

# BACK TO THE LAND

by

Most Rev. Dr Thomas Nulty  
Bishop of Meath

[www.grundskyld.dk](http://www.grundskyld.dk)

Most Rev. Dr Thomas Nulty

*Back to the Land*

First published 1881

\*\*

Digital edition 2002

[www.grundskyld.dk](http://www.grundskyld.dk)

# BACK TO THE LAND

## DEDICATION

### BISHOP NULTY'S LETTER

To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Meath:

Dearly Beloved Brethren,—

I venture to take the liberty of dedicating the following Essay to you, as a mark of my respect and affection. In this Essay I do not, of course, address myself to you as your Bishop, for I have no divine commission to enlighten you on your civil rights, or to instruct you in the principles of Land Tenure or Political Economy. I feel, however, a deep concern even in your temporal interests—deeper, indeed, than in my own; for what temporal interests can I have save those I must always feel in your welfare? It is, then, because the Land Question is one not merely of vital importance, but one of life and death to you, as well as to the majority of my countrymen, that I have ventured to write on it at all.

With a due sense of my responsibility, I have examined this great question with all the care and consideration I had time to bestow on it. A subject so abstruse and so difficult could not, by any possibility, be made attractive and interesting. My only great regret, then, is that my numerous duties in nearly every part of the Diocese for the last month have not left me sufficient time to put my views before you with the perspicuity, the order and the persuasiveness that I should desire. However, even in the crude, unfinished form in which this Essay is now submitted to you, I hope it will prove of some use in assisting you to form a correct estimate of the real value and merit of Mr. Gladstone's coming Bill.

For my own part, I confess I am not very sanguine in my expectations of this Bill—at any rate, when it shall have passed the Lords. The hereditary legislators will, I fear, never surrender the monopoly in the land which they have usurped for centuries past; at least till it has become quite plain to them that they have lost the power of holding it any longer. It is, however, now quite manifest to all the world—except, perhaps, to themselves—that they hold that power no longer.

We, however, can afford calmly to wait. While we are, therefore, prepared to receive with gratitude any settlement of the question which will substantially secure to us our just rights, we will never be satisfied with less. Nothing short of a full and comprehensive measure of justice

will ever satisfy the tenant farmers of Ireland, or put an end to the Land League agitation.

The people of Ireland are now keenly alive to the important fact that if they are loyal and true to themselves, and that they set their faces against every form of violence and crime, they have the power to compel the landlords to surrender all their just rights in their entirety.

If the tenant farmers refuse to pay more than a just rent for their farms, and no one takes a farm from which a tenant has been evicted for the non-payment of an unjust or exorbitant rent, then our cause is practically gained. The landlords may, no doubt, wreak their vengeance on a few, whom they may regard as the leaders of the movement; but the patriotism and generosity of their countrymen will compensate these abundantly for their losses, and superabundantly reward them for the essential and important services they have rendered to their country at the critical period of its history.

You know but too well, and perhaps to your cost, that there are bad landlords in Meath, and worse still in Westmeath, and perhaps also in the other Counties of this Diocese. We are, unfortunately, too familiar with all forms of extermination, from the eviction of a Parish Priest, who was willing to pay his rent, to the wholesale clearance of the honest, industrious people of an entire district. But we have, thank God, a few good landlords, too. Some of these, like the Earl of Fingal, belong to our own faith; some, like the late Lord Athlumny, are Protestants; and some among the very best are Tories of the highest type of conservatism.

You have always cherished feelings of the deepest gratitude and affection for every landlord, irrespective of his politics or his creed, who treated you with justice, consideration and kindness. I have always heartily commended you for these feelings.

For my own part, I can assure you, I entertain no unfriendly feelings for any landlord living, and in this Essay I write of them not as individuals, but as a class, and further, I freely admit that there are individual landlords who are highly honourable exceptions to the class to which they belong. But that I heartily dislike the existing system of Land Tenure, and the frightful extent to which it has been abused, by the vast majority of landlords, will be evident to anyone who reads this Essay through.

I remain, Dearly Beloved Brethren, respectfully yours,

THOMAS NULTY.

# BACK TO THE LAND

## THE ESSAY

-----

### Our Land System Not justified by its General Acceptance.

Anyone who ventures to question the justice or the policy of maintaining the present system of Irish Land Tenure will be met at once by a pretty general feeling which will warn him emphatically that its venerable antiquity entitles it, if not to reverence and respect, at least to tenderness and forbearance.

I freely admit that feeling to be most natural and perhaps very general also; but I altogether deny its reasonableness. It proves too much. Any existing social institution is undoubtedly entitled to justice and fair play; but no institution, no matter what may have been its standing or its popularity, is entitled to exceptional tenderness and forbearance if it can be shown that it is intrinsically unjust and cruel. Worse institutions by far than any system of Land Tenure can and have had a long and prosperous career, till their true character became generally known and then they were suffered to exist no longer.

### Human Slavery Once Generally Accepted.

Slavery is found to have existed, as a social institution, in almost all nations, civilised as well as barbarous, and in every age of the world, up almost to our own times. We hardly ever find it in the state of a merely passing phenomenon, or as a purely temporary result of conquest or of war, but always as a settled, established and recognised state of social existence, in which generation followed generation in unbroken succession, and in which thousands upon thousands of human beings lived and died. Hardly anyone had the public spirit to question its character or to denounce its excesses; it had no struggle to make for its existence, and the degradation in which it held its unhappy victims was universally regarded as nothing worse than a mere sentimental grievance.

On the other hand, the justice of the right of property which a master claimed in his slaves was universally accepted in the light of a first principle of morality. His slaves were either born on his estate,

and he had to submit to the labour and the cost of rearing and maintaining them to manhood, or he acquired them by inheritance or by free gift, or, failing these, he acquired them by the right of purchase—having paid in exchange for them what, according to the usages of society and the common estimation of his countrymen, was regarded as their full pecuniary value. Property, therefore, in slaves was regarded as sacred, and as inviolable as any other species of property.

### Even Christians Recognised Slavery.

So deeply rooted and so universally received was this conviction that the Christian religion itself, though it recognised no distinction between Jew and Gentile, between slave or freeman, cautiously abstained from denouncing slavery itself as an injustice or a wrong. It prudently tolerated this crying evil, because in the state of public feeling then existing, and at the low standard of enlightenment and intelligence then prevailing, it was simply impossible to remedy it.

Thus then had slavery come down almost to our own time as an established social institution, carrying with it the practical sanction and approval of ages and nations, and surrounded with a prestige of standing and general acceptance well calculated to recommend it to men's feelings and sympathies. And yet it was the embodiment of the most odious and cruel injustice that ever afflicted humanity. To claim a right of property in man was to lower a rational creature to the level of the beast of the field; it was a revolting and an unnatural degradation of the nobility of human nature itself.

That thousands upon thousands of human beings who had committed no crime, who had violated no law, and who had done no wrong to anyone, should be wantonly robbed of their liberty and freedom; should be deprived of the sacred and inalienable moral rights, which they could not voluntarily abdicate themselves; should be bought and sold, like cattle in the markets; and should be worked to death, or allowed to live on at the whim or caprice of their owner, was the last and most galling injustice which human nature could be called on to endure.

## The World's Approval Cannot Justify injustice.

To arrest public attention, and fix its gaze effectively on the intrinsic character and constitution of slavery, was to seal its doom; and its death knell was sounded in the indignant cry of the great statesman who "denied that man could hold property in man." Twenty millions of British money were paid over to the slave owners as compensation for the loss of property to which they had no just title, and slavery was abolished forever.

The practical approval, therefore, which the world has bestowed on a social institution that has lasted for centuries is no proof that it ought to be allowed to live on longer, if, on close examination, it be found to be intrinsically unjust and cruel, and mischievous and injurious besides to the general good of mankind. No amount of sanction or approval that the world can give to a social institution can alter its intrinsic constitution and nature; and the fact of the world's having thus approved of an institution which was essentially unjust, cruel and degrading to human nature, only proves that the world was wrong: it furnishes no arguments or justification for allowing it to live on a moment longer.

## Irish Land Tenure the Twin Sister of Slavery.

The system of Land Tenure in Ireland enjoyed a long and similarly prosperous career, and it, too, has created a state of human existence, which, in strict truth and justice, can be briefly characterised as the twin sister of slavery. The vast majority of tenant farmers of Ireland are at the present moment slaves. They are dependent for their peace of mind, for their material comforts, for the privilege of living under the roof beneath which they were born, and for the right of earning their bread on the farms which their forefathers enriched with their toil, on the arbitrary and irresponsible will of their landlord.

