless precision must prevail.

You cannot administer a great department of State except by fixed rules. If you leave discretion to the heads of a department as to the rents they should take, the allowances to be made in bad years, the consideration to be shown to old and infirm tenants, to widows, &c. you would of necessity introduce jobbery and corruption wholesale. Such enormous power could not be entrusted with safety to any officials, and even the heads of the government would be under frightful temptations to use this prodigious power for either private or political purposes. Think of over a million of farmers in Great Britain and Ireland holding direct from the State and at the mercy of a government department. Would no pressure be put upon them at election times? Would no promise to abate rents be given as the price of their support? Would not this huge state department become what all similar departments have become in the United States, a hotbed of bribery? We know that with every change of government in America more than 100,000 officials are turned out, from the President of the United States down to the humblest letter carrier. Would it be safe, as our government

becomes increasingly democratic, to place at its mercy so vast an interest as the agriculture of the United Kingdom.

Further, we would ask, where is the money to come from to improve the soil under this system? at present a large percentage of rent is returned to the soil in the shape of improvements. I should not be surprised if over 20 per cent of the rental of the land is returned to it in one shape or another, and probably another 20 or 30 per cent is spent by the landlords in keeping up their country houses, and supporting a host of domestic servants, gardeners, gamekeepers, grooms and other retainers—not to speak of the custom they give to the country shopkeepers. All this great expenditure, which is the life-blood of the rural community, would be stopped. The landlords, who would now be mere pensioners of the State, would have no inducement to live in the country any longer. They would drift into our towns or live abroad, and bring all the evils of absenteeism on this country that have been felt so keenly in Ireland. The hosts of people that depend upon them in the country would starve, or have to add to the congestion of our over-crowded towns. A great decrease in the rural population would take place—the very last thing that any good government should desire. Those beautiful mansions, which are the ornament of this country, and which afford pleasure to multitudes of tourists and sightseers, historical places such as Chatsworth and Haddon Hall, would fall into ruins. We should have rudely torn down the social edifice which it took centuries to build up and have left nothing to fill the void.

It may be said that the farmers would now become the improvers of the land, seeing that we have passed a Tenants' Compensation Bill. I fear little outlay would be made by them under the State as landlord, unless they got fixity of tenure and judicial rents, and I have little doubt that this would be the ultimate outcome of Nationalisation. It would

be found impossible to secure proper cultivation under the dreadful sense of insecurity caused by competition rents fixed by government officials; it would be found that we were turning Great Britain rapidly into an Ireland, and we should have to resort to the state of things we have established there. So this very arbitrary system of judicial rents would have to be introduced. If it merely confirmed existing rents the State would lose ten millions a year, as already stated. If it recouped that ten millions by adding to the rents, the tenantry would be bitterly discontented. It would be a choice of evils, and the extraordinary result would be reached that under the guise of Nationalisation of the Land, we would have constituted a new set of permanent holders of the soil, subject to a fixed quit rent, and the nation would have no greater control of the soil of the country than it had before!

Some may suggest that there are other ways of dealing with the land after the nation has acquired it. No doubt there are various ways. The Democratic Federation says it is to be cultivated by agricultural and industrial armies, whatever that may mean; but I believe every one of them would prove utterly impracticable, and all would be vitiated by the political danger of entrusting so large a business to the management of a State department. There was an agitation some years ago for the Nationalisation of the Railways. Some theorists held that the State should purchase and work our railway system. Most fortunately, as I think, this scheme was defeated by the practical good sense of the British people. But the management of the railways would have been simplicity itself compared with the management of a landed estate worth two thousand millions. No doubt bribery and corruption would soon have been rampant in the railway department, but that would have been a trifle compared with the powers that

an unscrupulous minister might exercise over the vast agricultural interest.

I think I have now said sufficient to show that the scheme of Nationalising the Land is about as absurd as the South Sea bubble, or as any other delusion that history records. If it be carried out by confiscation, it would be the most gigantic piece of wickedness perpetrated in modern times; if effected by purchase, it would be the worst investment which the State ever made. Under no circumstances that I can conceive would it work successfully, and it may be dismissed to the region of Utopia.

I might have gone further in my attempts to explode it by pointing out that Mr. George recommends the confiscation of all the freehold land in towns as well as in the country, so that any house which the owner had built on his plot of land would virtually be confiscated to the State, for it is very evident that if the land were taken by the State, and it had the power of exacting whatever ground rent it chose, it would virtually be the owner of the house. An obvious reply to Mr. George would be that it is difficult to conceive that any person would ever be so foolish as to build a house again. No lease given by the Government would be worth a day's purchase, for after a State had perpetrated such a piece of iniquity as suddenly and without compensation to take possession of every freehold in the country, it would be a small thing to break any leases it might afterwards give. I would simply point out that every man who could save anything from the general wreck would flee from a country abandoned to legalised robbery, and the time would come within measurable distance when Macaulay's New Zealander would stand on a broken arch of London bridge and survey the ruins of the modern Babylon. There is nothing more certain than if you set at nought the primary laws of morality, of which the eighth commandment is one, the descent to anarchy is

swift and sure. It is vain to suppose that men who would confiscate this principal form of property would stop short at it; if a thief puts his hand into my pocket and tells me he will only abstract the half-crowns, but that the shillings are sacred, I will put both my shillings and half-crowns out of reach as soon as possible. The principles of Mr. George's book are already amplified by the Democratic Federation, recently formed in London, so as to include the repudiation of the National Debt, the confiscation of railways, banks and most other forms of property.

