

Mr. Wallace's defence of Land Nationalization⁴ is meant to be read with special reference to Irish troubles. It need not be said that the book is ably written, and founded on wide and detailed study of facts. But we cannot say that Mr. Wallace displays in dealing with social questions the same patience and accuracy which he has displayed in the field of natural science. He starts with a violent prejudice against the institution of private property in land, and his argument hardly professes to be more than an *ex parte* statement. He deals much in general assertions, some of which appear to us to be quite unsupported by statistics. Thus, his repeated statement that England is "the most pauperized country in the world" is not correct, as Mr. Thornton (an authority whom Mr. Wallace is bound to respect) proved long ago. Again, the assertion that the poverty of wealthy countries is chiefly due to landlordism and the exaction of rent has not been proved, either by Mr. Wallace or by Mr. Henry George. Rent must be paid, so long as soils vary in fertility; and the condition of the Madras peasantry proves that rent paid to the State may be just as difficult to pay as rent paid to a landlord. Mr. Wallace has compiled a graphic account of the hardships wrought by eviction in Scotland and Ireland. We have no desire to defend the memory of Mr. Sellar or Mr. Trench, but we must point out that, if Mr. Wallace is going to sit in judgment on landlordism, he must allow for the good as well as the evil. What, for instance, would he make of Sir H. Maine's statement that private property in land has been the stimulus of agricultural advance, both in England and America? What would he answer to Mr. Caird, who says that the English system of culture produces better economic and social results than any other known to him? When Mr. Wallace comes to work out his own notion of a just land tenure, we are impressed by the laxity of his legal and political ideas. He thinks that every man has "a right to live on his native soil." What is a "right to live"? Is it the right to seek a piece of land, or the right to require somebody else to provide you with land? Then, what is a man's "native soil"? Take a native of the Island of Achill. How far does his "right to live" extend? To the island, or to the kingdom of Ireland, or to the United Kingdom, or to the world? Mr. Wallace should remember that he is dealing, not with abstractions, but with men who are quite capable of quarrelling if their rights are not properly defined for them.

⁴ "Land Nationalization." By A. R. Wallace. London: Trübner & Co. 1882.

Mr. Wallace says nobody but the cultivating occupier should have any rights in the land. But who is the occupier? May a man have land and employ his son to till it? May he employ a neighbour? And if he may employ another without working himself, how are you to prevent these occupiers from becoming landlords, and exacting oppressive dues from those whom they allow to work on their lands? Mr. Wallace will, perhaps, say that nobody need labour on oppressive terms, because every subject will have an opportunity of acquiring land of his own. But what is the precise value of this opportunity? Is a south-country labourer to leave his labour in order to embark in business as a peasant proprietor? If he does, and succeeds, let Mr. Wallace have the credit. But what if he fails? He may turn up on your hands, and tell you that the piece of land you gave him to reclaim cannot be cultivated at a profit. That was the end of many peasant proprietors created by the agrarian laws of Rome. And the only way to escape such social fiascos is to let the men who wish to become peasant proprietors find their properties for themselves. We entirely sympathize with Mr. Wallace in his hatred of inequality and his desire to raise the labourer beyond the danger of pauperism. But we do not believe in raising people by putting more power into the hands of the central Government. M. Thiers said that the "right to labour" would make the French a people of idlers and slaves. We feel sure that Mr. Wallace's "right to live" would produce a people whose life would not be worth living.