Abject, absolute and degrading dependence of this kind involves the very essence, and is, in fact, the definition of slavery. They toil like galley slaves in the cultivation of their farms from the opening to the close of the year, only to see substantially the whole produce of their labour and capital appropriated by others who have not toiled at all, and who even leave them not what would be allowed for the

maintenance of slaves who would be expected to work, but what hardly suffices to keep them from dying of want.

When grazing on land had been found more remunerative than tillage, and the people consequently became too numerous, the superfluous multitudes, who were now no longer wanted under the new state of things, were mercilessly cleared off the lands by wholesale evictions to make room for the brute beast, which paid better. Such of the evicted as had the means left to take themselves away were forced to fly for refuge as exiles into almost every land; and the thousands who could not leave were coolly passed on through hunger and starvation to premature graves.

Let anyone who wishes visit this Diocese and see with his own eyes the vast and boundless extent of the fairest land in Europe that has been ruthlessly depopulated since the commencement of the present century, and which is now abandoned to a loneliness and solitude more depressing than that of the prairie or the wilderness. Thus has this land system actually exercised the power of life and death on a vast scale, for which there is no parallel even in the dark records of slavery.

But the attention of the civilised world is now steadily fixed on the cruel and degrading bondage in which it still holds a nation enslaved, and therefore its doom is inevitably sealed.

### Justice, Not Vested Right, Should Prevail.

Some wise and thoughtful men can see no longer objections to the abolition of Landlordism now than were alleged not so long ago against the abolition of slavery. If the public good demanded the summary dismissal of landlords from an important position of trust, which as a class, they have so grievously abused, and, on the other hand, that they had been compensated for the real or fictitious property which it is assumed they possess in their lands, the justice of such a course could not for a moment be questioned. Yet I am afraid that few prudent, practical and experienced men could be found who would advocate the policy of a measure of so sweeping and radical a character. Undoubtedly a universal or a general peasant proprietary; not, however, the result of a sudden, hasty and unnatural change, but the gradual and natural growth of years—may probably be found to be the final settlement of the question of the land.

Hence the great majority of those who have thought the question out thoroughly regard the measure known as the "three F's," accompanied with largely increased facilities, and largely increased pecuniary encouragement, for the gradual establishment of a peasant proprietary, as the fullest measure of justice which the nation can just now expect from an Act of Parliament. But on whatever line the "new departure" may start, it is essential that the eternal and immutable principles of justice which determine the character of property in land shall in no instance be departed from by the people. Ours is a struggle for justice and for right, and we must not furnish our enemies even with a pretext to reproach us with dishonest or unfair dealing.

### Justice of Private Property in the Results of Labour.

The following are the acknowledged principles of justice that have a practical bearing on the question:—

Every man (and woman, too) has a natural right to the free exercise of his mental and corporal faculties; and whatever useful thing anyone has produced by his toil and his labour, of that he is the rightful owner—in that he has in strict justice a right of property. Any useful thing that satisfies any of our necessities, relieves any of our wants, ministers to our comforts or enjoyments, or increases our material happiness or contentment, may be an object of property, and the person whose toil and labour has produced that thing possesses in it a strict right of property.

The two essential characteristics of property therefore are: First, the thing itself must be useful for some purpose; and, secondly, it must be the product or the result of our labour.

Now, the effort or exertion demanded by labour is irksome, distasteful and repulsive to the indolence and self-indulgence that is natural to us and, therefore, no one will voluntarily subject himself to the painful inconvenience of labour who is not stimulated by the prospect of the remuneration and enjoyment which the fruit of his labour will return him.

Whoever, then, has voluntarily subjected himself to the painful operations of labour has, in strict justice, a right of property in the product or result of that labour; that is to say, he, and he alone, has a right to all the advantages, enjoyments, pleasures and comforts that

are derivable from the results of his labour. Others cannot complain of having been excluded from the enjoyment of a thing whose production cost them nothing; which he was not bound to produce for their use, and which, were it not for his efforts, would not have existed at all.

### Producer's Right of Disposal.

Use and exclusion are, therefore, the two essential peculiarities of the enjoyment of a right of property. The power to dispose of legitimate property is almost absolute. Property may be devoted by its owner to any purpose he pleases that is not inconsistent with the public good and does not interfere with the rights of others. He may keep it for his own use and enjoyment if he wishes, or he may exchange it by barter or sale for an equivalent in value of the property of others; he may alienate it by free gift when living, or bequeath it to anyone he pleases, as a voluntary legacy, when dying. He might even destroy it and do no wrong to anyone.

If Michael Angelo, in that delirium of artistic frenzy in which he called on his celebrated statue of Moses "to speak," had dealt it a blow of his mallet, which would have created not merely a rent in its knee, but had actually shattered it into atoms, the world might indeed deplore the destruction of this immortal work as an irreparable loss, but it could not complain that he did it an injustice or a wrong. Michael Angelo was master of his own free actions, and he was not bound to spend years of labour and toil in producing that incomparable statue to delight and please the world, and, even after he had produced it, he was not bound to preserve it for its enjoyment. "He might do as he liked with his own."

Every individual whose labour produces an article of property makes a substantial addition to the wealth of the nation; and a nation's general prosperity and happiness, and the degree and abundance in which it possesses all the comforts, the enjoyments, the luxuries and pleasures of life, depend entirely on the numbers engaged in industrial productiveness, and on the skill and efficiency of their labour. Every man, no doubt, works for his own self-interest, for his own benefit and happiness, but whether he wishes it or not, he works, too, for the increased enjoyment and prosperity of others. No man consumes all that his labour produces, and the benefit of the su-

perfluous products of his labour, if not enjoyed by himself, is sure to be enjoyed by some to whom he has transferred it. If a bootmaker does not himself wear all the boots he produces, somebody else is sure to wear them for him. It is, therefore, highly in the interest of the community, as well as of individuals, to encourage the production, the multiplication and accumulation of objects of wealth; and, therefore, to stimulate the activity and energy of the labour necessary for their production.

The laws of all nations, as well as the law of nature, have regarded as sacred and inviolable the right of property which a man enjoys in what he produces.

### Institution of Private Property Springs from the Necessity for Labour.

The first form of property ever seen or held on this earth was undoubtedly connected with land. Although political economists never dream of adverting to it, it is, nevertheless, an unquestionable fact that the institution of Private Property is one of the sad effects of original sin. It springs directly from the barrenness and sterility with which the earth was cursed in punishment of the crime of original sin. That curse deteriorated and to a great extent destroyed the primeval and teeming fertility with which the earth had been in the beginning created.

Before the fatal words, "*maledicta terra in opere tuo,*" had been pronounced the land needed not the labour of man to produce all that was superabundantly sufficient for the sustenance of man—all that satisfied to the full his wants, wishes, and desires. The rich and delicious fruits with which it spontaneously teemed were as unlimited as the waters of the seas, as the air we breathe, as the atmosphere in which we live. Like the manna, on which the children of Israel lived in the desert for forty years, everyone took all he wanted, and as the supply was as certain in the future as in the present, it would be folly to take more than was wanted for present use.

In the unlimited superabundance that then prevailed there was no room for the existence of Private Property at all. It was only when the earth had been cursed by sterility and barrenness, and that the supply of human food consequently became limited when the produce it

yielded became proportioned to the labour expended on it, and that every man had to work for his living, that Private Property became not only lawful but a necessary institution of society. Man's labour became a necessary means to reverse the result of this curse, and to restore to the earth, at least partially, the primeval fertility of which it had been despoiled in punishment of his sin.

The productiveness thus imparted or restored to the earth became, in strict justice, the property of the individual by whose labour it had been created, and this Property in Land is the first form of Private Property on record.

### Necessity for Labour Proves the Common Right to Land.

Although the earth, even in its present deteriorated state, is a splendid inheritance provided by the liberality of God for the maintenance of man, it is, nevertheless, an inheritance which places him under the necessity of patient, laborious toil in its cultivation and improvement, in order to extract from it the means necessary for his subsistence.

The human race cannot now any longer live on the earth if they refuse to submit to the inevitable law of labour. No man can fairly emancipate himself from that universal decree which has made it a necessity for every one "to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow."