The descent is rapid to the simple aphorism of Proudhon, the celebrated French Communist, that "Property is robbery." We may safely predict that if such views were spread so widely in our country as to lead to the return of many of their advocates to Parliament, the era of free government in this country would be drawing to a close. Long before such schemes could be put in force the propertied classes would do in England as they have often done in France, sacrifice liberty rather than run the risk of Communism. Some "saviour of society" will be found in all countries before Communism, which is another name for organised theft, is allowed to get the upper hand.

Liberty requires justice for her hand maid and due respect for the rights of all. It will only flourish permanently in communities that are essentially honest, enlightened and law-abiding. As the suffrage in our country becomes wider and wider, and power passes increasingly into the hands of the masses, it is increasingly necessary that education in the highest sense of the term should be universal. By education I mean the harmonious development of all our powers, based on the immutable precepts of religion and morality. There is no doubt that demagogues will be found to appeal to the basest motives of the most degraded classes. In all ages men are to be found who are willing to prostitute great talents to the vilest purposes; men

who, like Cataline of old, or Robespierre and Danton of modern times, would climb to power on the ruins of their country. We need not be astonished if schemes that combine the principles of Atheism and Communism are flaunted before the constituences of the future, but I shall be much surprised if the sober commonsense that has hitherto distinguished the British people is beguiled by their enchantments.

Before parting with the subject of Land Nationalisation, I would point out, in a word or two, that not only the owners of land would be defrauded on Mr. George's plan, but likewise all the mortgagees, whose name is legion. Much of the land of this country is heavily burdened; probably hundreds of millions are lent on its security. As the State has encouraged the belief that land was the safest form of property, it has long been the custom of Banks, Insurance Companies, Loan Societies and other agencies that gather up the savings of the nation to lend them on the security of the soil. The sole livelihood of multitudes of widows and orphans depends upon trust money so invested. It is difficult to conceive what frightful misery would be caused by suddenly pulling away the platform on which such a pile of obligations has been reared. The ruin of the landlords themselves would be but a part, perhaps a small part, of the general disaster. As when dynamite is exploded in a crowded thoroughfare, helpless women and children would be among the chief sufferers.

I must, however, before concluding, point out in a few words the direction in which true land reform must run.

I am not of those who regard our land system as at all perfect. The proprietors are far too few either for the social welfare of the country or for the stability of property itself. There were in the United Kingdom, by the last Parliamentary return (that of 1872), 314,000 owners of more

than an acre each, and 852,000 owners of less than an acre each, the latter mostly in towns. It would be greatly for the advantage of society if more people were interested in the soil of the country. The large estates are very much the creation of the law of entail, a law which is doomed, and is already in a great measure set aside. The ordinary laws of nature are opposed to the perpetuation of gigantic fortunes, either in land or moveable wealth. The heirs of the rich are often spendthrifts and dissipate what their fathers have gained.

The law of entail has overridden the wiser law of nature and kept estates intact, though the proprietor was bankrupt; that unjust provision is tottering to its fall. The law of primogeniture, which passed all real estate when entailed, or in case of intestacy to the eldest son, will fall along with it, and liberty will be given to parents to leave their estates more in accordance with the dictates of justice. Then the system of limited ownership, which springs out of the law of entail, will disappear along with it. Many estates are starved at present, because the landlord is merely a life renter, with little power and no inducement to make improvements; that injurious system will pass away with entail. I would hope and expect that many of the large estates will naturally subdivide, and many of them will certainly come into the market as soon as entails are broken. The farmers also under the Tenants Compensation bill will tend to become fixtures, and if compensation be extended to the sitting tenant upon rise of rent, as is proposed by Sir James Caird and many of our best agriculturists, there would gradually arise something analogous to the Ulster tenant right, and we should have two classes instead of one permanently interested in the soil.

The assessment of mansions and pleasure grounds and also of waste lands in the vicinity of towns should likewise

be adjusted to their selling value, not to their nominal letting value, which is often quite deceptive. There are large tracts of land allowed to lie idle in the outskirts of rising towns, like our own Kensington Fields, that they may be sold at a vast advance in price when required for building purposes. Some of our greatest fortunes have been made in this way, and yet these lands escape taxation so long as they are unoccupied. This is a great blot which must be removed.

