

NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

SIR,—Before offering any general remarks on the above scheme, it is necessary to state very broadly and distinctly the point of view from which one approaches the consideration of such subject. However much many of us may not only admire, but sympathise with, the arduous labours of able philosophical minds, we must be careful not to confound the views and opinions put forward by men of such calibre and nobility with what are really the practical aspects of questions coming forward constantly for consideration and actual treatment in our own day and generation. Much in the scheme before me, therefore, I may broadly say, may be worthy of serious practical comment and consideration a generation hence; but it has no claim to be put forward within the scope of practical politics in our own time, and therefore must be regarded with suspicion and distrust if pushed by philosophical thinkers into the arena of public discussion. A thing out of date is like a six-months child; it has no chance of life, because the functions which should have brought it forth at maturity have not been properly fulfilled. I have always (at least, of late years, after much philosophic study) regarded practical and progressive politics—the Liberal politics of our day—as the ex-

pression of the growth of the nation, following out its own instincts and genius in gradual and natural development, and expressing such in law when ripe for such expression. The difference between the leaders of a people and the people themselves is only that the former are the greater minds of the people, and see and appreciate and know and ascertain sooner than the many what are the wants and requirements of each succeeding age. Those who are ahead of their age are the philosophers; those who are behind are the Tories.

Upon the general merits of this comprehensive scheme, therefore, from a philosophical point of view, I do not propose to enter. But its propounders must not think, as a consequence, that I have no sympathy with their prospective appreciation of what society may eventually come to. Still, on practical grounds, viewed in the light and reason of our own age and day, the scheme has one grave defect. It starts from an abstract and philosophical basis, and has no relation whatever to existing circumstances, laws, or conditions of society in Great Britain or elsewhere. My view is that we shall arrive at these higher grounds of civilisation naturally in due time, without endeavouring to get there by the aid of a balloon. Neither has the scheme, therefore, as a necessary consequence from what I have just said, any relation to "the lines of the Constitution" which has governed England in a rough and ready manner for so many centuries. I have elsewhere shown in print that I believe this Constitution to be philosophically sound, whatever modifications or improvements or reforming alterations it may have in the process of time to undergo. It therefore follows that, from my own point of view, and as the result of my own studies, I cannot regard this scheme as sound in itself, apart from the fact that it is impracticable. I believe the working out of these problems is the old-fashioned English method of reform, however slow and clumsy and difficult such process may be. To be so slow and difficult only proves that it is the expression of actual life, plus as much of the intelligence of each age as can be worked into it.

Turning now to the more practical aspects of the politics of our day, I must be allowed to express a hope that our reformers will not coquette with this scheme of nationalisation. To do so would only be to retard healthy and sound reform for several years, and also give occasion for those oratorical and denunciatory addresses which the Tories furnish the country with when any speculative mode of reform is advanced. It would also be an unwise and unpatriotic step, as those that have at heart the welfare of their country would not entertain the scheme. Without discussing its details, therefore, I must be allowed to let it pass.

The views which are advocated by the Farmers Alliance seem to me those which are most likely to commend themselves to the country. They are practical, and they follow the "lines of the Constitution." If I may be allowed to quote a commonplace historic incident, exactly as the barons of old forced their Sovereign to sign their liberties, so will the farmers of England shortly force Parliament to sign their enfranchisement from obsolete laws and rules and conditions of tenure of land. The growth of public opinion as to the necessity of agricultural reform; the movement among the farmers themselves for better and sound conditions of tenure; the wants of the community generally, in the way of an increased supply of food, and therefore, a corresponding sympathy in the improved condition of the agricultural classes—clearly prove that some important and national reform is close upon us, so far as the landed interest is concerned.

Many conscientious men of the farming class are, however, experience shows, holding back; not because they do not heartily approve of and believe in such movement, but because on party grounds they think they will be leaving their old friends—who, however, are not really their friends, but their enemies, and of the nation generally, as witness the speeches and views of many gentlemen of the Tory type of late, who seem not to have the faintest realisation of the great social and political changes necessary in the interests of the farming class, and through them of the whole community. The question of party, therefore, as to which farmers must support, settles itself. They must support the party of progress, whatever political name they or the party may be known by. This is, indeed, a national question; the two strands (Liberal and Conservative) must be woven into one rope, in order to pull forward, "with a long pull and a strong pull and a pull altogether," the work of the State.

It is not actually necessary that a Labourers' Bill go hand in hand with the Farmers' Alliance Bill. The labourers will be certain of their enfranchisement in getting their votes; and a short measure might subsequently be passed giving them a legal right to a small quantity of land for cultivation; and money might be advanced to them (on principles inculcating thrift, which Mr. Fawcett would be admirably qualified for working out) to buy their homes and gardens when and where desirous of doing so. But the greater measure would then remain to be passed; viz., a measure dealing with all the higher aspects of the land question, such as devolution, entail, settlement, and appropriation. A Bill of this kind must necessarily proceed from the Government; it should not be the work of a class, or of legitimate and constitutional agitation to promote it, though these may be actually necessary to secure its

success.—T. B. WOODWARD, Hardwick Bank, near Tewkesbury, Nov. 4.

P.S.—It is necessary to point out, as shown by the date of this letter, that it was written some days before the appearance in the *Mark Lane Express* of Mr. Wallace's powerful letter of the 14th inst. The cogency of the arguments of that letter I do not dispute. But I think Mr. Wallace's difficulties would commence as soon as he endeavoured to make his view practical. I will only pause now to point out the first two difficulties that occur to me. "Perfect freedom" in farming does not necessarily imply exemption from occasional supervision. Much indolent and bad farming would occur if this were the case. And what guarantee are we to have that "foremen and bailiffs" do not become "sub-tenants in disguise," and that "jobbery" does not arise in this way? Let us enfranchise the farmer, and get rid of the drink curse among the working classes generally, and leave those who come after us to give practical consideration to schemes of land nationalisation.—T. B. W.