Now, the land of every country is to the people of that country or nation what the earth is to the whole human race—that is to say, the land of every country is the gift of its Creator to the people of that country; it is the patrimony and inheritance bequeathed to them by their Common Father, out of which they can by continuous labour and toil provide themselves with everything they require for their maintenance and support, and for their material comfort and enjoyment.

### The Land of Every Country the Common Property of Its People.

God was perfectly free in the act by which He created us; but, having created us, He bound Himself by that act to provide us with the means necessary for our subsistence. The land is the only means of this kind now known to us.

The land, therefore, of every country is the Common Property of the people of that country, because its real owner, the Creator who made it, has transferred it as a voluntary gift to them. "Terram autem dedit filiis hominum."

Now, as every individual in that country is a creature and child of God, and as all His creatures are equal in His sight, any settlement of the land of a country that would exclude the humblest man in that country from his share of the common inheritance would be not only an injustice and a wrong to that man, but, moreover, would be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator.

### How Best to Use the Common Estate.

The great problem, then, that the nations, or, what comes to the same thing, that the Governments of nations have to solve is—what is the most profitable and remunerative investment they can make of this common property in the interest and for the benefit of the people to whom it belongs? In other words, how can they bring the largest, and, as far as possible, the most skilled amount of effective labour to bear on the proper cultivation and improvement of the land?—how can they make it yield the largest amount of human food, human comforts and human enjoyments—and how can its aggregate produce be divided so as to give everyone the fairest and largest share he is entitled to without passing over or excluding anyone?

### Security of Possession Necessary to Secure the Rights of the Improver.

It is because the principle of Private Property fulfils all these conditions, satisfies all these requirements and secures all these results, that it has been regarded by all nations as a necessary social institution under all forms of government.

The most active, energetic, and, at the same time, the most powerful principle of human action that we know of, is self-interest, and self-interest is the principle of Private Property. This principle of self-interest is deeply embedded and engrained in our nature; its activity is constant, uniform and irrepressible, and whether we advert to it or not, it is the secret and inexhaustible spring of nearly all our actions, efforts and endeavours. We labour with untiring energy, ear-

ness and perseverance, when we know that we are working for ourselves, for our own interests and benefits.

If, therefore, the land of a country was surrendered up to the self-interests of the people of that country; if it was given up to the operations of the most powerful moral force known to man, which is everywhere present and everywhere supremely active and energetic, and which would throw its whole force and strength into the effort needed for the proper cultivation and improvement of the soil, then we might expect the largest possible returns of human food and human enjoyments that the land could possibly yield.

Wherever, therefore, the principle of Private Property in Land is carried out to the full extent that its justice and the interests of the community demand, the land of that country will be parcelled out in larger or smaller lots among its people, on the plain principle of justice, that the increased fertility and productiveness which they shall have imparted to the soil shall be their own, and that they shall have a strict right of property in the returns—no matter how abundant—it shall yield to their capital and labour.

With this disposition adopted the powerful principle of self-interest will be brought to bear effectively and with all its energy and force on the cultivation and improvement of the soil; and as the cultivators or farmers will have a strict right of property in the products which it shall yield to their labour and capital, so it will be their highest interests, and they will make their best efforts to make them as large and as abundant as possible. The returns, therefore, from the land will be the highest it is capable of yielding. To stimulate the production and enlarged growth of that invaluable property which is created in the development and improvement of the soil, and to secure to its owner the certainty of enjoying all its uses and benefits, he must have a right to the continued and undisturbed possession of his land.

The labour and capital necessary for the production of property of this kind are immediate; the returns to be derived from it may be spread over many years, perhaps over all future time. No man will incur the expenditure if others, not himself, are to be benefited by it. He might, no doubt, enjoy the full benefit of improvements already made after a certain term of years; but to stimulate him to make further and larger improvements in the soil, and, at the same time, to

secure him a certainty of enjoying the full fruits of those he has already made, no term of years can produce on men's minds what has been most felicitously called "the magical effect of perpetuity of tenure."

### Non-Improvers Can Have No Rights in Land.

The arguments, therefore, which prove that, in strict justice, as well as in the interests of the nation at large, a landholder who is constantly improving and increasing the productiveness of his farm has a right to the continued occupation of it, prove, too, that a non-improving landholder has no right to be left in the possession of it at all. The people of a nation have too deep an interest in the productiveness of the land of the nation and in the amount of human food it will yield, to be able to allow any portion of it to remain in the hands of a man through whose criminal indolence or incapacity it either produces nothing at all, or what will be much less than it is capable of yielding.

Thus, an improving land-holder has by that very fact, in strict justice and in the higher interests of the public, the title, and, indeed, the only unquestionable title that exists to the continued and undisturbed possession of his land.

The occupier's rights of property in the agricultural products of the land, in the permanent improvements he has made in the productiveness of the soil, and in the undisturbed occupation of his farm, while he continues to improve it, are all deeply rooted in the clearest principles of natural justice.

### Security of Possession and Full Ownership of Products for the Common Good.

They are, moreover, necessary and sufficient to secure the highest permanent and progressive improvement of the soil, and to draw from it the largest and most profitable returns it is capable of yielding. The legislature, therefore, which is bound to strive in every reasonable way for the advancement of the public good, can hardly withhold its sanction and protection from clear natural rights, which are of vital interest, not only to the cultivators themselves, but also to the well-being of the nation at large.

The agricultural products of the land of the nation will then be disposed of or distributed among the people of the nation by the cultivators who produced them, on the principle of competitive sale, and everyone will receive a share of the whole at the price that it cost to produce it, and that will be considerably less than it would cost himself to produce it. No one, therefore, has been called on to surrender his share in the common property of the nation without getting an equivalent in return. No one has surrendered his share in this property; everyone has simply made a most profitable and remunerative investment of it.

### A Just Right of Property in Improvements, But Not in Land Itself.

In the foregoing exposition of the principles of justice on the question of the Tenure of Land, I have made no distinction between the landlords of a country and the tenant farmers who hold land under them, for in truth, on the question of Property in Land there is no room for any such distinction. I am, however, quite ready to allow the full benefit of the rights of Property in Land, as I have explained them, to any landlord or tenant who has created such property; but I cannot allow either to landlord or tenant any other or further rights of Property in land than those I have just enumerated.

No individual or number of individuals can have a right of Private Property in the land of a country in its original state, and antecedently to human culture; for in that state the land of a country was and is still the Public Common Property of the people of that country. Undoubtedly the people, by their combined labour and industry, "have not made the land" of their country, but they have received it as a voluntary free gift, and as a necessary means for their subsistence, from their Common Father and Creator, who did make it.

### What Right of Exclusion Implies.

Besides, a right of Property in Land implies, as I have observed, a right of exclusion as well as of use in its enjoyment; and, therefore, if any privileged class had a right of property in the land of a country they would have a right to the exclusive use of the land of that country—that is to say, they would have a right to the exclusive use of all

the necessaries of life in that country, and the people would have no right to exist at all. Not only, then, would the well-being but the very existence of the nation depend on the whim and caprice of a single class of the community.

Again, no class of men could have such a right of private property in the land of a nation—firstly, because they could not by their own labour and industry have created such a right themselves, for "no man has made the land"; and, secondly, because they could not have received that right, either by contract or free gift, from anyone who was competent to give it. The people of the nation could not give it, for if they were to barter, or sell, or give away the land, they would expropriate the means that were necessary for their own subsistence, and that would be tantamount to a nation committing suicide.

#### Individuals May Rightfully Collect Payment for Improvements in Land.

The tracts of country known in England as the Bedford Level, and in Flanders as the Pays des waes, were, not so very long ago, as sterile, as barren, and even more useless than the bogs of our own country at this moment. By an enormous expenditure, however, of capital and labour they have been drained, reclaimed and fertilised, till they have at last become among the most productive lands in Europe. That productiveness is entirely the result of human labour and industry, for nature did hardly anything for these lands.

If the question, then, was asked: Who has a right to charge or demand a rent for the use of the soil of these lands for agricultural or industrial uses? the answer undoubtedly would be, the person who by his labour and capital had created all their productiveness, who had imparted to them all the value they possess. In charging, therefore, a rent for the use of what he had produced he is only demanding a most just and equitable return for his capital—a fair and honest remuneration for his labour. His right to demand this could not possibly be disputed.

