

## SOCIALISM.

BY PROFESSOR FLINT, D.D., LL.D., AUTHOR OF "THEISM," ETC.

### VI.—NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

**S**Ocialism proposes to reconstruct and reorganize society. It has the merit of being not merely critical, but also, in intention at least, constructive. It seeks not simply to pull down, but also to build up; it would pull down only to build up; and it even would, so far as possible, begin to build up before pulling down, in order that society, in passing from its old to its new mode of life, may not for a moment be left houseless.

It has often been said that Socialism has shown itself much stronger in criticism than in construction. I cannot altogether assent to the statement. Socialism is nowhere weaker, it seems to me, than in its criticism of the chief doctrines of political economy. It is weak all over, because it has not had sufficient critical discernment to apprehend the essential laws of economic life. The leading representatives of Socialism, and especially the founders of the principal early schools of French Socialism, have shown no lack of constructive ingenuity. Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Comte were men of quite exceptional constructive power. They were unsuccessful constructors, not owing to any want of constructive ability, but because they had not a solid foundation of principles on which to construct, and chose some very bad materials with which to construct. Fourier, for example, displayed an extraordinary ingenuity in planning his *phalanges* and *phalansteres*; but of course it was wasted, for he was trying to accomplish the impossible, believing that he could so alter the conditions of life as to insure every person against requiring to do any hard or disagreeable work, secure to him eight meals a day, and provide him in abundance with all known pleasures, and even with many peculiar to the new era of existence.

If, however, by saying that Socialists have been more successful in criticism than in construction, is merely meant, that they have been more successful in pointing out the evils of our present social condition than in indicating efficient remedies for them, the statement is undoubtedly true; but it is true of many others than Socialists, and is no very severe censure. It is for all of us much easier to trace the existence and operation of social evils than to find the remedies for them; to detect the faults of any actual

system of society than to devise another which would be free from them, and free at the same time from other faults as bad or worse. Yet we must not on that account undervalue the criticism of social institutions and the exposure of what is defective and injurious in them. We shall never cure unless we know thoroughly what are the evils we ought to cure. In so far as socialistic criticism is true; in so far as it fixes our attention upon the poverty, misery, and wickedness around us—upon what is weak and wasteful, unjust and pernicious, in the existent constitution of society—and compels us to look at them closely, and to take them fully to heart: so far it does us real service.

But Socialists, as I began by saying, do not confine themselves to criticism. They make positive constructive proposals. One of these proposals is the subject of the present paper.

Nationalise the land. Private property in land is unjust in itself and injurious in its consequences. The land is of right the property of the nation, and in order that the nation may enjoy its right, labour reach its just reward, and pauperism be abolished, what is above all needed is the expropriation of landlords. This is what Mr. Henry George, Mr. Alfred R. Wallace, and many others recommend as a cure for the chief ills under which society is languishing. In early youth I myself held the views which they maintain, having become acquainted to some extent with a man whose name should not be forgotten in connection with this doctrine—a man of talent, almost of genius, an eloquent writer, as eloquent a talker—Patrick Edward Dove, the author, among other works, of a "Theory of Human Progression" and "Elements of Political Science," in which he advocated the nationalisation of the land ardently and skilfully. No one, perhaps, has more clearly and forcibly argued that the rent-value of the soil is not the creation of the cultivator, nor of the landlord, but of the whole labour of the country, and, therefore, should be allocated to the nation; that this would allow of the abolition of all customs and excise, and the imposition of a single tax of a kind inexpensive to collect; that it would unite the agricultural and manufacturing classes into one common interest, and

would secure to every labourer his share of the previous labour of the community, &c. I have long ceased, however, to believe in land nationalisation as a panacea for social misery.

