CORRESPONDENCE.

NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

Sir,—The interesting letters of Mr. A. B. Wallace upon "NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND" have not been followed by such criticisms as might have been looked for. It is otherwise with supporters of their principles, that silence implies acceptance. I do not propose to waste much time in enlarging upon the scheme from a conservative standpoint, but to inquire whether the suggested changes would be followed by desirable consequences.

In passing, I may be allowed to take a general exception to the reasoning of Mr. Wallace—reasoning arising from the fact that this is a manufacturing rather than an agricultural country. It may be questioned, too, whether the proposed system will deprive of the opportunity of purchasing land through rise of price, consequent upon accumulation of capital. By that means, the whole population. The town therefore owes him, not only in the towns where his works are situated, but in the immediate vicinity of his residence.

There is a main object with land-reformers that the tenant should be protected against a rise upon his own improvements. The precautions which are intended to prevent this form a marked feature of the Farmers' Alliance Land Bill. Even as that bill now stands, however, the unhappy tenant is permitted to appropriate any difference there may be between his enhanced rent and the returns upon the outlay in reference to which that rent was raised. By Walloe's scheme the landlord takes the place of the tenant, and if the measure is absolutely confiscatory; such improvements as have been described are beyond the capacity of any Government official to estimate. A value coming down from any central office would be compelled to take things as he found them, and in conformity with Mr. Wallace's inflexible schemes, the liberal benefactor would receive with the acquisition the expense of furnishing the value of the "quality or productivity of the land itself," whatever that abstraction may be, and no more.

At the end of "ten years (more or less) after the passing of the Act the whole land of the country will become the property of the State." The hardships entailed upon its unfortunate possessors would be extreme, and if anything more extreme, they might still be mitigated, if no margin of grace whatever were allowed. Not one acre of land would be sold during that time except at ruinous loss. The owners of genuine property, who are advertised that they have only the "mercy" of their confiscators to trust to, would throw their land into a glutted market. The more benighted had been thy dealings with the claimants the greater would be the prospect of their loss, as long as the gentlemanly averting from losses by an example already taken. At the end of the ten years would come the fresh evils, "No doubt an extensive readjustment of holdings would then take place." The same "limiting right" would attract an infinity of claimants, while none would be willing to settle on barren acres.

The continued struggle for the spoil would beget every sort of demoralisation, discontent, litigation and probable violence, since every malcontent would be justified in asserting extrusion from his "right." To this may be added the practical difficulties attending the genuine agriculturist. How is the meed of capital to be raised for agriculture if at any time and in any place one of the "millions" may claim his "birth-right" out of part of the farmer's holding? There, indeed, one way in which existing landowners might lose is. It is possible on paper, but in practice it would involve civil war. As land was approached for permanent tenancy, tenant-right — to which perpetuity is to be attached — would rapidly rise in value: for unless the official valuers were to be followed by an army of secret police, it would be impossible to prevent competition for advantageous holdings. The official valuation would, in short, be to the real value of tenant-right as in the days of army-purchase the regulation price of commissions was to the price actually paid. But in order to secure this competition with its fruits it would be necessary for the landlord to be in complete command of the land and tenant-right at the end of the ten years, and this could only be through wholesale and unplanned evictions immediately before the close of the period. The occupiers would be, if possible, for a while driven from the soil.

Similar ill consequences would be begotten in towns. There, no doubt, evictions would be more difficult; but the uncertainty of the values and natural doubts of the "mercy" of the official valuations would preclude the expenditure of one penny during the ten years interval upon the dwellings of the poor. The artisan looking forward to his precarious future might turn his applications into the small farmer—a transformation, be it observed, which none of the statisticians have sought to make. The advantages created a peasant proprietary have ever yet attempted —will be in the meantime stiCKen in his dilapidated frame. In his paper in the Contemporary Review, Mr. Wallace was obliged to admit the impossibility of a consistent working of his scheme in towns, but the position he has now taken as if he had offered some reasons for the conclusion that it is no more a "good scheme" than those classes, would speedily overstock the soil. In short, the continued struggle for the spoil would beget every sort of demoralisation, discontent, litigation and probable violence, since every malcontent would be justified in asserting extrusion from his "right." To this may be added the practical difficulties attending the genuine agriculturist. How is the meed of capital to be raised for agriculture if at any time and in any place one of the "millions" may claim his "birth-right" out of part of the farmer's holding? There, indeed, one way in which existing landowners might lose is. It is possible on paper, but in practice it would involve civil war. As land was approached for permanent tenancy, tenant-right — to which perpetuity is to be attached — would rapidly rise in value: for unless the official valuers were to be followed by an army of secret police, it would be impossible to prevent competition for advantageous holdings. The official valuation would, in short, be to the real value of tenant-right as in the days of army-purchase the regulation price of commissions was to the price actually paid. But in order to secure this competition with its fruits it would be necessary for the landlord to be in complete command of the land and tenant-right at the end of the ten years, and this could only be through wholesale and unplanned evictions immediately before the close of the period. The occupiers would be, if possible, for a while driven from the soil.

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