Now, the artificial productiveness of these tracts of country hardly equals, and certainly does not surpass, the natural fertility of large districts of rich, luxuriant, arable and pasture lands in the County of Meath, in this Diocese. If it were asked, then, who has a

right to charge a rent for the use of the soil of these highly favoured districts in Meath for agricultural or industrial purposes, the answer should be that if human industry or labour had imparted to these lands a real and substantial amount of artificial productiveness, by the cultivation and permanent improvement of the soil, then the person who had created that productiveness had a perfect right to demand a rent for the use of it.

Exaction by Individuals of Rent for Land is Wanton injustice.

But who, it may be further asked, has a right to demand a rent for the natural fertility of these lands "which no man made," and which, in fact, is not the result of human industry and labour at all? The answer here, also, should be, he who had produced it.

But who produced it? God. If God, then, demanded a rent for the use of these lands, He would undoubtedly be entitled to it. But God does not sell His gifts or charge a rent for the use of anything He has produced. He does not sell; but He gives or bestows, and in bestowing His gifts He shows no respect of persons.

If, then, all God's creatures are in a condition of perfect equality relatively to this gift of the land, no one can have an exceptional right to claim more than a fair share of what was intended equally for all, and what is, indeed, directly or indirectly, a necessary of life for each of them.

When all, therefore, relatively to this gift, are perfectly equal, and nobody has any real claim to it; when all equally need the liberality and generosity of God in it, and no one can afford, or is willing, to part with his share in it—to alienate it from any or all of them would be to do them a wanton injustice and grievous wrong, and would be a direct disappointment to the intentions of the Donor besides.

The Whole People the True Owners of the Land.

When, therefore, a privileged class arrogantly claims a right of private property in the land of a country, that claim is simply unintelligible, except in the broad principle that the land of a country is not a free gift at all, but solely a family inheritance; that it is not a free gift which God has bestowed on His creatures, but an inheritance which he has left to His children; that they, therefore, being God's eldest sons, inherit this property by right of succession; that the rest of the

world have no share or claim to it, on the ground that origin is tainted with the stain of illegitimacy. The world, however, will hardly submit to this shameful imputation of its own degradation, especially when it is not sustained by even a shadow of reason.

I infer, therefore, that no individual or class of individuals can hold a right of private property in the land of a country; that the people of that country, in their public corporate capacity, are, and always must be, the real owners of the land of their country—holding an indisputable title to it, in the fact that they received it as a free gift from its Creator, and as a necessary means for preserving and enjoying the life He has bestowed upon them.

### Distinction Between Individual Rights and Community Rights.

Usufruct, therefore, is the highest form of property that individuals can hold in land. On the other hand, I have shown that the cultivator's right of property in the produce of the land, in the improvements he has made in the productiveness of the land, and in its undisturbed occupation as long as he continues to improve it—that these various rights are all founded on the strictest principles of justice, and that their recognition and protection by the State will secure for the land the highest culture and improvement it is capable of receiving, and will draw from it, without fail, the largest returns of human food it is capable of yielding.

On these immutable principles of justice and right, the order, progress and welfare of society depend. They allow free scope and hold out the highest encouragement to the fullest development of the energy and activity of human industry and enterprise, by securing to everyone the full fruits of his labour, and recognising in him a right of property to all that his hands produce. They guarantee to him immunity and protection from disturbance as long as he devotes himself with earnestness and zeal to his industrial pursuits.

On the other hand, if a man, through indolence or incompetence, allows his land to run wild, to return to its primitive sterility and barrenness, so as to produce nothing at all, or at all events, much less than it is capable of yielding, it is no hardship to that man if these principles call on him to surrender a trust which he held from society, and which, to the great detriment of society, he has so grievously abused.

Finally, it is no injustice to refuse the remuneration of labour to those who have not laboured at all. This usufruct, therefore, is a right of property in land, which is held mainly for the benefit of the public and for the advancement of the general interests of the community. And yet the general interests of the community are hardly distinguishable from the private interests of the usufructuary. The larger the amount of permanent improvements made in the soil, and the richer and more abundant returns it will yield, the better will it be for both interests.

### Public and Private Interests.

An usufructuary or farmer who labours might and main for his own self-interests, labours with the same amount of earnestness and zeal for the interests of the public as well. But it is the consideration of the public interests that will determine the continuity of his occupancy. The continuity of his occupancy entirely depends on the continuity of its real, practical effectiveness for the advancement of the interests of the public. The moment it ceases to be useful and beneficial to the public welfare, that moment it ceases to have a right to exist any longer. If individuals could have a right of Private Property in Land, that right would not be fettered by these responsibilities; in fact, it would not be liable to any responsibility at all.

The ownership of reclaimed tracts like the Bedford Level approximates closely, without, however, fully realising, to a right of private property in land. The Bedford Level owner is not responsible to society for the management of that property, nor is he bound to have any regard to its interests in the use he wishes to make of it. Being master of his own free actions, he was not bound to create that property for the benefit of society, but for his own, and he may now make whatever use he pleases of it. If through mismanagement it produces less than it is capable of yielding, that is his own affair altogether. If he allowed it to return to its original sterility society might regret that it suffered a great loss, but it could not complain that he did it an injustice or a wrong.

The distinction, therefore, between the two rights of property in land is essential and fundamental, and it is absolutely necessary to apprehend it clearly and to bear it distinctly in mind.

## Economists on the People's Rights in the Land.

Now, there is nothing novel or startling in the common and inalienable right of property which I have shown every people possesses in the land of its country. I know of no writer on political economy who disputes it, although I am familiar with the works of many of the most eminent.

Bastiat, the great defender of the property classes in France, certainly does not dispute it; on the contrary, he assumes it as a settled principle of justice throughout his entire treatise.

The late Mr. Cairnes, though by far the most able and eloquent of all the modern advocates of landlords' rights and privileges, as far as I know, at least, does not controvert it either. The facts and principles set forth in some of the most powerful and best written passages of his works prove the manifest injustice of allowing to anyone, except the people, a right of private property in the land of their country.

Mr. Mill, in his great work on Political Economy, after having accepted the universally received definition of property exactly as I have given it, says: "The essential principle of property being to assure to all persons what they have produced by their labour and accumulated by their abstinence, this principle cannot apply to what is not the produce of labour, the raw material of the earth." And again: "When the sacredness of property is talked of, it should always be remembered that any such sacredness does not belong in the same degree to landed property. No man made the land: it is the inheritance of the whole species."

In the remainder of this chapter Mr. Mill lectures the proprietors of land on their obligations and responsibilities to society in the management of it, and consequently he must be addressing himself to owners who have only the right of usufruct in their lands. Such admonitions, if addressed to men who had an absolute right of private property in land, would be simply an impertinence, as they would not be obliged to account to him or to anyone else for "what they did with their own." Further on Mr. Mill adds: "Those who think that the land of a country exists for the sake of a few thousand landowners, and that as long as rents are paid society and government have fulfilled their function, may see in this consummation a happy end to Irish difficulties. But this is not a time, nor is the human mind now in

a condition in which such insolent pretensions can be maintained. The land of Ireland, the land of every country, belongs to the people of that country."

Mr. McDonnell, in his excellent work on the land question of England and Scotland, says, it became a trite and popular phrase to say "that the land was the property of the people."

Mr. Arthur Arnold, Member of Parliament for the Borough of Salford, in his work on Free Land, published quite recently (1880), writes: "The land belongs to the nation, to the State, to the people. It is not possible to sever the interests of a beggar crouching at the gates of a park from that land. Infinitesimal they may be, but their existence cannot be denied." He adds: "There is no such thing as private property in land held by individuals known to English law, or the law of the land." He quotes the highest legal authority in proof of his statement.

Williams, on "The Law of Real Property," thus writes: "The first thing the student has to do is to get rid of the idea of absolute ownership. Such an idea is quite unknown to the English law. No man is in law the absolute owner of lands. He can only hold an estate in them."

Even Mr. Froude, in an extract given by Arnold, although he does not give the reference, thus writes:

"Seeing that men are born into the world without their own wills, and being in the world they must live on the earth's surface, or they cannot live at all, no individual or set of individuals can hold over land that personal and irresponsible right which is allowed them in things of less universal necessity."

### Land Rent for the Community a Design of Divine Providence.

I think, therefore, that I may fairly infer, on the strength of authority as well as of reason, that the people are and always must be the real owners of the land of their country.