I deny that individual property in land is unjust, and, consequently, that justice demands the nationalisation of land. It is necessary, however, to explain precisely what I understand by this denial. I do not mean by it, then, that an individual may justly claim an absolute proprietorship in land, an unlimited right alike to use or abuse land. Nay, I wholly disbelieve that any man can possibly acquire a right to such absolute proprietorship in anything. All human rights of proprietorship are limited—and limited in two directions—limited both by the law of perfect duty, and the legitimate claims of our fellow men; or, as the Theist and Christian may prefer to say, by the rights of God, and by the rights of society. If we have an absolute right to anything, it would seem that it must be to our own lives, yet we have no absolute right to them. We are morally bound to sacrifice our lives, whenever a great cause, whenever God's service, demands the sacrifice. Thus without an absolute right of property even in our own selves, we can still less have an absolute right of property in anything else. By no labour or price can we purchase an absolute right in anything, and so, of course, not in land. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." If these words be true (and Socialists often quote them as true), most certainly no man can reasonably regard himself as the absolute proprietor of any portion of the earth; but just as certainly can no man reasonably regard himself as the absolute proprietor of any portion of its fulness, or even of his own limbs, faculties, or life. In the strict or absolute sense there is but one Proprietor in the universe. No man's proprietorship is more than tenancy and stewardship.

But our rights of property in land, as in everything else, being thus necessarily subordinate to the sovereignty and limited by the moral law of God, they cannot possibly be absolute and unlimited as against society. The individual is a member of society; connected with it in many ways, benefited by it in many ways, indebted to it in many ways, and bound by the laws of morality to seek to promote its good, and, if need be, to sacrifice his personal interests to the general welfare. He can have no rights which are

in contradiction to his duties, no rights to do wrong to society, or even to do nothing for society. On the contrary, the society of which he is a member, to which he owes so much, by which his property is protected, and from which it is even largely derived, has obvious claims on him and his property, and may most righteously insist on their fulfilment. There is no reason why any exception should be made, or favour shown, in respect to property in land. Nay, as the welfare of a people is even more affected by property in land than by personality, the State may reasonably be expected to guard with special care against abuses of it, and to insist on its being held and administered only under such conditions as are consistent with, and conducive to, the general good.

Yet Socialists continually argue against the private ownership of land on the supposition that individual proprietors of land must be allowed an unlimited right of abusing their position. They think it relevant, for instance, to adduce instances of landlords who have exercised the power which proprietorship gave them in interfering with the religious and the political freedom of their tenants. But manifestly the proper inference to be drawn from such facts is, not that landlordism is in itself an evil, but simply that landlords who venture to act the part of despots in a free country should be punished, and compelled to pay due respect to the constitution of the country in which they live. No right of property in land would be violated should a landlord who persisted in interfering with either the religious or the civil liberties of his fellow-subjects be expropriated without compensation. Then, if the right of property in land be only a relative and conditioned right, what meaning or force is there in the argument so often and so confidently employed, that private property in land must be unjustifiable, because otherwise were a man rich enough to buy an English county he would be entitled to make a wilderness of his purchase, and to sow it with thorns, thistles, or salt; or even were he rich enough to buy up the world he would be entitled to prosecute all its other inhabitants as trespassers, or to serve them with writs of eviction? It would be just as reasonable to argue that a man rich enough to buy up all the pictures of Raphael, Titian, and Rembrandt, or all the copies of Homer and the Bible, Dante and Shakespeare, would be entitled to burn them all, and that, therefore, there should be no private property in pictures or books.

Proudhon wrote his celebrated treatise on

property to prove that property, meaning thereby the absolute right to use and abuse a thing, is theft; and he occupied about a third of it in contending that property is impossible; that there neither is, has been, nor can be such a thing as property: that property is not itself, but a negation, a lie, nothing. He has no less than ten elaborate arguments to this effect. His book was extremely clever, but so admirably adapted to make a fool of the public that it would have been very appropriately published on a first of April. No elaborate reasoning is needed to convince reasonable men that property understood as it was by Prudhon, if it were possible, would be theft; or that if society allow such theft—allow rights of property in land, or in anything else, which are clearly anti-social, plainly injurious to the community—it is foolish, and forgetful of its duty.

I do not maintain, then, that the individual ownership of land is an absolute or unlimited right. I do not even maintain it to be an essential or necessary right. It is not the only form of property in land which may be just. It has been generally, if not always, preceded by tribal or communal ownership, and it may be succeeded by collective or national ownership. It may be limited, conditional, modified in various ways according to the changing requirements of time and circumstance. What I hold in regard to it is simply this, that in itself, and apart from abuses, it is not unjust, but, on the contrary, as just as any other kind of individual property, or even of any other kind of property, individual or collective.

