

## The Great Land Question.

AGITATED BY HENRY GEORGE, MICHAEL DAVITT, PROF. WALLACE, DR. EADON  
AND REFORMATORY SOCIETIES IN GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY.

THEY who in the fearless pursuit of truth attain ideas for which the age is not prepared are recognized as Utopians. The dullards who have not the desire, and *therefore* have not the capacity to seek new truth, languidly regard as dreamers the men who talk of things so foreign to their own habits. The more dogmatic class, inspired by the dogmatism of the colleges, array themselves in scorn to repel new thought. But, fortunately, as men die they fail to transmit *all* of their bigotry to posterity, and new men come in with new ideas.

In that new world of thought to which anthropology belongs, the basis of social order is understood, and I felt it my duty in 1847 to present the law of justice in relation to "The Land and the People," with very little hope that the doctrine presented would ever become in my own lifetime a basis of political action, since other ideas equally true and equally demonstrable have to bide their time. But the toilers who suffer from the lack of employment have furnished an eager audience to the land reformers, and the great land question is destined to agitate the nations for a century to come. The *Boston Globe* recently called attention to the original presentation of this subject at Cincinnati, in the following editorial:—

"There seems to be a notion prevalent that the ideas advocated by Mr. George are novel. But they are not. They once more illustrate the familiar fact that there is nothing new under the sun. Much the same doctrines were urged here in America at least forty years ago, and were the subject of comment in the papers of the day.

"Dr. J. R. Buchanan, now of Boston, presented the case at Cincinnati in 1847 much as it is now put by Mr. George and Mr. Davitt. The *Memphis Appeal* of September 23 of that year, gave an elaborate review of Dr. Buchanan's essay, in which it said:

"'The Land and the People' is the title of a well-written pamphlet from the pen of Dr. J. R. Buchanan of Cincinnati, formerly known to our citizens as an able and accomplished lecturer on the science of neurology. It is quite plain from the production in question that the doctor has not confined himself to the study of the physiological system, of which we believe he is the author, but has evidently thought deeply upon other subjects vitally concerning the well being and progress of society. Whatever may be thought of the positions of this pamphlet, we cannot deny to it the merit of great beauty of style and force of logic. The whole argument is based upon the proposition that the earth is the original gift of God to man, and as such belongs of right to the human race in general, and not to the individuals of the race separately. The author insists that the land is not the product of man's labor any more than air, sunshine, or water, and that originally this gift of God ought to have been left as free as those lighter, but

indispensable elements must ever be, from their very nature. The artificial and unnatural laws which have sprung up and become fastened upon society have thrown immense obstacles in the way of the bare perception of this great truth, as the doctor deems it, besides at the same time interposing barriers almost insurmountable to its reception and adoption into the framework of government. It is insisted, however, that these obstacles may be overcome, and the rights of the people restored to them, without any injustice to the present proprietors of land, and without any convulsions in the great elements of society.

“Dr. Buchanan explained in his essay, as Mr. George does in his works now, that he did not mean to annul the existing titles to land. ‘Far from it,’ Dr. Buchanan said. ‘Such a scheme would be a miserable climax of folly and injustice, fit only to render the great principle equally odious and ridiculous.’ The doctor insisted that he proposed to ‘maintain in legislation the broad principle that the nation owns the soil, and that this ownership is paramount to all individual claims,’ and from this fundamental proposition as a corner-stone the superstructure was to be built up. The present proprietors of the soil were not to be disturbed in their possession, and the government was not to interfere in the details of agriculture, renting and leasing estates, determining possession, etc. But the owners were to be considered as the tenants of the nation, paying rent to it for the benefit of the people at large. This rent was to be extremely small at first, estimated upon the value of the soil alone, without the improvements, that being the original gift of nature, free to all. It was to be increased, however, in the course of two generations, until a rent of about 5 per cent should have been exacted from all the tenants of the nation — that is, from all who occupied any portion of the soil. The rent thus raised — a vast revenue — was to be applied to the establishment of free colleges, free schools, free libraries, and other institutions calculated to improve and benefit the citizen.

“This is the doctrine, substantially, as put forth at the present time by Mr. George, and by so many persons supposed to be entirely new. Again we remark that ‘there is nothing new under the sun.’”

This subject will be taken up hereafter in the *JOURNAL OF MAN*. Its progress as a policy will be noted, its writers reviewed, and the dictates of dispassionate science presented. It is too late to intercept the folly and crime that have surrendered the rights of the people in the American continent, but not too late to begin reclamation of our lost sovereignty.