This great social fact appears to me to be of incalculable importance, and it is fortunate indeed that on the strictest principles of justice it is not clouded even by a shadow of uncertainty or doubt. There is, moreover, a charm and a peculiar beauty in the clearness with which it reveals the wisdom and the benevolence of the designs of Providence in the admirable provision He has made for the wants and the necessities of that state of social existence of which He is the au-

thor, and in which the very instincts of nature tell us we are to spend our lives.

A vast public property, a great national fund, has been placed under the dominion and at the disposal of the nation to supply itself abundantly with resources necessary to liquidate the expenses of its government, the administration of its laws and the education of its youth, and to enable it to provide for the suitable sustentation and support of its criminal and pauper population. One of the most interesting peculiarities of this property is that its value is never stationary; It is constantly progressive and increasing in a direct ratio to the growth of the population; and the very causes that increase and multiply the demands made on it increase proportionately its ability to meet them.

### Landlordism Takes the Patrimony of the People.

Let the democracy of England as well as of Ireland, learn the melancholy fate that has overtaken this splendid inheritance which God has placed in their hands, and which would have saved them eighty millions sterling which they now annually pay by direct and indirect taxation for the government of the country. That patrimony was once theirs by right, and by right it is theirs still; but, in fact, it is theirs no longer: a class has wrested the land from the people of the country and now hold a strict monopoly in it. They sell it out to the people as if it were an ordinary article of private property and solely the result of their own capital and labour.

The rents which the landlords draw from their lands is an income which they derive from the sale of what are avowedly God's gifts, which "no man made." If they had only claimed the right of selling the use of the permanent improvements they had made in the soil, by the capital and labour they had expended on it, no one could dispute the Justice of their demand; but any element of income that might possibly be derived from this source is called in the language of political economy, not Rent, but Profit.

Political economists who have written with scientific precision on the nature and properties of Rent, confine it exclusively to the moneys which the landlord receives for allowing the tenant the use of the original and natural productiveness of the soil.

## How Political Economists Define Rent

Adam Smith says: "Rent may be considered as the produce of those powers of nature the use of which the landlord lends to the farmer. It is the work of nature which remains after deducting or compensating all that can be regarded as the work of man. It is seldom less than a fourth, and frequently more than a third of the whole produce." The part then of the agricultural products of the land which is the result of the operations of the powers of nature is sometimes more than a third of the whole—and that is the Rent of the landlord.

Ricardo, the inventor of the celebrated theory of Rent, called after his name (Ricardo's "Theory of Rent"), defines Rent to be: "That portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil. It is often confounded with the interest and profit of capital... In the future pages of this work, then, whenever I speak of the Rent of land, I wish to be understood as speaking of the compensation which is paid to the owner of the land for the use of its original and indestructible properties."

Scrope writes of it: "The value of land and its power of yielding a Rent are due to two circumstances. 1. The appropriation of its natural power. 2. The labour applied to its amelioration. Under the first of these relations Rent is a monopoly. It restricts our usufruct and enjoyment of the gifts which God has given to men for the satisfaction of their wants."

Senior thus speaks of Rent: "The instruments of production are labour and natural agents. Natural agents having been appropriated, proprietors charge for their use under the form of Rent, which is the recompense of no sacrifice whatever, and is received by those who have neither laboured nor put by, but who merely hold out their hands to accept the offerings of the rest of the community."

McCulloch defines it: "What is properly termed Rent is the sum paid for the use of the natural and inherent powers of the soil. It is entirely distinct from the sum paid for the use of buildings, enclosures, roads or other ameliorations." Rent is, then, always a monopoly.

Lastly, Mill says: "The land is the principal of the natural agents which are capable of being appropriated, and the consideration paid

for its use is called Rent. . . . It is at once evident that Rent is the effect of a monopoly."

### Land Monopoly Usurps God's Gifts to All.

Thus, on the highest and most unquestionable authority, are we forced to conclude that, owing to the monopoly which the landlords have usurped in the land of the nation, they sell out the "use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil"; of "the natural and inherent powers of the soil"; of "the natural powers of the soil"; that is to say, they sell the use of God's gifts like so many articles of private property, and as if they were purely the result of their own toil and labour.

If the "Bedford Level," and the rich tract of land in Meath with which I have compared it, were to be leased out to tenant farmers for a given term of years, the one would fetch quite as high a rent as the other. The farmer would not concern himself much in inquiring into the source from which the fertility of the land was derived; all his solicitude and inquiries would be directed to the existence of the fact that the fertility was there, and which of them possessed it in the higher degree. The rent which the owner of the "Bedford Level" would receive for the use of his land would be the just and equitable remuneration to which he was entitled for the expenditure of his labour and capital, while the Meath proprietor would receive as high a reward for having done nothing at all. Only that his income is so woefully wanting in justice, the condition of the Meath proprietor would certainly be enviable.

### The Price of Land a Monopoly Price.

This privileged class not merely sells the use of God's gifts, but extorts for them a price which is most unjust and exorbitant; in fact, they hardly ever sell them at less than scarcity or famine prices. If a man wants to buy a suit of broadcloth, the price he will be required to pay for it will amount to very little more than what it cost to produce it—and yet that suit of clothes may be a requirement of such necessity or utility to him that he would willingly pay three times the amount it actually cost rather than submit to the inconvenience of doing without it. On the other hand, the manufacturer would extort the last shilling he would be willing to give for it, only that he knows

there are scores of other manufacturers ready to undersell him if he demanded much more than the cost of its production. The price, therefore, of commodities of all kinds that can be produced on a large scale, and to an indefinite extent, will depend on the cost required to produce them, or at least that part of them which is produced at the highest expense.

But there is a limited class of commodities whose selling price has no relation or dependence at all on the cost at which they have been produced; for example, rare wines that grow only on soils of limited extent; paintings by the old masters; statues of exquisite beauty and finish by celebrated sculptors; rare books, bronzes and medals, and provisions or articles of human food in cities during a siege, and more generally in times of scarcity and famine—these commodities are limited in quantity, and it is physically impossible in the circumstances existing to increase, multiply, or augment them further. The seller of these commodities, not being afraid of competition, can put any price he pleases on them short of the purchasers' extreme estimate of the necessity, utility, or advantage to themselves of such commodities.

Fabulous sums of money, therefore, have been expended in the purchase of such commodities— sometimes to indulge a taste for the fine arts; sometimes to satisfy a passion for the rare and the beautiful; and, sometimes, too, to gratify a feeling of vanity or ambition to be the sole proprietors of objects of antiquarian interest and curiosity. On the other hand, enormous sums of money have been paid in times of scarcity or during a siege for the commonest necessities of life, or, failing these, for substitutes that have been requisitioned for human food, the use of which would make one shudder in circumstances of less pressing necessity.

### The Landlord the Greatest Burden on the Land.

The land is a commodity that strictly belongs to this class. It is limited in extent, and no human power can enlarge or extend its area. The competition for it is excessive, the competitors struggling for its attainment—not for the purpose of satisfying a taste for the fine arts, or to gratify a passion for the rare or beautiful, but to secure a necessary means of existence: for they must live on and by the land, or they cannot live at all. The owner, therefore, of that land can put on it

any rent he pleases, and the poor people competing for it have no choice but to accept his terms or die in a ditch or a poor-house. Under the present system of Land Tenure, the owners are not only enabled, but actually exact for the use of the land the last shilling the tenant is able to pay, leaving him only what is barely sufficient to keep him from dying.

Mr. Mill, who is the highest of all authorities on this subject, thus writes on the letting of land as it is actually carried out in Ireland: "With individual exceptions (some of them very honourable ones) the owners of Irish estates do nothing for the land but drain it of its produce. What has been epigrammatically said in the discussions on 'peculiar burdens' is literally true when applied to them, that the greatest 'burden' on the land is the landlords. Returning nothing to the soil, they consume its whole produce, minus the potatoes strictly necessary to keep the inhabitants from dying of famine."

### Landlordism Confiscates the Work of Improvers.

But the present system of Land Tenure not merely enables a class to exact from the people of the country a famine price for the use of the land which God made: it also enables them to charge a rent for the use of the improvements on the land which the people themselves made, which are purely the result of their own industry and capital, and which, in fact, on the strictest principles of justice are their own private property. With the knowledge and experience which we have acquired all our lives long of the transactions that are daily taking place between landlords and tenants, the clearest and most convincing proof that can be given of this fact will perhaps be found in the plain and simple statement of it.