In order to establish the legitimacy of collective property in land, the illegitimacy of individual property in land is affirmed. But the connection between the one contention and the other is far from obvious. On the contrary, it is difficult to see how collective property in land can be right if individual property in land be necessarily wrong. If a tribe of savages may appropriate a portion of unowned territory as a hunting ground, surely an individual man may with as much justice appropriate a portion of unowned land through occupying and cultivating it,—or rather with more, as he has done more to the land. The title of savages to the land over which they roam is often a weak and questionable one, just because they have never really appropriated, cultivated, used it. The aborigines of Australia were hardly more entitled to be called the proprietors of Australia than were the kangaroos of Australia, for they had only, like the kangaroos, wandered

up and down in it. If any individual among them had made something like a garden of any portion of Australian soil his title to that piece of ground would have been much superior to that of his tribe to the hundreds of miles over which its members sought for their food.

It has never been shown that national property in land has any better foundation than individual property in land. A nation generally gets its land by occupation and conquest, and if these are good titles for it they are good titles for individuals. Appropriation through purchase and cultivation are better than these, and individual property is more frequently acquired by them than national property. The titles of the Norman followers of William the Conqueror to the lordship of English lands may have been morally far from good, but they were as good as William's own to the lordship of England; the right of the Norman individual was as good as that of the Norman State. If individual property in land then be unjust, we shall not escape from injustice by taking refuge in national property in land; for it must be equally or more unjust, seeing that it rests on the same or weaker grounds, and has been effectuated in the same or worse ways. The only mode of escape from the alleged injustice must be to allow of no property in land; to have all land unappropriated, free and open to all. But this would render land useless, or nearly so. If everybody is to have the same right to it nobody will get any good of it. The earth, however, can hardly have been designed to be useless. If, as Socialists frequently remind us, God has made it for the good of all, He cannot have so given it to all that it could benefit none. And certainly it is only through land becoming the property of some that it can become profitable to all, or indeed of almost any use to any.

It cannot reasonably be doubted that individual property in land was a decided advance and improvement on any of the forms of collective property in land which preceded it. It would not otherwise have everywhere displaced them in progressive societies; it would not otherwise have uniformly accompanied the growth of civilisation. The collective tenure of land was once the general rule: now it is the rare exception. Why? Because it was an economically feeble and defective system; because it cramped freedom, depressed energy, limited production, could not supply the wants of a large population, and hindered the accumulation of capital.

None of the objections against private property in land appear to me to be of any real force. Some argue thus: No man has made the earth or given to it its natural powers, and therefore no man is entitled to appropriate it and its powers to his own exclusive use, or to exact from another compensation for their use. Were this argument good no natural agent whatever could be justly appropriated, and all industry would be wrong, all production of wealth sinful. One man takes a piece of wood and makes it into a bow and arrows, to kill the creatures which are to serve him as sustenance; another takes a piece of ground, clears it, cleans it, digs it, plants in it the seeds of trees and herbs which will yield him food. In what respect is the latter less entitled to be left in undisturbed possession of the piece of land which he has made useful than the former of the piece of wood which he has made useful? In none. The natural qualities of the wood were as much the creation of God and His free gift to man as the natural powers of the soil; the soil not less than the wood has in the process of appropriation been converted from a natural and useless into an artificial and useful thing; and the men who have respectively so changed the wood and the soil have both justly become the owners of them, and are entitled either to keep them for their own use or to lend the use of them to others for a compensation. Agricultural land is very rarely the mere gift of nature; it is almost always an artificial and manufactured article. It is often an instrument of production most expensive to make, and generally also one most expensive to maintain in efficiency. Hence in any advanced stage of civilisation none except capitalists can be the proprietors of it without injury and injustice to the community.

Land, it is likewise often argued, so differs from other things that it ought not to be made property of like other things. As it is limited in amount, and the quantity of it cannot be increased, the ownership of it, we are told, is a monopoly to which no individual can be entitled. This is a very common yet a very weak argument. Only things which are limited are made property of; what is unlimited, or practically so, is not worth appropriating. Political economy does not concern itself about things the supply of which is unlimited. There is no social question as to the use of such things. But what articles of value are unlimited? What natural agents needing to be taken into account in the production of wealth are unlimited? None.

