LAW AND COMMUNISM.

THE Land Nationalisation Society, of which a distinguished man of science is, strange to say, President, has not, in spite of unremitting exertions, succeeded in attracting much notice from the public. Since Mr. Henry George, whose perverted ingenuity made him an object of some interest, and who played such tricks with political economy as made the professors weep, returned to California, the body which he created or inspired has languished in comparative obscurity. Mr. George is said to be now engaged in the useful and honourable task of persuading his countrymen that their protective tariff cripples their industry and impoverishes themselves. Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, who is, we believe, a Protectionist, carries on Mr. George’s work of proving, or rather asserting, that private property in land is the legal recognition of theft. Mr. Wallace’s deviations from the sphere of natural science, in which he has done such admirable work, have hitherto, if we mistake not, led him to adopt the doctrines of Spiritualists, Protectionists, and confiscators of the land. The famous proverb about the shoemaker and his child has seldom received a more striking illustration.

The Saturday Review. 413

Mr. Wallace’s deviations from the sphere of natural science, in which he has done such admirable work, have hitherto, if we mistake not, led him to adopt the doctrines of Spiritualists, Protectionists, and confiscators of the land. The famous proverb about the shoemaker and his child has seldom received a more striking illustration.

The Land Nationalisation Society has discovered that, last four centuries has been one of progress towards that property, for it explains the technical meaning of the word "estate." Put to general purposes, it is simply a misleading fallacy. The ignorant employment of legal maxims is a fruitful source of error. There is a sense in which it is true that "an Englishman’s house is his castle." But to infer that a policeman might not break into a house to arrest a murderer would be a grave mistake. The other authorities cited by the Society are equally irrelevant, except a sentence of Mr. Froude’s to the effect that "land never was private property in that personal sense in which we speak of a thing as our own—made it of any real value—made it anything more than a portion of the earth’s surface. Mr. Herbert Spencer says that, “however difficult it may be to embody the theory of the nationalization of the land in fact, equity sternly commands it to be done,” which seems to show that equity, unlike law, caput ad impossibilia. Every one who is not a member of the Land Nationalisation Society knows that the history of the English land laws for the last four centuries has been one of progress towards that rational freedom of the private owner which is anathema to Mr. Wallace and his friends.

Mr. James Mill said that “no man made the land,” he either perpetrated a truism or inculcated a paradox. Bedford Level was not created by any human agency. But a judicious expenditure of landlords’ capital alone made it of any real value—made it anything more than a portion of the earth’s surface. Mr. Herbert Spencer says that, “however difficult it may be to embody the theory of the nationalization of the land in fact, equity sternly commands it to be done,” which seems to show that equity, unlike law, caput ad impossibilia. Every one who is not a member of the Land Nationalisation Society knows that the history of the English land laws for the last four centuries has been one of progress towards that rational freedom of the private owner which is anathema to Mr. Wallace and his friends.