I can see no reason whatever why the Death duties, as Mr. Gladstone calls them, should be so very much heavier on personal than on real property. This most unjust distinction must be swept away, nor would I object to a graduated duty as estates increase in value. Besides this I have always thought that a difference should be made between income derived from fixed property and that derived from the labour—either of hand or brain—the one is certain, the other precarious, and it is fair that the former should pay higher income tax than the latter.*

I am also in favor of extending the Bright clauses of the Irish Land Act to Great Britain, so that the State may be empowered to advance three-fourths of the purchase money to occupying tenants desiring to buy their farms, and I would give special facilities for the creation of small properties, say of ten or twenty acres, to encourage the more thrifty of the peasantry to acquire land, and to facilitate the creation of market gardens on a large scale.

It is also a fair question whether the State should not aid agricultural labourers by loans to purchase their cottages along with garden allotments. No one can doubt the immense boon to a farm labourer of a plot of ground he can call his own, and if any reasonable

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* Freehold estate, except where employed in trade, pays no probate duty, while personalty pays 2 to 3 per cent. Succession duty also falls more lightly on realty than on personalty.

way could be shown whereby the State could facilitate this desirable result, without incurring undue risk, all land reformers would favor it. I have, however, little faith in the general extension of the French system of peasant proprietary to this country. Our soil and climate are not favorable to it. The habits of our people are radically opposed to the excessive thrift and discouragement of families which characterise the French peasantry, and which are essential to the successful working of their system. Nations develop their own modes of life, and you cannot force imitations. We can as little copy the land system of France as she can copy our manufacturing and commercial system. The case of Ireland is different, and there I think that a peasant proprietary, arrived at by honest purchase with some aid from the State, may perhaps prove to be the ultimate solution of the land question.

There is another point also on which I will partly go with the views of the Nationalists. I allow that property in land ought not to be as absolute as property in chattels. You may make and destroy a chair or a table, and no one has any right to complain; but the owner of land has no moral right to destroy its value, or debar the public from all access to it, when such access is no personal injury to himself. I think it is contrary to natural law that vast tracts of barren land in the Highlands should be shut up

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* This paper is written with reference mainly to land tenure in England, and I wish to add that I except the Highlands and Islands of Scotland from the scope of my remarks. Their condition is widely different from that of England, or the Lowlands of Scotland, and more nearly resembles that of Ireland. The tribal system existed in the Highlands till the middle of last century, the land being to a certain extent the common property of the Clan, though the chief had special rights of his own. After the battle of Culloden, the system of English law was applied most unjustly to the Highlands, and the chiefs were constituted absolute owners of the land, causing in many cases cruel injustice to a brave and honest people, who had shed their blood like water for the same chiefs. Many evictions took place at the end of last century and beginning of this as harsh as those which made the Irish Land Act necessary, and I consider that even yet some reparation ought to be made to a most loyal section of the British nation, and protection given to the "Crofters" on principles akin to those of the Irish Land Act.

against the harmless tourist, because a deer-stalker does not wish his game to be disturbed. I would neither acknowledge nor permit such a usurpation. I would not permit the elementary rights of the earth's inhabitants to be sacrificed to extreme theories of game preserving. In the same way I would uphold the rights of town populations to common rights of way wherever practicable, and not allow them to be debarred from the enjoyment of the beauties of nature at the whim of landowners who may happen to be of a boorish disposition.

I greatly regret the abstraction of so many village commons in past ages, and it is fairly a question whether portions of these should not be re-purchased for the public good. Our town populations are far too much cramped, and I would take, by compulsory purchase, whatever land is required for recreation ground, or even, in case of necessity, for building purposes, and for the legitimate development of growing towns. The rights of landowners can never be so interpreted as to override the primary necessities of life for the toiling masses of the country. There will probably be directions, not yet clear to us, in which the State must do more than it has yet done to sweeten the lot of our labouring poor; and as these become plain, common sense will impose any restrictions on landed property that may be shown to be necessary.

Another important suggestion I would make, is the

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* I have not dealt in this paper with the evils of leasehold tenure in our large towns. I think the system of building houses on leases of 75 years, so common in London, is very disadvantageous to the public. The houses revert to the owner of the land at the end of the lease, and so he profits, as it seems to me, unjustly by the expenditure of others. Besides there is no inducement to build solid and lasting habitations when the owner or builder of the house loses his right at the end of a term of years. The necessary consequence is that much of this property becomes almost uninhabitable towards the end of the lease, for it is nobody's interest to keep it in repair.

I therefore advocate some scheme for the conversion of leaseholds into freeholds on just terms to all concerned, in the same way as copyhold tenure has been gradually exchanged for freehold.

compulsory registration of titles to real property, with an authoritative record of all charges upon it.

One of the chief obstacles to the transfer of property in England is the cumbrous and costly process by which titles are verified. It operates very much against the multiplication of small owners. The State must do here what it has done in France, Belgium, and other countries: establish land courts to register titles and make transfers cheap and easy. I believe nothing would do more to multiply small owners. I would also establish agricultural schools, as is done in Switzerland and other Continental countries, where farmers' sons can learn the science of their profession.