Stone, coal, iron, wood, &c., are all as limited as the surface of the ground. Limitation is a condition of all wealth, not a distinctive peculiarity of wealth in the form of land. That land is limited is the very reason why there is property in land. It is no reason for concluding that property in land must be an unjust monopoly, or a monopoly at all. Those who affirm that it is, merely show that they do not know what a monopoly is. If every man be free to go into the sugar trade, selling sugar is not a monopoly, although the quantity of sugar in the world is not unlimited. In like manner, the limited amount of land cannot make property in land a monopoly, provided there be, as there ought to be, free trade in land.

Another argument against private property in land, and one which is much relied on by most advocates of land nationalisation, is based on the fact that the value of land is largely due to the general labour and growth of wealth of the community. It is not only what the landlord does to his land which gives it the value represented by its rent. A piece of ground in the centre of London is of enormous value, not because of anything which its owner has done to it, but because of the industry and wealth of London. The socialistic inference is that a proprietor cannot justly profit by what thus owes its existence to the community; that the "unearned increment" derived from social labour, or general social causes and "conjunctures," should of right return to society. But here, again, it is overlooked that what is alleged is not more true of land than of other things; that all prices are as dependent as rents of land on the general labour and prosperity of the community; that if land in the centre of London rents high, it is because houses there rent high; and that if houses there rent high, it is because a vast amount of business is done in them. It is not only the owners of land in London who profit by the industry and prosperity of London, but also its professional men, merchants, tradesmen, and labourers. All of them, when times are good, when "conjunctures" are favourable, receive "unearned increments" as well as the landowners; all of them are in the same way indebted to the community. The large incomes of London physicians and London merchants, compared with those of physicians and merchants of equal ability in provincial towns, are as much due to an unearned increment as the high rents of the owners of the ground on which London is built. If the people of

London are rightfully entitled to the unearned increment in the rents of its ground-proprietors, they are entitled also to the unearned increment in the fees, salaries, and profits of all classes of its citizens. That they are entitled to it in any case has yet to be proved. That there is any way of exactly separating unearned from earned increment, and justly apportioning it among those who have contributed to produce it, has yet to be shown. That a city or a nation can have any better claim to it than an individual has never been shown, and is clearly even incapable of proof. For the value of land in London, for example, depends not only on the wealth of London, but on the wealth of England, and the wealth of England depends on the wealth of the world, on the labour, production, and abstinence of the world. If, therefore, the argument under consideration were valid, the British nation ought in justice to hand over to other nations no inconsiderable portion of the unearned increment contained in the wealth of its members.

The rise and fall of the rents of land, then, depend on the labour and good or bad fortune of society, no otherwise than the rise and fall of all other rents, of all prices, and of all values. There is nothing special or peculiar in the mode of their increase or the course of their movement which can warrant society to treat them in an exceptional way, and to deal with property in land differently from all other property. Easily proved as this truth is, and amply proved although it has often been, enthusiastic advocates of land-nationalisation, like Mr. Henry George and Mr. Alfred R. Wallace, cannot afford to acknowledge it. They have founded their whole system on the assumption that land alone, or almost alone, increases in value with the increase of population and wealth, and that in virtue of this law the landowners of a country by simply raising rents can and do appropriate all that labour and capital contribute to the production of national wealth. The assumption is altogether arbitrary, and undoubtedly contrary to fact. The man who can believe that land is in this country the exclusively, or even a specially remunerative kind of property; that the want of it is a necessary and chief cause of poverty, and the possession of it the infallible and abundant source of wealth, displays a remarkable power of adhering to a prepossession in defiance of its contradiction by experience. Is there any kind of property which increases

less in value in Britain than land? It is known not to have doubled in value during the last seventy years. It has certainly diminished in value during the last twenty years. There is no apparent probability of any relatively great or rapid rise in its value in the future. The vast increase of the national income since, say, 1820, has been almost wholly derived from other property than land. It is not the rule but the exception to make large fortunes, either by speculating in land, or cultivating land. The notion that the landowners are appropriating all the wealth of the nation, and keeping the other classes of society in poverty, can be entertained by no man of unprejudiced mind who is acquainted with the mass of evidence to the contrary accumulated by the recent researches of scientific economists and statisticians.