The land of Ireland would at this moment still be in its original state of nature had it not been drained, cleared, reclaimed and fertilised by the enormous outlay of labour and capital which has been expended on it by the people of the present and their forefathers in past generations. The landlords contributed nothing, or next to nothing, for its improvement.

Mr. Mill thus writes of the improvement of land in Ireland: "Whenever in any country the proprietors, generally speaking, cease to improve their lands, political economy has nothing to say in defence of landed property as there established.

Landed property in England is very far from completely fulfilling the conditions which render its existence economically justifiable. But if insufficiently realised, even in England, in Ireland those conditions are not complied with at all. With individual exceptions . . . the owners of Irish estates do nothing for the land but drain it of its produce."

### Reports of Government Commissions.

The Bessborough and Richmond Commissions recently appealed directly to the nation for information on this important point. The answer which the nation returned was (as everyone knew should be the case), that all, or nearly all the permanent improvements in the soil of the country were effected by the labour and capital of the people of the country. The Bessborough Commissioners write in their report: "As a fact, the removal of masses of rock and stone which, in some parts of Ireland, encumbered the soil, the drainage of the land and erection of buildings, including their own dwellings, have generally been effected by the tenants' labour, unassisted, or only in some instances assisted, by advances from the landlord."

### The Work of the Tenants.

The Liberal section of the Richmond Commission write, in their report on the same subject: "In a country like Ireland, where the dwelling houses, farm buildings and other elements of a farm, including often the reclamation from the waste of the cultivated land itself, have been, and must, in our opinion, continue to be, for the most part, the work of the tenants."

Even the Tory section of this Richmond Commission, composed as it is of men of the highest type of Conservatism and Landlordism, observe with a frankness that shows the force of the evidence brought before them:

"Bearing in mind the system by which the improvements, and equipments of a farm are very generally the work of the tenant, and the fact that a yearly tenant is at any time liable to have his rent raised in consequence of the increased value that has been given to his holding by the expenditure of his own capital and labour, the desire for legislative interference to protect him from an arbitrary increase of rent does not seem unnatural."

But further argument in proof of this fact is quite unnecessary, seeing that both Houses of the Legislature bear emphatic testimony to it in that section of the Land Act of 1870, which declares that "all permanent improvements in the soil and on the farm are assumed to have been made by the tenant, except in those cases in which it has been clearly proved they have been made by the landlord." The vast property thus created by the labour and capital of the people, in the permanent improvement of the soil and in the buildings and equipments of their farms, and which has been growing and accumulating for centuries, covers a very considerable part of the aggregate value of the land of the country.

### Driven From the Land.

The question then arises, what has become of this enormous property? The correct answer to this question will, I think, be found to be that one part of it has been wantonly wasted and destroyed; that the landlords have coolly appropriated to their own use a second part of it; and that the people pay, at the present moment, a rent for the use of the residue of what was once all their own property.

In the one County of Meath, in this Diocese, there are about 369,000 acres of land laid down in grass seeds or pasture. That vast territory was nearly all parcelled out about the commencement of this century in farms of various sizes, ranging from ten to seventy, eighty or a hundred acres each. These farms were dotted over with clean, commodious, comfortable, whitewashed dwellings, with offices, out-houses and the plant of well-to-do farmers. These dwellings were occupied by a race of the most laborious, industrious, hard-working and virtuous people that ever lived in any country. But, owing to the iniquitous system of Land Tenure, they have been almost all mercilessly evicted and swept away, and every vestige of the vast amount of human life, industry, contentment and happiness that once flourished on these lands has been so carefully obliterated that, looking at them in their present melancholy solitude, one would imagine them to have always been "prairie lands" since the creation.

The property which these poor people possessed in their dwellings and farm houses has been thus wantonly destroyed, and the permanent improvements they had created in the productiveness of the soil were coolly appropriated by the landlords who evicted them.

## How Tenants are Rack-rented.

Until the Irish Land League interfered with their operations, these exterminators sold out by public auction every year the use of the people's property, as well as the natural productiveness of the soil, to cattle dealers, for a term of nine, ten or eleven months, and at a rent ranging from £4 to £6 an acre; and they drew from their estates an income twice, and in many instances three times as large as the few honest and honourable proprietors in their neighbourhood who never evicted anyone at all. I need hardly direct attention to the notorious fact that those who have been suffered to remain, were only too glad to be allowed the privilege of paying a rent for the use of the residue of what was once their own property.

The proof of this is plain. Proprietors, in letting their land, do not distinguish between the enormous value superadded to the land by the people's labour and capital for centuries, and the value it has inherited from nature, and, perhaps in some instances, from their own improvements.

They let its whole value from every source at the highest price it will bring. And yet this sorely aggrieved class of men complain that they can not now let their lands as they always let them before, and as all other owners are allowed to sell their property still, on the principle of open competition and free sale!

During the long, large and varied experience the world has had of the letting of land on that principle, was it ever heard that an owner let his land at less than its fair value?—and surely that fair value included the people's improvements on the land as well as his own. We have seen, on the high authority of Mr. Mill, that it is the almost universal practice of Irish landlords to exact from their tenants in the form of rent the whole produce of the land minus the potatoes that are necessary to keep them from dying of hunger; and surely rack-rents like these cover every form of value the land possesses, and consequently the people's improvements.

## Landlordism Prevents Improvements.

But the truth is, if the landlords only confiscated the enormous property created on the land by the people's capital and labour for ages up to the present moment, a word of complaint would not be

heard against them. The great grievance of which the people complain is that, even still, if the tenant has the folly to expend his labour and capital in the permanent improvements which the soil so sadly requires, the landlords are on the lookout to appropriate it at once, and put a fresh increase of rent on him for the use of his own property.

Quite recently, therefore, the nation has earnestly appealed to the Legislature, through the Bessborough and Richmond Commissions, to protect the property which the people were ready to create in the permanent improvement of the soil, by barring the landlord's right to appropriate it or charge a fresh rent for its use.

Even the Tory section of the Richmond Commission were so struck with the manifest injustice of the arbitrary power by which the landlord can put any rent he pleases not only on the land, but on the tenant's permanent Improvements in the land, that they virtually recommend the Government to leave the tenants no longer at their mercy. "Bearing in mind," they say, "the system by which the improvements and equipments of a farm are very generally the work of the tenant, and the fact that a yearly tenant is at any time liable to have his rent raised in consequence of the increased value that has been given to his holding by the expenditure of his own capital and labour, the desire of the tenant for legislative interference to protect him from an arbitrary increase of rent does not seem unnatural"

The Bessborough Commissioners deplore the extent to which this arbitrary power has been abused in constantly imposing a fresh increase of rent on every fresh improvement made in the land by the tenants' capital and labour. The weight of evidence, they say, proves that the larger estates are in general considerably managed, but that on some estates, and particularly on some recently acquired, rents have been raised both before and since the Land Act to an excessive degree, not only as compared with the value of the land, but even so as to absorb the profit of the tenant's own improvements.

This process has gone far to destroy the tenant's legitimate interest in his holding. In Ulster, in some cases, it has almost "eaten up" the Tenant Right. Elsewhere, where there is no Tenant Right, the feeling of insecurity produced by the raising of the rent has had a similar effect.

The Liberal section of the Richmond Commission thus write of the extent to which rents are generally raised: "But we are satisfied that large proportion of the occupiers of land are living in fear of an increased demand of rent upon any signs of increased ability to pay, and sometimes subjected to rents which do not admit of hopeful industry, and make contentment impossible. This state of things is found in its worst form upon the poorer tillage lands, upon the smaller properties, and especially, though not exclusively, upon those which have come into the hands of new owners since the famine of 1846-47, and down to the present time. We have had strong evidence, both from our Assistant Commissioners, Professor Baldwin and Major Robertson, and from private witnesses, that the practice of raising rents at short and uncertain intervals prevails to an extent fully sufficient to shake the confidence of the tenants, and to deter them from applying due industry and outlay to the improvement of their farms." And they conclude "that this condition of things has created injustice in the past, and is fatal to the progress so much needed for the future."

### An Open Violation of the Principles of Justice

Under such a state of things one may well ask, is it in human nature that anyone could have the heart or the enterprise to expend his labour and capital on the permanent improvement of the soil exclusively for the benefit of others, and with a certainty that he will be charged an increased rent for the use of his own property?