In the Colonial possessions of this country I think that a most wasteful system of dealing with the land has been adopted. There we had the opportunity of applying sound principles of land tenure to virgin territory unencumbered by old proprietory rights; but we have allowed vast tracts of land to be alienated to speculative buyers almost for nothing, and so have laid the foundation for even greater inequalities of wealth than we have in England.

It would have been a wise policy had our Colonies in America, Australia and elsewhere refused to give freehold possession to any but *bona fide* settlers, and not alienated more than 100 or 200 acres to any individual, and they might even have retained the right of imposing a moderate land tax, say of 10 per cent, on its future annual value. No settler would have objected, when he was getting land almost gratuitously, to come under such an obligation. These new States would thereby have laid the foundation of a splendid revenue in the future, and would have kept their boundless stores of land for the relief of the dense population of Europe. Instead of that they have sold vast stretches of territory to squatters, to railway companies, to speculative land companies, and to foreign

adventurers. Some of these men own millions of acres, and will pile up incredible fortunes from the labour of the toiling emigrants, who are compelled to apply to them for the right to settle on those vast domains. It is only the other day that I was asked to take a share in a grant of three millions of acres in an American State, which a speculative builder had received as payment for putting up a State house. It is easy to see that future agrarian difficulties are being created wholesale in the new countries of the world by such reckless procedure. It was, no doubt, this ruinous system of dealing with unappropriated land, and the abuses of these land speculators, which contributed largely to form Mr. George's opinions. The old countries of Europe are exempt from this special class of evils; but it is a great injustice that their emigrant population should in this way be cut off from much of the advantages that the new countries of the world would otherwise offer.

Our rulers were not wise in permitting the Colonies in their infancy to do as they liked with their vast possessions. They should have acted as trustees for our future population, and carefully guarded the rights of unborn millions.*

It is a question even yet whether our Government should not acquire and hold a quantity of virgin soil in Manitoba, Australia, or New Zealand as trustee for future emigrants from the old country. If we wait a few years longer these lands may all be appropriated, as is the case over most of the United States. It is a grave question whether the poverty of masses of our people may not compel us to adopt some system of State emigration, and it would be an infinite pity if we allowed all the vast

* To show the sparseness of population in these new countries, compared with the density of our own, I may state that if the soil of England were divided equally among its people it would scarcely yield 1½ acres to each person, whereas Australasia would give 704 acres to each person, and Canada 482 acres.

domain acquired by the courage of our forefathers to be granted away, so that this country ceased to have any beneficial interest in it.

I must now bring these remarks to a close.

While I dismiss as a chimera the idea of nationalising the land in the old countries of Europe, I admit there is a possibility of doing something in that direction with the unoccupied portions of the world. I willingly recognise the philanthropic spirit that underlies this movement. I sympathise with its desire to elevate the poorer classes, and would gladly join in any practicable scheme founded upon justice which aims at that result.

I admit with deep sorrow that modern civilisation has failed to eradicate poverty and suffering among large sections of the population. The struggle and strain of life with many is excessive, and if by wiser social adjustments we can lessen this, who would not thankfully welcome them; but the causes of inequality of wealth lie deep in the foundation of human nature and the constitution of the world, and no laws can essentially alter them. Mankind vary enormously in natural and acquired gifts; it is impossible to hinder a strong man succeeding where a weak man fails, or a wise man rising where a foolish man falls—till we can make men equally wise, strong and virtuous, there will be profound differences of condition just as there are profound differences of character. No laws can hinder a good workman getting better employment and higher pay than a bad one, a good physician or lawyer attracting crowds of clients while the dull and careless practitioner starves—the prudent merchant or tradesman amassing a fortune while the idle or reckless loses one. Modern civilisation does not diminish but accentuate moral and intellectual differences; it is more difficult for the idle, the improvident and the vicious to hold their own in the race of life now than in ruder ages—all our processes are more

refined—all require greater skill and higher character, and there is an increased tendency to precipitate the coarser material to the bottom of the social edifice—hence we see in all our cities a huge and melancholy deposit of human wretchedness and vice. It is an honest desire to raise this sunken mass of human beings which accounts for much of the socialism of the day. Those schemes for compulsorily dividing the land and distributing wealth among the poor, are the outcome of mistaken philanthropy, but they will never succeed while such vital differences exist in the capabilities of mankind. The utmost you can expect of a State is to give a fair chance to every one, and free play to all the powers and capacities of its citizens—it never can, by any laws or social arrangements, produce equality of condition. "The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags;" "he becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." These laws are unchangeable; they have operated in all ages and all climes, and human legislation cannot override them, nor should it try to do so. Yet benevolence has its function as well, and much that the State cannot do ought to be done by private philanthropy. Where there may not be a legal obligation there is often a moral one, not less binding, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Nor am I one of those who would exclude the State altogether from the sphere of benevolence. The conscience of the community is impersonated in its Government, and I regard with hopefulness the increasing responsibility felt by the State for the care of the weak and helpless. I expect rich results to flow from this principle in the future, yet we must guard against sapping individual self-reliance and leading the people to look to the State as a Special Providence. Our strength in the past has sprung from individual initiative, and we must beware of weakening that mainspring of our national greatness.