We shall have ample discussions of this subject. Mr. George has given us “Progress and Poverty” (cloth, \$1.00; paper, 20 cents); “Social Problems,” at the same price; “The Land Question” (paper, 10 cents); “Property in Land” (paper, 15 cents); “Protection or Free Trade” (cloth, \$1.50). At Baltimore a volume has been issued as one of the John Hopkins University studies in political and historical science, written by Shosuke Sato, Ph. D., Special Commissioner of the Colonial Department of Japan. N. Murray is the publishing agent, and the price in paper is \$1.00. This work is

a "History of the Land Question in the United States," and describes the formation of the public domain by purchase and cession, and the entire administration of the land system of the United States. The land laws of early times and of other countries are stated in the introduction. Another very instructive work recently issued is entitled, "Labor, Land, and Law; a Search for the Missing Wealth of the Working Poor," by William A. Phillips; published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Mr. Phillips has been a member of Congress from Kansas, and his work is an extensive view of the land question in other countries as well as the United States.

In the near future this must be the burning question of politics and statesmanship, as it is at present in Great Britain. The agitations in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have long been on the verge of bloody conflict, and a Land League has been formed in Germany at Berlin, of which Dr. A. Theodor Stamm is president, having for its object the transfer of land ownership from individuals to the State. A newspaper at Berlin is devoted to its objects.

A few facts show how inevitable the conflict that is coming, while the agricultural classes of all Europe are being driven by American competition deeper and deeper into poverty and inability to pay rent, which can never be again what it has been. The *New York Evening Post* very justly says: "The truth is, we are witnessing in Ireland the gradual disappearance of rent. The land is no longer able to support anybody but the actual cultivator. To make this process peaceful, and as far as possible harmless to all parties, ought to be the chief concern of the Government." Landlordism in Great Britain has small claims upon our sympathy, for the great body of the land is held by titles which have no other basis than the robbery of old by military power. According to John Bright, in England and Wales one hundred persons own 4,000,000 acres; in Scotland twelve persons own 4,346,000 acres, and seventy persons own the half of Scotland; nine tenths of all the land in Scotland belongs to 1,700 persons, the rest of the population having only one tenth. In Ireland less than 800 persons own half of all the land, and 330 persons own two thirds of all the land in Scotland; 402 members of the House of Lords hold 14,240,912 acres, with a rental of \$56,865,637.

It is no wonder that the tenants of the Duke of Argyle have risen against the police that enforce the landlord's claims, and that the Welsh resistance against tithes has impoverished the Welsh clergy.

The Irish agitation has a just basis, which was well stated by the *Boston Herald* as follows:—

"The assertion has been frequently made that rents have increased more in England than in Ireland; but one of the ablest English statisticians, a man who can hardly be accused of partiality toward Ireland, has recently pointed out that while in the forty years from 1842 to 1882 the rents in England increased on an average 15 per cent, the rents in Ireland in the same period increased

on an average 20 per cent, and this, too, in a country where farming has been carried on on a low scale of culture, where the landlord has done practically nothing for his tenant, and where the results of the harvest are more uncertain than in England. It is the constant desire that the Irish landlords have shown in the past to get the last pound of flesh and the last drop of blood out of their tenants that is the cause of the present detestation in which they are held by the latter."

In the United States the public domain has been criminally surrendered to monopoly. Commissioner Sparks speaks in his reports of the "widespread, persistent land robbery." The fences of land robbers have been removed from 2,700,000 acres, and over 5,000,000 will probably be redeemed. In fifteen years, 179,000,000 of acres have been given by Congress to various railroad corporations, a larger territory than the empire of Germany. Before these wrongs were consummated, nearly forty years ago, I called a public meeting in the Cincinnati court house, which protested against this surrender of the people's domain. The present agitation will probably bring it to an end. In the Congressional debates last June Mr. Eustis said "the railroad men had made fortunes as mushrooms grow in the night; a coterie of such men had enriched themselves at the expense of the people of the United States. They did not observe equity, honesty, or good faith, and only came here to assert their legal rights and to defy the authority and power of Congress and the people of the United States to deal with them. The great question to-day was whether the government was superior to the corporations, or the corporations superior to the government. The corporations had exhibited shameless and unpardonable oppression and extortion, as well as effrontery in their dealing with the people and the Government of the United States." "Our people and our country," said the speaker, "were only able to stand the drafts thus made on their liberties because they were yet young and strong and vigorous." Mr. Eustis advocated the forfeiture of every acre of land that had not been earned according to the strict limitations and conditions imposed in the grant.