How can any government allow the land of a nation to remain in the hands of a class of men who will not improve it themselves, or allow others to improve it either? How can any just government suffer any longer a system of Land Tenure which inflicts irreparable ruin on the general industry and prosperity of a nation, and which is maintained solely for the purpose of giving the landlords an opportunity of plundering the class of industrious, improving tenants which it is specially bound to protect and defend?

Such open violations of the fundamental principles of justice and of public morality, would make one who has thoroughly thought the case out, ask himself whether he was really in the region of hard, stern facts and realities, or only in an ideal of fancy or fiction.

The essential and immutable principles of justice used certainly to be:—

That everyone had a right of property in the hard-earned fruits of his labour; that whatever property a man had made by the expenditure of his capital, his industry and his toil, was really his own; that he, and he alone, had a right to all the benefits, the advantages and enjoyments that that property yielded; and that if anyone else meddled with that property against his will, or interfered with him in its enjoyment, he was thereby guilty of the crimes of theft and of robbery, which the eternal law of God, as well as the laws of all nations, reprobated and punished with such severity.

But the principles which underlie the existing system of Land Tenure, and which impart to it its specific and distinctive character, are exactly the reverse of these. The principles on which that system is based are:—

That one privileged class do not require to labour for their livelihood at all: that they have an exclusive right to all the advantages, comforts and enjoyments that can be derived from a splendid property, which exacted no patient, painful or self-denying efforts of labour to create it or acquire it, and which, in fact, they inherited without any sacrifice at all: that, being a singularly favoured race, and being all God's eldest sons, the rest of the world must humbly acknowledge themselves to be their inferiors in rank, lineage, condition and dignity: that this superiority of rank gives them a right to sell out God's gifts as if they were purely the products of their own labour and industry, and that they can exact in exchange for them famine or scarcity prices. Finally, that they enjoy the enviable privilege of appropriating the hard-earned property of others against their wills, and do them no wrong even if they charge them a rent for the use of what would really appear to be their own.

### Landlordism Robs All Classes.

Hitherto we have confined ourselves almost exclusively to the consideration of the various forms of injustice, and the spoliation of private property which the existing system of Land Tenure enables the proprietors of the soil to inflict on the tenant farmers of Ireland.

But the tenant farmers, though a numerous, influential and important section of the nation, are, after all not the nation. Despite our

cruel misgovernment in the past, some few of our national industries still survive, as well as that of cultivation of the soil. Then there are, moreover, certain trades and professions whose services are indispensable to any nation that has any claims to be considered civilised. The vast numbers who are engaged and live by their labour, industry and skill in the various trades and professions form an important and an influential section of every civilised community.

Now, any form of injustice, oppression or wrong that can possibly exist in any of the great trades or industries of a nation is only felt by the individuals who belong to that industry or trade, and who earn their livelihood by their labour and skill in it. Outside, in the other greater or lesser of the national industries, it is hardly felt at all. But the Irish system of Land Tenure wrongs and impoverishes not only those who live by and of the land, but all other classes in the community as well! It robs not only the cultivators of the soil, but every man in the community, of a substantial portion of the hard-earned fruits of his labour, no matter in what trade or profession he may labour for his living. It is, therefore, not a local or a particular grievance, but a great national injustice, and that, I think, is its most objectionable peculiarity.

I have already shown that the land of every country is the public property of the people of that country, and consequently, that its exclusive appropriation by a class is a substantial injustice and wrong done to every man in that country», whom it robs of his fair share of the common inheritance. The injustice of this appropriation is enormously enhanced by the fact that it further enables the landlords, without any risk or trouble, and in fact makes it a matter of course for them, to appropriate a vast share of the earnings of the nation besides. They plundered the people first of God's gifts in the land, and that act of spoliation puts them under a sort of necessity of plundering them again of an enormous amount of their direct earnings and wages. The line of argument that leads directly to this conclusion seems abundantly clear.

### Land Values intended by Providence for Public Purposes.

I have already observed that the chief peculiarity of the land of a country was that its value was never stationary, that it was always progressive and rising, that in fact it increased in a direct ratio with

the growth of the population and the advancing progress of the industry of the nation.

It would seem as if Providence had destined the land to serve as a large economical reservoir, to catch, to collect and preserve the overflowing streams of wealth that are constantly escaping from the great public industrial works that are always going on in communities that are progressive and prosperous.

Besides the permanent improvements that are made in the land itself, and which increase its productiveness and value, there are other industrial works not carried out on the land itself, but on its surroundings and in its vicinity, and which enhance its value very considerably. A new road is made for the accommodation of a district; a new bridge is thrown across a river or a stream to make two important localities accessible to each other; a new railway passes close by and connects it with certain large and important centres of industry; a new factory or a new mill is erected, or a new town is built in the neighbourhood.

Industrial works like these add very materially to the value of all the land in their vicinity. It is a well-known fact that a new railway has in several instances doubled the value of the land through which it passed, in consequence of the increased facilities it had afforded for the sale of its agricultural products.

In every state of society, which is progressive and improving, such industrial works are continually going on, and hence the value of the land is rising also everywhere. But its value rises enormously with the enlarged growth of the population of a nation, and with the increased productiveness of its industry.

### Wages Do Not Keep Pace.

The United Kingdom furnishes an example that is singularly illustrative of this fact. Says Mr. Cairnes: "A given exertion of British labour and capital will now produce in a great many directions five, ten or twenty times, in some instances perhaps a hundred times the result which an equal exertion would have produced a hundred years ago. It is not probable that industry is, in any direction whatever, less productive now than it was then; yet the rate of wages, as measured by the real well-being of the labourer, has certainly not advanced in anything like a corresponding degree; while it may be doubted if the

rate of profit has advanced at all." A given amount, then, of British capital and labour is now ten or twenty times more effective than a hundred years ago, while, on the other hand, the quantity of such effective labour and capital now engaged in British industrial production is perhaps twenty times larger now than formerly.

### Value of British Industrial Production.

The total aggregate result of British industrial production is therefore something enormous, and its gross pecuniary value must be proportionately large. What that total pecuniary value is I suppose it would be impossible to determine, even approximately. We know, however, that the pecuniary value of the foreign goods imported annually into England amounted for several years past to considerably more than £300,000,000 sterling.

Now, as barter, or the mutual exchange of commodities, is the principle of international trade, these foreign goods could be paid for only by the export of English manufactured goods to such an amount that their aggregate pecuniary value would be substantially equal to that sum. If to these three hundred millions we add the price of the British manufactured goods consumed at home that sum would probably realise a few hundred millions more.

But to guard against the possibility of a pretext to object to our argument, let us assume that the total pecuniary value of British manufactured goods, whether consumed at home or abroad, only amounted to £300,000,000 sterling. Now, that being the sum realised by the sale of the fruits of British industrial production, becomes, of course, the natural and just remuneration of the labour and capital that produced them. The part of that sum that must be apportioned for the remuneration of capital must be comparatively small, seeing that the rate of profit on capital for years past has been as low as, perhaps lower than, at any previous period. Vastly the larger portion of it, therefore, must pass into the hands of the labourers, who will spend it, perhaps, to the last shilling.

Wise and thoughtful men have often bitterly deplored the want of that spirit of self-denial in the British operative which would induce him to save and "put by," with the view of improving his condition, or, at all events, of making provision for the evil day of sickness or of old age. The clothing of the British workman is not very expensive,

and, with the exception of the outlay necessary for that purpose, the remainder of the vast sums he has earned will be spent on food.

### Landlords Sow Not, But They Reap.

Now, the ordinary food of the operatives and people of every country is what is called "the raw products of the soil"; that is to say, the beef, the mutton, the bacon, the poultry, the eggs, the milk, the butter, the flour, the meal, the potatoes, and the vegetables that spring directly from the soil, and that require only the simplest and the most inexpensive industrial processes to fit them for immediate use. "The raw products of the soil" will then be sold to the operatives as to other people at the highest price they will bring, on the principle of open competition and free sale.

When, therefore, the competition is thus for the necessaries and luxuries of life, and that the competitors must be reckoned by millions, and that their means for purchasing must be reckoned by hundreds of millions, the demand for the raw products must be enormous, and the prices which they will bring must range very high. This enormous demand will exhaust all the foodproducing resources of the country till a point is reached at which a further supply of food from the soil would cost more than its production in foreign countries, plus the expense of its carriage and delivery here.