NATIONAL INCOME AND TAXATION COMPARED.

(*From* MULHALL'S DICTIONARY OF STATISTICS.)

	Income Millions £.		Taxation Millions £.		Ratio of Taxes per Cent.
United Kingdom	1,247	...	124	...	10
France	965	...	145	...	15
Germany	850	...	104	...	12
Russia	760	...	85	...	11
Austria	602	...	74	...	12
Italy	292	...	74	...	25
Spain	188	...	41	...	21
Portugal.	45	...	8	...	18
Holland	104	...	10	...	10
Belgium	120	...	14	...	11
Denmark	47	...	4	...	9
Sweden and Norway	104	...	10	...	10
Greece	23	...	3	...	13
Europe	5347	...	696	...	13
United States	1420	...	160	...	11

The Taxation includes all Taxes, Rates and Revenues, National and Local.

APPENDIX.

MR. S. SMITH, M.P. ON LAND NATIONALISATION.

To the Editor of the Daily Post.

SIR,

I trust you will grant me a little of your space to make a few observations on the lecture by Mr. S. Smith, M.P. so fully reported in your paper of Tuesday, because it is right that your readers should be informed that the bulk of the lecturer's criticism does not apply to English land nationalisers, whose contentions and proposals were passed over with the most studious silence. Surely it is a very remarkable and suggestive fact that a member of the British Parliament, lecturing in one of our chief cities on the applicability of land nationalisation to England, should yet not say one single word about the English Land Nationalisation Society or the proposals it makes, but should confine himself strictly to the proposals of an American for land nationalisation in America. Before Mr. George's remarkable book was noticed by a single English review, and while it was still unknown to the vast majority of English readers, an article on land nationalisation appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for November, 1880. This article led to the foundation of a Land Nationalisation Society, and was followed by the publication of a small volume on "Land Nationalisation: its Necessity and its Aims," in which the large body of facts on which the society founds its proposals are set forth. Only a few months back Professor Fawcett's article on "State Socialism and the Nationalisation of the Land" was answered by myself in two successive issues of *Macmillan's Magazine*. I mention these facts because they raise the question of Mr. Smith's competence to treat the subject at all. He appears to be completely ignorant that any such book, articles or society exists, for he says, speaking of the Trades Congress, "I much doubt if they or any of their sympathisers in this country have clearly thought out the subject, or perfected any plan for the acquisition of the soil or its cultivation after it was acquired." Now, this is exactly what we have done; and yet, in total ignorance of our pro-

posals, our facts and our arguments—for "I much doubt" surely implies ignorance—Mr. Smith comes forward to instruct the people of Liverpool. If he is not ignorant of the facts I have stated, still less reason have his audience to be satisfied that the chief English proposals for land nationalisation should be purposely ignored, while they were led to believe that those of the American writer were universally adopted by English nationalisers.

I will now briefly reply to a few of Mr. Smith's statements from the standpoint of the Land Nationalisation Society.

1. Mr. Smith says that "human misery is deepest where the land is not appropriated, and human happiness and civilisation most advanced where the land is held by private owners." This assertion I directly contradict. There is no such connection as alleged, but rather the contrary, if we eliminate such factors as ignorance, barbarism and bad government, and compare only countries which are fairly comparable. I will give two examples which sufficiently demonstrate the incorrectness of Mr. Smith's generalisation. In a very remarkable article in *La Nouvelle Revue* (15th March, 1883,) on "La Famille Chinoise," it is stated that the land of China is really national, every one holding it from the State, and paying a fixed rent to the State. Holdings are small, the average being seven acres, while estates of more than 200 acres are exceedingly rare. Every family also holds a small portion of "patrimonial land," which is invaluable and inviolable. The result of this excellent system, says the writer, is that every hamlet forms a complete community, where the inhabitants find their school, their guildhall, their court of justice. In these hamlets each home is independent, yet all are bound together by the ties of relationship, and all assist each other in the various troubles and labours of life. The writer dwells at some length on the peace and contentment, the simplicity, and the happiness of Chinese village life under this beneficent land system, and this, be it remembered, in spite of a very imperfect civilisation and a despotic Government. The next case I will quote is that of Switzerland, where the old system of communal land still largely prevails, and where its influence is felt even in the districts where it has been abolished. Here we have at once the freest, the best educated, and the most really civilised people in the globe, if we measure civilisation, not by the height reached by the few, or the luxury and refinement of the rich, but by the general well-being, intelligence and contentment of the great majority of the people. In Switzerland landlords and landlordism, as we understand them, are almost unknown; and in Switzerland pauperism, famine and social degradation are almost equally wanting.

