

Transcription, January 2015:

*Liberty* (Boston) 3(22) (23 Jan. 1886): 8a-8b.

[p. 8a]

‘Land Nationalization.’

In J. K. Ingalls’s “Social Wealth,” several passages leave the cursory reader in doubt of the author’s definite aims. Among these, in the beginning of his criticism upon that unflinching defender of capitalism and land monopoly, Mr. Mallock, (p. 161), he writes: “Mr. Mallock thinks a *remedy like ‘nationalization of the land,’ or ‘limitation of estates in land,’* would be like prohibiting the sale of knives, because they were sometimes used feloniously to take life.” Here it would seem to be assumed by Mallock and allowed by Ingalls that nationalization of the soil is a process analogous to limitation of proprietorship, which is contrary to all our experience thus far, in the management of public lands, either by the United States or by particular States. Mr. Ingalls has also cited many historians to prove that the same betrayal of trust and privilege extended to monopolists, while disinheriting the mass of citizens, have ensued upon the national assumption of property in the soil of conquered countries in the Roman, the German, the English, and other traditions. Everywhere, with a fatal monotony to the slaves rescued from carnage by cupidity, the serfdom of the victors has succeeded, and both now stand upon the dreary level of an exploited proletariat. The Nation, the State, Government, has ever been an intermediary organ of spoliation, confiscating the soil from its cultivator and organizing landlordry.

Is Mr. Ingalls a State Socialist appealing to Government as a remedy for the evils it has caused? No; if nationalization is here quoted as a remedy against monopoly, it is only by deference to the reputation of Alfred Russell Wallace, who has artificially connected the limitation of proprietary land tenure with the revival of those feudal traditions which in the English land laws are still vivacious, and acknowledge the supreme title of the State as feudal chief.

Mr. Wallace pays homage to this in a *quit-rent* tax to be levied on the original value of the land distinguished from values added by labor, as in H. George’s plan, though not, as in the latter, levied up to its full value. This distinction would of necessity be arbitrary, be left to somebody’s discretion, or else really unequal by its assumption of equality; since between values and areas there is no parity.

For the rest, Mr. Wallace proposes occupancy as a principle of limitation, but no definite areas and no basis on which to compute them are stated. No British subject is to be excluded from occupancy, and sales freely allowed; but subletting prohibited,—a fantastic scheme of legislation. Mr. Ingalls relies exclusively on public opinion enlightened by science and the sense of justice for the restoration of the soil to the laborer; who on his side may help public opinion with a patent cyclone wire-fence cutter and a few bullet-headed arguments.

Mr. Wallace’s prospective liberality is not to touch any living soul among the privileged, but he forgets to add that it begs the question of that posterity which, educated in privilege, will have its own say about the execution of the new legislation, when it comes to the scratch. This legislation for the exclusive benefit of future generations may be admirably conservative in its *intentions* to avoid revolutionary bloodshed; it recommends itself especially to the priests, from whose promised treasures in heaven it has taken the quiescent hint, and both systems require equal doses of faith. Mr. Wallace, be it remembered, is

not merely a naturalist, which is positive, but an evolutionist, which is comparative, and a spiritualist, which is superlative, and may carry the endowment of prophecy. The feature of compulsory taxation, as applied to land *per se*, as an original value belonging to the State, representing the collective humanity, is a bit of political quackery common to Wallace and to George. The “Summary,” quoted from Wallace, does not provide for the *limitation* to which it alludes, in the clause of *occupying ownership*, which, by the employment of machinery and hired labor, might legally cover any number of acres. Probably Mr. Wallace has not formulated his plan in a business way, but merely suggested its aims and directions.

As to the extension by that promising youth, Clark, in the “higher law of property,” to “the bounty of Nature in the whole material universe outside of man,” reverting to Humanity, alias Uncle Sam, by a two per cent. death rate, Ingalls, no longer restrained by his respect for popular reputations, fearlessly pricks the economic bubble.

He computes that two per cent. on all assets, including land, would amount to a double tithe, which State and Church may share, and he says of *Taxation*, that *its power is the very essence of despotism*. About this artifice for “correcting Nature’s blunders,” he remarks: “What neither George nor Clark seem capable of comprehending is that the civil power to collect rent, make compulsory exchanges, and enforce unequal contracts is the evil to be abated, and not the inability of Nature to bestow her bounty as she desires, or to effect the economy she intends.”

How loose a thinker, and at the same time how besotted with the arrogance of despotic capitalism using government as its tool, is Henry George appears from a paragraph quoted by Ingalls, which begins with “All taxes must come from the produce of land and labor, since there is no other source of wealth than the union of *human exertion* with the material and forces of Nature,” and ends with “We can tax land whether cultivated or uncultivated or left waste, wealth whether used productively or unproductively, and labourers whether they work or play.” This metaphysical humbug about Nature as a preface to the most fantastic and arbitrary legislation, so fashionable with our demagogues, gives a pitiful idea of the public intelligence on which it can impose, and which mistakes for original genius of statesmanship the rehash of a criticism upon patent abuses, now ventilated for the hundred thousandth time, and which St. Simon, Fourier, Owen, and Proudhon completed in the last generation.

Mr. Ingalls in several places flouts “the empiricism of political platforms,” the petrification of legal enactments, speak of the multitude “fruitlessly following the *ignis fatuus* of legislating justice into human relations and rectifying wrong by use of the ballot,” “organizing temperance by legal prohibition,” etc.

He alludes here and there to Anarchy as if deferring to conventional prejudices; yet, to be a pronounced Anarchist, he lacks only the courage of his convictions.

Edgeworth.

[\[Return\]](#)

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.