It has to be added that the connection of the individual with society is for the owners of land, as for other persons, the source of *undeserved decrements* as well as of *unearned increments*. This fact the advocates of land nationalisation strangely overlook, or unjustly ignore. They seem as if the conjuncture of social circumstances, the incalculable operation of social causes, only brought gain and wealth to the possessors of land; whereas, in reality, it as often brings to them loss and poverty. Riches sometimes flow in upon them, as upon other men, owing to the condition and fortune of the community; but from the same cause they as frequently "take to themselves wings and flee away." If, therefore, the State is, on the plea of justice, to appropriate landowners' increments so far as not individually earned, it must also become responsible for their decrements so far as socially produced. For society to seize on the socially caused increment, yet not to restore the socially caused decrement, in individual incomes, would be a manifestly mean and unfair procedure. Those who have recommended it in regard to the rents of land have been partly influenced by a false theory of the subject, and have neither looked calmly nor comprehensively at the subject. They have seen only one side of the shield. They have gazed so eagerly at the coveted increments as wholly to overlook the decrements, though equally real. Now, suppose that the British Government, about the year 1870, in the belief that landowners only benefit by their connection with society, had agreed to appropriate their unearned increments, but on condition of making up for their decrements

not due to their own mismanagement, should there be any: would not the bargain have been a wretched one for the British people during the fifteen years which followed? Why, they would have had decrements everywhere year after year, and increments nowhere. In some of these years, instead of being entitled to get anything from great landowners, like, for instance, the Duke of Bedford, they would have had to give them fifty per cent. Instead of being either foolish or unjust, it is really both the wisest and the justest policy which the State can pursue, not to attempt the impossible task of separating the social or unearned from the individual or earned portions in the incomes of any class of its citizens, but to leave them both to enjoy the gains and bear the losses which their connection with the nation involves.

For having thus argued at such length that justice does not demand the nationalisation of the land of the country, my excuse must be that so many persons are at present loudly asserting the contrary, and endeavouring to make it appear that private property in land is morally wrong, and that to expropriate landowners without compensation would be an innocent or a virtuous act.

I do not maintain that to nationalise the land would be in itself unjust. If private property in land may be just, so may national or collective property be. What I fail to see is, how national or collective property in land can be just if private or individual property therein must necessarily be unjust. Nationalisation of the land would be quite just if the present proprietors were bought out, and if men were left not less free than they are at present to purchase the use of the land in fair competition. It is quite possible to conceive of a kind of nationalisation of the land which would not interfere with the liberty of individuals in regard to the possession or tenure of land, and which would consequently not be Socialism at all in the sense in which I employ the term. Could it be shown that to nationalise the land by the national purchase and administration of it would be clearly for the good of the nation I should have no hesitation in advocating its nationalisation.

The present proprietors could in justice only demand for their land its fair market value. They may have in theory a right to the possession of it for all eternity, but this is not a right which will entitle or enable them to get more for it in fact than a sum equal to between twenty and thirty annual

rents. They could reasonably claim from the State, supposing the nationalisation of the land were resolved on, only its ordinary selling price. But this they could with perfect justice claim; this could not honestly be refused to them. To maintain the contrary is to advocate theft. The proposal of Mr. George and his followers to appropriate the rent of land by throwing on it all public burdens is a suggestion to theft of the meanest kind; to theft which knows and is ashamed of itself, and tries to disguise itself under the name and in the form of taxation. The State which adopts it will only add hypocrisy to theft. The proposal, also often put forward of late, that, on due intimation, property in land should be appropriated by the State without compensation, when present owners die, or after the lapse of twenty or thirty years' possession, is likewise one of flagrant dishonesty. Imagine three men: one invests his money in land, the second buys house-property, the third acquires bank-shares. Can any good reason be given why the capital of the first alone is, either at his death or after thirty years, to go to the nation, while that of the other two is to remain their own however long they may live and at their death to go to their heirs? Or is it in the least probable that a State unprincipled enough thus to appropriate the capital invested in land would long scruple to appropriate any kind of investments? There must be a radical change in the primary moral apprehensions and judgments of men before proposals such as these can be generally regarded as other than immoral.