2. Mr. Smith very justly says that none but a dreamer would seriously impugn titles to land because Alaric or William the

Conqueror acted unjustly; but he omits to notice the much more important fact that possession of land, except so far as it is personally occupied, never can arise otherwise than by force or fraud. Take any plot of land you like in Great Britain, and if you trace its history far enough you inevitably come to an owner who obtained it by force or fraud. There is no other way in which land can be obtained, except in the case of a piece of land cultivated by its owner in unbroken continuity from the time it was first enclosed; and almost the only land thus held in England is by some of the squatters on our commons and wastes. There is no other form of property whatever which inevitably has its origin in wrongdoing, and this alone goes far to prove that such property cannot be good for the community.

3. In reply to the argument that land should not be private property because it is limited in quantity, is essential to human existence, and is not producible by human labour, Mr. Smith asserts that "the productiveness of the soil is mainly the result of ages of careful cultivation." This is simply not true, since the productiveness mainly depends on the physical characters of the soil and subsoil; but even were it true, it would prove that the land belonged to the successive cultivators, not to the landlords, who, as a rule, never cultivate: that is, the land should belong to the whole people whose ancestors from time immemorial have given it its "main value."

4. Another gross misstatement is, that "most other kinds of property" as well as land increases in value with increase of population and wealth. The very reverse is the case. Broadly speaking, all property except land is destructible, and more or less rapidly deteriorates in value; the few apparent exceptions, as old pictures and books, and our public funds, do so because they are in the nature of monopolies. The funds, too, are not property, but debt, and they rise in value merely because the payment of interest on no other debt is guaranteed by the State. "House property," Mr. Smith, with a strange confusion of ideas, declares to increase in value! But surely he knows that it is the land that increases, while the house upon it steadily deteriorates in value, and has to be kept up by an ever-increasing outlay in repairs.

5. In answer to Mr. George's proof that landlordism keeps down wages to the minimum necessary to sustain life, Mr. Smith adduces the oft-exploded fallacy of the rise of wages in most trades; but he ignores the facts that house rents and the prices of meat, butter, eggs and milk have risen in a far greater ratio, and that labourers, on the average, have to work as hard and have as much difficulty in earning a bare subsistence as ever they had, while they have been creating an enormous increase of wealth and luxury for all the classes above them.

For the proof of this fact, and of the probable increase of pauperism and misery—notwithstanding official statistics—I must refer your readers to my article in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

6. If Mr. Smith had examined our English proposals for land nationalisation, and not those of an American, he would have seen that we do not consider the transference of the rents of land to the State to be the only or even the most important benefit to be obtained. The most vital point is that all English people who wish it shall have the use on equal terms of some portion of English land, and that the fruits of every hour's labour upon the land shall belong to the labourer. In order that labourers may not be forced to compete for any wages that will keep them and their families from starving, or from being turned homeless from the cottage they occupy at a weekly rent, we would provide that every man shall have the opportunity of acquiring a plot of land direct from the State, on which he may live, and from which he can never be ejected so long as he pays the rent of the land at its fair value. Every village and country town would then grow, in all the natural development of rural life; our country would be soon dotted over with groups of cottages, gardens and small farms; such rural produce as milk, butter, eggs, cheese, poultry and bacon would be produced and consumed on the spot, instead of being imported from a score of foreign countries, while our labourers are crowded into the slums of great cities simply and solely because landlords will not let them live in the country. Millions of acres, now neglected and almost worthless pasture, could and would be cultivated like a garden, only allow the labourer to have it on the same terms as the farmer, with absolute security of tenure, and every one of these cultivators would not only help to diminish the intensity of the struggle for existence in towns, but would spend their gains almost wholly on home manufactures, and thus create a demand for labour in all the industries of the country.

7. Mr. Smith then adduces Professor Fawcett's argument against the possibility of the State acquiring the land by purchase; but he knows nothing of our proposal to allow the existing landlords and their living heirs to continue to enjoy their present net incomes, while at once taking the land for the use of the people; and declaring that no unborn person shall inherit any portion of the national land. This disposes of the terrific picture he draws of widows and orphans beggared by confiscation. Such has been the result of the Irish land legislation, but by our scheme no living person would suffer.

8. Finally, Mr. Smith admits that perhaps the State ought to aid labourers to buy their cottages and gardens, which he says would be an "immense boon." He declares that Highland landlords should not be allowed to shut out tourists; that village commons should not be enclosed; that the rights of