The prices, therefore, of "the raw products" thus ranging very high, the value of the soil which produced them also rises enormously; indeed, the vast sums which the nation pays for its food, for nearly all the necessaries and many of the luxuries of life, pass directly, and with little expense or trouble, into the hands of those who hold the ownership of the land, with the single deduction of the remuneration due to the usufructuaries or farmers.

If the land had not been appropriated by individuals and diverted from the original purpose for which Providence had intended it, the high prices which the nation thus imposes on itself by the vastness of its numbers and the abundance of its wealth, in the purchase of the raw products of the soil, should be regarded as a most just and natural tax, which it instinctively levies on itself to realise the large sums that are necessary for the support of its public burdens.

## The Great National Property Which Landlords Are Permitted to appropriate.

But now the great national property which Providence has destined for the support of the public burdens of society has been diverted from its original purpose to minister to the wants, the necessities, and perhaps the extravagance of a class. The explanation of this extraordinary act of national spoliation will be found in the fact that hitherto this class could just do as it pleased; the government of the country lay for centuries exclusively in its hands, and despite the combined influence of "English radicalism" and "Irish obstructionism" it is practically in its hands still. The enormous value, then, thus superadded to the land from the two sources just indicated passes directly with the land itself into the hands of those who own it.

Those who hold the ownership of the land hold also the ownership of all the accessions of value it receives from all quarters. This increase in the value of their property cost no sacrifice, demanded no painful effort of labour. Even while they slept their rent rolls went on increasing and multiplying.

The value continually imparted to the land by the industrial exertions of the community, in the construction of harbours and bridges, in the making of new roads and railways, in the erection of new factories, mills and houses, etc., has all gone with the land, has all been confiscated and appropriated by the owners of the soil.

Professor Cairnes feels sorely perplexed to account for some of the anomalous results of this appropriation. He says: "A bale of cloth, a machine, a house, owes its value to the labour expended upon it, and belongs to the person who expends or employs the labour; a piece of land owes its value, so far as its value is affected by the causes I am now considering, not to the labour expended on the land, but that expended on something else—the labour expended in making a railroad or in building houses in an adjoining town; and the value thus added to the land belongs not to the persons who have made the railroads or built the houses, but to someone who may not have been aware that these operations were being carried on—nay, who perhaps has exerted all his efforts to prevent their being carried on. How many landlords have their rent rolls doubled by railways made in their despite!"

## Professor's Unwitting Testimony

It never occurred to Mr. Cairnes that he had here given, quite unconsciously to himself, an unanswerable argument, *ex absurdo*, to prove the injustice of the appropriation of the land. If the land had not been confiscated no such absurd or unjust result could have followed. The value imparted by labour to the land, exactly like "the bale of cloth, the house or the machine," would belong to the persons who expended or employed that labour, that is to say, to the public, by whose industrial exertions it had been created.

Lastly, the vast accessions of value which the land is constantly receiving from the proceeds of that "self-imposed tax" which the nation levies on itself in the high prices it pays for the "raw products of the soil," together with the increased productiveness of the soil itself, go all, as Mr. Cairnes is forced to confess, "neither to profits nor to wages nor to the public at large, but to swell a fund ever growing, even while its proprietors sleep—to the rent roll of the owner of the soil."

## Private Property in Land the Real Robber of Labour.

Thus the appropriation of God's gifts in the land led naturally, and as a matter of course, to the appropriation of an enormous amount of the wages and earnings of the nation, which, in the designs of Providence, kept constantly dropping into the land, accumulating on the land, and adding to the value of the land, not for the enrichment of the landlords, but for the support of the public burdens of the State.

Now a system of Land Tenure which thus despoils the people of a nation of a vast amount of their earnings, which transfers a valuable property which they have created by patient, painful and self-denying efforts of their labour, to a class who do not labour at all, and make no sacrifices whatever, can, I think, be fairly characterised as a system of national spoliation. The hardworking, industrious masses of the nation are taxed twice, and for an enormous amount each time. They are taxed first for the benefit of the owners of the soil, to supply them with all the comforts, enjoyments and luxuries which they de-

sire, and are taxed again to the amount of eighty millions annually for the government and defence of the country.

With two such enormous drains on the productive industry and labour of the country, I cannot share in the astonishment which Mr. Cairnes feels at finding that, notwithstanding the increased productiveness of British industry, "the rate of wages, as measured by the real well-being of the labourer," has not improved to any material extent, "while it may be doubted whether the rate of profit has advanced at all."

### Both Capital and Labour are Exploited.

Both capitalists and operatives, therefore, are intensely disappointed and supremely dissatisfied with these disheartening results, and mutually reproach each other with fraud and foul dealing in the division of their common earnings. Their mutual misunderstandings and rival claims to a larger share than they actually receive have given rise to "lockouts" on the one side and "strikes" on the other; to combinations of capitalists among the employers and "Trade Unions" among the labourers. Thus their mutual relations, which ought to be of the friendliest character, have at last settled down into the permanent form of an insane internecine war, which inflicts irreparable injury on the common interests of both.

It never occurs to either side that a third party could possibly be liable to blame. I think I have shown that neither party has received, or at all events can retain for his own use and enjoyment, its fair share of their common earnings. The existing system of Land Tenure, like a great national thief, robs both parties of an enormous amount of their earnings for the benefit of a class who do not labour at all.

As the operatives complain the louder, so the case they make against the capitalists seem really the weaker and the worse founded of the two. Mr. Cairnes, with many others, proved to evidence that unless in rare and exceptional cases it is perfectly impossible for the capitalist to withhold from the operatives their fair share in their common earnings.

### Higher Money Wages but Lower Purchasing Power.

Does it therefore follow that the strong, widespread and permanent feeling of discontent which prevail among the labourers is the

result of fancy or imagination, having no solid foundation whatever in fact?

Undoubtedly this feeling proves the labourers to have substantial grievances, although I think they have failed to trace them to the causes that have really produced them. The money wage of the English operative is now considerably higher than in any past period of English history. But if his money wage is now high, the price of the raw products of the soil, that is to say, of the necessaries and comforts of life, is vastly higher still.

A given amount of money will not now procure for him the same quantity of food and of the other necessaries of life as formerly. In purchasing the raw products of the soil, he must pay not only for the necessaries and comforts of life which he enjoys himself, but also for the comforts and luxuries which go to the enjoyment of the owners of the soil. The price, therefore, of the raw products is a payment and a tax; a payment for what he consumes himself, and a tax for what is consumed by others.

Then again, a vast margin of the earnings of the English people is expended in direct and indirect taxation. The public burdens of every nation fall mainly on the vast masses of that nation, and the operatives of England are the vast masses of the English nation.

If the English operatives could only retain for their own use and benefit the vast sums which, under the existing system of Land Tenure, go on the one hand to the owners of the soil, and the sums that an economical system of taxation would save for them on the other, their material comforts and enjoyments would be multiplied a hundred fold. Under the existing state of things their condition is utterly incapable of any improvement in the future.

### Economist's Revolting Doctrine of Despair.

Political economists can see no possible way in which English operatives can permanently improve their condition, except they have recourse to that revolting and unnatural expedient of voluntarily restraining and limiting their numbers. "This, then," says Mr. Cairnes—the limitation of his numbers—"is the circumstance on which, in the last resort, any improvement at all of a permanent kind in the labourer's condition turns."

If the self-commissioned apostles who preach this new doctrine only warned the people against the consequences of reckless and improvident marriages, I would join and go with them heartily. But when they advise them (as they seem to me to do) to increase and multiply according to the requirements of trade, and in such proportions as they may be wanted, for the benefit of their betters; when they advise them to increase and multiply only when trade is prosperous, prices are high and commerce flourishes, I am heartily opposed to them.

These teachings appear to me not only unchristian, but revolting and unnatural; and their wickedness is only surpassed by the astounding ignorance of human nature which they reveal in men who ought to be better informed.

### The Only Hope for Labour—"Back to the Land."

The British workman has no need to have recourse to such an unnatural expedient for the purpose of improving his condition. The chief, the fundamental obstacle he will have to overcome, will be found in the existing system of Land Tenure. British operatives and capitalists, of all men living, appear to me to have the largest and deepest interest in a thorough and radical reformation in the system of Land Tenure in our country as well as in their own.

Trades Unions, therefore, instead of wasting their energies and resources in a fruitless struggle with capitalists, would do well to turn their attention in this direction. They have a wide field here for their efforts, and their labours here cannot possibly be fruitless.

The rallying cry of capitalists and labourers ought then to be—  
"Back to the Land"