If the nation, then, would become the sole proprietor of the land of the country, it must first buy out the present landowners. Any other course would be unjust. No other course is possible except through violence, revolution, civil war. But buying out the landowners would be a very foolish and unprofitable financial transaction for the nation. It could only be effected at a cost of about two thousand millions; the interest on which would amount to more than the net return of the land, which is in this country not above  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. It would not be, perhaps, an impossible financial operation, but it would certainly be a very difficult one; and it would divert an enormous capital from profitable spheres of employment, necessarily increase taxation, and tend not to any improvement in the condition of farmers but to rack-renting. I shall not, however, occupy the space still at my disposal in showing that land nationalisation accomplished by purchase

would be a very disadvantageous investment of national capital, because this has been often unanswerably shown, and can hardly be said to have been ever seriously contested. Socialists themselves—all of them, at least, except credulous believers in the power of the State to work industrial and economical miracles—do not deny it. On the contrary, it is just because they cannot help admitting it, cannot fail to see that land-nationalisation by purchase would be a case where honesty would not pay, that they are forced to advocate schemes of land-nationalisation by open or disguised confiscation that are distinctly dishonest.

The nationalisation of the land has been advocated as a solution of the social question. By the solution of a question is meant an answer to it, a settlement of it. But the nationalisation of the land would answer no social question, would settle none. It would only raise in a practical form the question, What is the nation to do with the land? Only when this question is settled, or practically answered in a satisfactory manner, will ever the land question be solved. But the slightest reflection will show that the question which would arise as to how the land when nationalised ought to be made use of must prove an extremely difficult one to answer aright. Those who, like the great majority of the advocates of land-nationalisation, merely expatiate in a general way on the advantages which they conceive would flow from the measure, avoiding to state and explain what system of land administration they would substitute for that which at present prevails, must be regarded as vague thinkers and empty talkers; yet none the less likely on that account to influence dangerously the ignorant and inconsiderate.

The nation might deal in various ways with the land which it has nationalised. It might, for example, proceed forthwith to denationalise it by creating a new class of proprietors, say, peasant proprietors. But one can hardly suppose that it would be so inconsistent as thus to stultify itself. The socialistic arguments against property should be as applicable to private property on a small as on a large scale. Buying out one class of proprietors in order to put in another class would be an obviously absurd procedure. The new proprietors could hardly expect other classes of the nation to pay, merely for their benefit, the interest of the enormous debt incurred in buying out the old proprietors. These classes might justly, and no doubt would, look to them to pay it. But peasant

proprietors, and, indeed, any class of proprietors so burdened, could never maintain themselves and prosper. Still less could they pay a land-tax additional to that required to yield a sum equivalent to the interest of the debt incurred by the State in the purchase of the land. Yet what Socialists aim at is to impose such a tax on land as will render every other species of taxation unnecessary. This method, then, would neither satisfy any principle of those who contend for land-nationalisation, nor serve any desirable end. The proprietors of the new system would be in a far worse position than the farmers of the old; the use of the land would be restricted to a class as exclusively as before; and the only change in the relation of the State or nation to the land would be its liability for the enormous debt incurred by its purchase.

The State might also let the land when nationalised to tenant-farmers. This is the plan which, were all private ownership of land abolished, would produce least change in the agricultural economy of the country, and which Government could follow with least trouble and most sense of security. Hence it is the plan which has found most favour with those who advocate land nationalisation. But how, then, would the rents be determined? If by competition, Socialism, which professes to set aside competition, would be untrue to itself in conforming to it. While rents would not be lowered, the general community would be as much shut out from enjoyment of the land as it now is, and the expenses of the Government so increased by the management of it as largely to deduct from the rent. If, on the other hand, the rents should be fixed otherwise than by competition, and in accordance with some truly socialistic principle, a just and equitable principle of the kind has yet to be discovered. It is as impossible, apart from competition, to determine what are fair rents as what are fair wages. If fixed otherwise they must be fixed lower than competition would determine, otherwise the farmers will be aggrieved and driven to resistance. But the more they are thus lowered the greater must be the wrong done to the rest of the community, which instead of being benefited by the return from the land will be burdened with an increased measure of the debt on the land. If, then, the changes required by this plan be comparatively slight, the advantages which can reasonably be expected from it are equally slight. The condition of farmers would not be improved; the condition of agricultural labourers would