landlords "should not be allowed to override the necessities of life for the toiling masses of the country;" that the State "shall give a fair chance to every one, and free play to all the powers and capacities of its citizens;" and other such suggestions. But every one of these things would be done once and for all by our system of land nationalisation, without costing the nation—that is, the taxpayers—one penny; while all of them are so completely opposed to "the rights of property," as they are now interpreted, that so long as those rights exist each detail of reform will be fought against by the whole power of the landlords. In the meantime all the evils of a pauperised community, depopulated villages, and "horrible cities" must go on and increase, notwithstanding our frantic efforts to ameliorate the outward symptoms, so long as the fundamental cause—private property in land—remains. I would ask your readers to ponder on the facts stated by the chairman, Sir James A. Picton, and then say whether a system which permits such things can be longer permitted to exist. Our public writers are never tired of assuring us that "property has its duties as well as its rights," but those duties are neither defined nor enforced either by equity or by public opinion, as shown by the continuous confiscation of tenants' property by hundreds of Irish landlords, and the wholesale misery and death caused by evictions in Ireland and the Highlands, without a single example of the prime cause of such horrors—the landlord—even suffering in reputation or social position. In the present day in Great Britain the great landlords have, as a matter of fact, no duties, while their power for evil is practically unlimited. I appeal to the records of Ireland and the Highlands to bear out this assertion. Such power is inconsistent with freedom and national well-being, and as it is inherent in the system of landlordism, that system must be abolished.

Yours, &c.

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

GODALMING, *29th Nov. 1883.*

MR. S. SMITH, M.P. AND MR. WALLACE.

To the Editor of the Daily Post.

SIR,

I beg leave to offer a few observations in reply to Mr. Alfred Wallace's criticism of my lecture that appeared in your issue of Tuesday.

Mr. Wallace blames me for confining my remarks to Mr. George's scheme of nationalisation and ignoring his plan. I

admit that I selected Mr. George as the chief exponent of this school of thought. I have found his views widely disseminated in all sections of society, but I have not yet met any supporter of Mr. Wallace's scheme. I plead guilty to not having read Mr. Wallace's writings on the subject; but now, thanks to his letter, I fairly understand his opinions, and they appear to me to be a somewhat pale reflection of those of Mr. George. Most of what I said in reply to the one is also applicable to the other, with some modifications which any intelligent reader can supply. The principle of both writers is the same—viz. that private property in land is a fraud on the community. This I wholly deny, and the common-sense of mankind for centuries has ratified my view.

Mr. Wallace's proposal to confiscate private property after two lives is milder than Mr. George's, but is the same in principle. It is as if two competing schemes for repudiating the national debt were put before the public—one to commence at once, the other after twenty years. It would be found, I think, that all the dishonest section of the community would vote for immediate repudiation, and so, if the property of the landowners is to be taken from them without compensation, it would be found that the most thorough-going scheme of confiscation will be most popular with those who covet their neighbours' property.

All Continental experience supports this view. The Communists there are strictly logical. They do not distinguish between the temporary and permanent possession of land. They do not even distinguish between land and other property. They hold that all property is stolen from the community, and they would empty Mr. Wallace's pocket as remorselessly as he would empty the pockets of the British landlords. I say empty their pockets, because the selling value of their property would be nil from the day his measure passed. And what would become of the load of mortgages and incumbrances of all sorts which most estates have to carry? Would the nation pay these back after having stolen the property on which they were based, and which English law has for centuries treated as the safest form of security?

I also wonder how long a nation which had perpetrated such a fraud would consent to pay sixty millions a year to pension off landlords, whom Mr. George's and Mr. Wallace's followers would never tire of denouncing as idle drones. I think when that time came Mr. Wallace would find that the "Mountain" would swallow up the "Girondists," as happened in the French Revolution, and perhaps Mr. Wallace would go to the guillotine in his vain attempt to stop the Robespieres of the future! Depend upon it a nation can never deflect from the path of honesty without paying a heavy penalty; the temptation is

often very great to sacrifice principle for temporary relief. Such a temptation the United States had to repudiate their debt at the close of the civil war, but they bravely chose the nobler path, and who can doubt that the whole nation was strengthened by this example of good faith. Our own country nobly stood up to a far more oppressive debt at the close of the Napoleonic war, and has, in consequence, gained the front place in the world for national integrity. The chief part of the power of England at this day rests upon the splendid credit she enjoys, and the knowledge of the whole world that she can, and will, fulfil her engagements to the letter. Shatter that, and you break her right arm; any scheme of domestic confiscation would at once react on the national credit and paralyse it. Who would lend money to a State that one day robbed the owners of the soil, and might next day rob the national creditor? Already papers are being sown broadcast through the country, which recommend in the same breath the confiscation of the land and the repudiation of the debt. Robbery is very catching, and the area of pillage is sure to grow larger.

Mr. Wallace objects to my statement that the area of civilisation coincides with the area of private ownership of land. He quotes China and Switzerland as cases to the contrary. As to China, it is the first time I have found that country cited as a model for England to follow. I have always understood that there is not in all the world a more stagnant civilisation than that of the Celestial Empire; in no country is the struggle for life more terrible; in no country is there such shocking overcrowding, such a vast number of deaths through suicide, infanticide and starvation. The vast mass of the people can just keep themselves alive by unremitting toil, and I make bold to assert that the average British artisan earns ten times the wages of a Chinese labourer. India and China are the two great countries where the State owns the land. I have travelled for weeks alone in the interior of India with a single black servant, have slept in the villages, sometimes on heaps of straw, and can testify that the poverty of England would be riches there. The usual rate of wages was then threepence per day; many of the natives went almost naked, and over hundreds of miles I could not get a piece of bread fit to eat; during hundreds of miles' travel I did not see a house that a British artisan would care to live in. Friends of mine who have travelled in China tell me that the filth and nastiness of a Chinese village are indescribable, and if these two countries are to be taken as an example of the blessings of State ownership of land, I say commend me sooner to some desolate island, where I can live like Robinson Crusoe.