In the house of Representatives, December 11, 1886, Mr. Payson of Illinois, on behalf of the Committee on Public Lands, called up the bill declaring a forfeiture of the Ontonagon and Brule River land grant. In detailing the circumstances of the grant Mr. Payson declared that from the organization of the Ontonagon and Brule River Company no step had ever been taken by it which did not indicate that that organization had been purely speculative and effected for the purpose of getting land from the General Government. It had been an attempt at bare-faced robbery from its inception down to the present time. Referring to the statement made by persons interested in the road, that it had been accepted by commissioners and reported upon as having been built in first-class style, he asserted that miles of the road had no other ballast than ice and snow, which, melting in spring, left the rails held in suspension eight inches above the ground. In support of his assertion,

he produced photographs of various sections of the road and commented upon them, much to the amusement of the House. A bridge, as depicted by the photograph, he declared to be humped like a camel and backed like a whale. A section of a mile in length showed but one railroad tie; while a 250-foot cut was shown as being filled with logs and brush. The bill was passed without division. It forfeits 384,600 acres.

The march of monopoly must be arrested in the United States and Mexico. A New England company has obtained from Mexico eighteen millions of acres in lower California. All over the world the curse of land monopoly flourishes undisturbed. The natural result of landlordism everywhere is already foreshadowed in this country by the example of William Scully in Illinois. The *Chicago Tribune* one year ago devoted four columns to the career of Scully, a resident of London, who owns large tracts of American land, and has introduced the Irish landlord system in managing his American property. The *Tribune* said:—

“Scully is one of the chief figures among the alien proprietors of American soil, and has introduced the meanest features of the worst forms of Irish landlordism on his estates in this country. He has acquired in the neighborhood of 90,000 acres of land in Illinois alone, at a merely nominal figure—50 cents to \$1 per acre, as a rule. His career as an Irish landlord was a history of oppression and extortion, that was appropriately finished by a bloody encounter with his tenants. He was tried and acquitted on the charge of double murder, but became so unpopular that in 1850 he sold most of his Irish property, and has since devoted himself to building up a landlord system in Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, and other States. He made entries of the public domain through the medium of the land warrants issued to Mexican war soldiers, which he purchased at the rate of 50 cents per acre. In Logan County, Ill., alone, he has 40,000 to 45,000 acres. It is the almost universal testimony that Scully's rule in that county has reduced 250 tenants and their families to a condition approaching serfdom. Furthermore, Scully pays no taxes, the tenants signing ironclad agreements to assume the same, but they are required to pay to Scully's agents the tax money at the same time as the rentals—the 1st of January of each year; whereas, the agent need not turn over the taxes to the county treasurer until about June 10 following. It is suggested that Scully probably makes a handsome percentage on the tax money remaining in his hands for five months. It is also shown that a great deal of this alien's land entirely escapes taxation, thus increasing the burden on other property holders; that he takes the most extraordinary precautions to secure his rent, executing a cast iron lease, with provisions that mortgage the tenant's all, scarcely allowing his soul to escape, and making it compulsory for small grain to be sold immediately after harvest, no matter what may be the condition of the market; that grain dealers are notified not to buy of the tenants until Scully's rent is paid; in short, that Scully has founded a land system so exacting that it is only paralleled in

Ireland, and rules his tenantry so despotically that few can be induced to tell the story of their wrongs, justly feeling that it would involve ruin to them."

Much sympathy has been excited by the reports of cruel evictions in Ireland, to gratify the merciless avarice of landlords, and for the justice of these reports we need not depend on Irish testimony alone. American travellers have told enough, and the *London Standard* of Jan. 18 says: "Some of this winter's evictions have been inhuman spectacles, fit only for a barbarous country and a barbarous age."

There is nothing intrinsically wrong in the relation of landlord and tenant, which should excite a prejudice against the landlord; on the contrary, many landlords have been a blessing to the communities in which they lived; but our land system is a conspicuous part of a grandly false social system based on pure selfishness, which makes all men jealous competitors, and destroys the spirit of fraternity.

Our social system tends ever to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, and the struggle in Ireland is but the forerunner of a movement that will extend around the globe. Is there no remedy for the evils? Indeed there is! Sixty years of thought have made me familiar with the evils and the remedies. Some of the remedies are coming to the front at present. All will in time be presented in the *JOURNAL OF MAN*.

Land reform is but one of the great measures that progress demands. The first and greatest is a **PERFECT EDUCATION** for all, moral and industrial. The second is **SPIRITUAL RELIGION**. The third is **JUSTICE TO WOMAN**. The fourth, which is **JUSTICE IN LEGISLATION**, includes land reform, financial reform, and many other reforms. The fifth is **INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATION**. The sixth is **TEMPERANCE**.

The first reform includes all the others. The second would ultimately bring all things right, and so would the third in a longer lapse of time.

**ANTHROPOLOGY** is the intellectual guidance into all reforms, and therefore should precede all. Hence it is the leading theme of this *Journal*.

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