not be improved; the condition of the general community would be rendered much worse, as it would be placed in the position of a landlord, the rental of whose land fell far short of the interest of the debt on it. Private landowners, indeed, would be got rid of; and the members and agents of the Government would take their place. But would this be of real advantage? In all probability it would be the reverse. A democratic government represents only that political party in a country which happens for the time to command the largest number of votes. As it will not be long in power unless its budgets are of a popular and cheerful kind, it would be very impolitic to spend, as great private landowners have done, vast sums in agricultural experiments which may not prove financially successful, or in improvements which will bear fruit only in a somewhat distant future. Yet unless this be done the land and agriculture of a nation will not prosper but will rapidly deteriorate. The agents of a modern democratic government, or, in other words, of a party government which represents merely an unstable political majority, cannot but have far too much interest in immediate returns and far too little in the permanent amelioration of the soil, to make good land-administrators. It is generally recognised by those who have studied the subject, that were the soil of a country left entirely to the management of any class of mere farmers it would soon be, if not ruined, seriously deteriorated. Hence probably, in the case of the land being nationalised, it would be found expedient to allow the occupiers of land under the State fixity of tenure and judicial rents, or, in other words, a virtual proprietary right and a monopolistic privilege. But this state of things would certainly be neither more just nor more profitable to the general community, and especially to the labouring classes, than the system which at present prevails.

It is unnecessary to discuss either the proposal that the State should restore agricultural village communities or that it should create agricultural co-operative associations. In exceptional circumstances both the agricultural village community and the agricultural co-operative society might, perhaps, be established with good results under the fostering care and guidance of a sagacious, generous, and wealthy individual; but the former has so many economic defects, and the success of the latter implies so many favourable contingencies not likely to be found in conjunction, that no prudent government

will feel itself warranted to spend any considerable sum of public money in calling them into existence. No person in this country, so far as I am aware, has been so unwise as to contend that the land should be nationalised with a view to a general adoption of either of these forms of rural economy.

Still another method, however, might be adopted, and it is the one which would unquestionably be most consistent with the principles of Socialism. The State might take into its own hands the whole management of the whole land of the country. It might organize agriculture, as it does the art of war, by the formation of armies of industry, superintended and guided by competent officers of labour. Thomas Carlyle, it will be remembered, recommended that "the vagrant chaotic Irish" should be provided with plenty of spade-work, formed into regiments under "sternly benignant drill-sergeants," and given suitable pay and rations for their labour. There are Socialists who generalise the suggestion, and talk enthusiastically of organizing agriculture and creating armies of agricultural industry after the model of our modern military system. But, however attractively this scheme may be presented, it is, in reality, one for the introduction of slavery. The desire for freedom must be extinguished before it can be realised. It would degrade the agricultural labourer from the status of a moral being. It would impose a tremendous task and confer a terrible power on the State. It would enormously increase the temptations to corruption both of rulers and of ruled in connection with the appointment of officers of labour. Politically, therefore, it would be a retrograde and pernicious system. And economically, also, it would be faulty in the extreme. In order to be efficient it would require to be most expensive, and would consequently involve a constant drain of capital from manufactures and commerce to agriculture. The expense of adequately officering an army of agricultural labourers would necessarily far exceed the expense of officering an army of soldiers, as the difficulty of effective supervision is vastly greater; yet even in the case of the latter the cost of officering is not less than half the entire cost.

The nationalisation of the land, I may add, would not answer, but only raise, the question, How is the nation, as sole proprietor of the land and its produce, to act in relation to foreign trade? It is a difficult question for the Socialist. If the State engage in and encourage foreign trade it will fail to get free



of the competition which Socialists denounce, and must conform its agricultural policy to that of its competitors. If it set itself against it, it will be unable to feed a large population, and must be content to rule a poor and feeble nation. The land of Great Britain cannot yield food to half the people of Great Britain. In order that Britain may retain her place among the nations, it is absolutely necessary that her vast urban and manufac-

turing population shou'd have cheap food, and therefore that the cultivators of the land should not receive high prices for its produce.

The nationalisation of the land, then, is not demanded by justice, and would not be a solution of the social problem. Its nationalisation on socialistic principles would be contrary to justice, and incompatible with social prosperity.

---