Then, as to Switzerland, Mr. Wallace says, "The old system of communal land still largely prevails." I do not agree with

him. I have travelled repeatedly through that country, and inquired closely into the land tenure and habits of the people; the cultivated land is all, or nearly all, occupied by small proprietors, who hold their rights quite as tenaciously as in any part of the world; the high mountain pastures are communal property, for it is impossible to divide them, but each person is rigidly restricted to the grazing of a fixed number of cows, and the milk yielded by each cow is minutely credited to the owner; it is, in fact, a system of limited ownership defined as exactly as it is possible to do under the circumstances. There are also common rights of cutting wood on the slopes of the mountains. Switzerland in its land laws is almost a copy of France; in each of them private ownership of land is most jealously guarded, and the proprietor may deal with it as he chooses, either cultivate it himself, sell it, or lease it to another, and there are many occupying tenants paying rent in France, and still more in Belgium.

As to the general system of peasant proprietary, I have studied it pretty closely for several years; at one time I was much enamoured of it, but fuller knowledge has somewhat modified my views. It is a very hard life for small proprietors, say those of five to ten acres. The French and Swiss peasants stint themselves almost of the necessaries of life; the women work out in the fields almost as much as the men. I have repeatedly watched the Swiss women, and even the little children, toiling from early morn till late at night; their hands and faces get almost black long before they are middle aged, and all female beauty disappears; most of their little properties are burdened with mortgages, and the great struggle of their lives is to prevent sub-division. For this purpose they resort to every expedient to keep down population; in some of the Swiss cantons marriages are forbidden till the applicants can show they have property enough to support a family, and all through France means are taken to hinder the growth of population which cannot be even hinted at here. The population in the rural districts of France has long been stationary, and is now declining; and there is a drift towards the large cities there as well as in this country. All the phenomena of high rents, overcrowding, and extreme misery exist in Paris the same as in London, and there is tenfold more bitterness and demoralisation.

So far as wishes are concerned, I myself would delight to see a growth of peasant proprietors in this country, but its success would involve a great change in the habits of our rural labourers. I venture to state that if we were to present the first thousand labourers we met each with ten acres of land not one quarter of them would retain their holdings at the end of ten years. They would mostly have large families, and find the strain of life very great on those small holdings, where much of the work must be

done with hand labour; they would want to help on their children in life, and the temptation to sell their land for £500 (say £50 per acre) would be irresistible; they would drift into town and start some small business there, or, more likely, emigrate to countries where £500 would buy a large farm, and enable them to make three or four times as much as they could do in England. The little peasant properties would be gradually swallowed in some large estate by the same law which has nearly extinguished the small English yeomen. What has caused the disappearance of the numerous freeholders of Cumberland and Westmoreland? Just the desire to sell their little properties that they might use their capital more advantageously. I exceedingly regret this change, but do not see how it is to be hindered. Besides the climate of these isles is not nearly so favourable to peasant cultivation as that of France; there they have sunshine most of the year, and long, hot summers, and much of their wealth is derived from vine cultivation, which only needs hand labour, in which all the family can co-operate. Our winters are long and wet, the soil stiff and deep, and needs to be torn up by steam ploughs to yield its full increase. Our autumns are often wet, and reaping machines are needed to quickly cut down the harvest. The small cultivator cannot compete with the large farmer, except in favourable circumstances, just as the hand-loom weaver cannot compete with the modern factory. If we fight against the forces of nature, we are doomed to failure; and, as I have said already, I do not see that the State can do much more than let everyone use their labour and capital to the best advantage. The reforms I have recommended would give every reasonable facility to enable small holders to acquire land if they wished to do so; more than this the State cannot and ought not to do; it might just as well legislate that large factories should not be established because they interfered with the spinning-wheel and handloom. I believe the attempt to force prematurely a system of peasant proprietorship upon this country would be as signal a failure as the attempt to restore the domestic industries of last century, before steam machinery was invented.

As to Mr. Wallace's denial of my statement that most other kinds of property rise in value as well as land when a country is flourishing, I refer to any Stock Exchange list of securities, and point to the enormous difference in their value between times of national prosperity and times of depression.

Most of the other points in Mr. Wallace's letter I have already dealt with, and must apologise for the length of this communication.

Yours, &c.

SAMUEL SMITH.

4, Chapel-street, Liverpool, 6th Dec. 1883.