

## A GOOD HOME AND A GOOD LIVING.

### LETTERS ON WORK AND WAGES.

#### II. Freeing the Land.

By MOYA LLEWELYN DAVIES.

[*Appearing also in "Political News" (the organ of the Home Counties Union of Women's Liberal Associations) for April.*]

DEAR D.,

It is plain from your letter that you agree with me that what the working people want is more and steadier employment with better wages, better houses at lower rents, and relief from the present heavy rates and taxes.

Does not everyone, or nearly everyone, agree that the working people ought to have these things? Look at Tariff Reform, offered to the people as a cure for unemployment and low wages! Look at the Housing Acts, Small Holdings Acts, Minimum Wage Act, all passed in recent years, which are attempts to help the people to get better homes and a better living! But has it ever occurred to you, that instead of trying to help the people it might be better to let the people help themselves? They are only too anxious to work and produce the things they want, and are perfectly well able to do so, if only they were allowed the opportunity. What prevents them from doing so? Why is it that there is not enough work for all, and that people should be suffering in this way through no fault of their own?

No one can work without land, and the things the land yields. Land there is in plenty—land suitable for producing food of all kinds, and for timber, stone, clay, metals, and all the raw material from which alone useful things can be made, and the making of which gives employment to men; land suitable as sites for houses, and for wharves and warehouses, factories and shops, where raw materials could be worked, and goods distributed. Is it not plain that there would be plenty of work for all, if that which is necessary for all work, and of which there is plenty—I mean the land—were set free for the use of all, on fair terms? All the work that has ever employed men, and given them the means to live, requires the use of land. There has never been a trade nor an industry which has not owed its existence to work which was first of all done by men upon the land.

But though there is plenty of land, land which could be turned to good account, the people who want to use it, can't get it. It is a case of "water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink!" Many people who own valuable land, won't use it themselves, and won't allow others to use it. For such land in many places a price of £100 or even £1,000 an acre has been refused. Such land is kept back as a speculation, till the need for it becomes greater still and a still higher price can be asked. And all the time this land escapes paying taxes altogether, or pays on a very low value, far below its real value.

Then again much land which could supply people's wants is kept by the owners for sport, or for pleasure, or merely from selfish pride of ownership. Everyone who owns such land, and refuses to turn it to account himself or let others do so, is causing the unemployment, low wages, and poverty which are oppressing the people.

He refuses to allow it to grow corn for instance, he is therefore preventing farm-labourers, harvesters, binders from getting work; the miller and his men might be milling it but they do not get the opportunity; the railway does not carry the flour to the market, there is less work for railwaymen, clerks, engine drivers, porters, shunters. Less work for the railways means less work for the iron-workers, coal miners, engineers, and numberless other workmen. And all these thousands of men who might have got employment if that land had been put to use, they themselves would have been buying goods, and giving employment; renting houses and helping the building trade; buying food, clothes, furniture, and so helping countless numbers employed in producing these things.

If more land were put to use, not only would there be more work, but wages would rise. Men at present idle, would find work, the number of men looking for jobs would be less, it would be more difficult for masters to get men, and they would have to pay higher wages.

With a bit of land, a man in the country, for instance, could find plenty to do, work of a healthy, happy kind which would bring him in enough for comfort. But things must not be as they are now! He must not be squeezed and crippled by too high a rent for his bit of land; and as soon as he begins to use the land and make it produce, or build a cottage on it, he must not be made to pay rates on his improvements. He must not be punished because he works hard and produces food and other things, thus helping himself and others, and making things more abundant and cheaper for everybody. No! having paid a fair rent for his bit of land that must be the end of paying for him. He must be allowed to go ahead and get the best out of his land, and improve his position as much as ever he can, and no rate or tax must be put on him for doing so.

And if he were thus prosperous—working his own land at a profit, or working for someone else at good wages—he would have no great difficulty in renting a cottage if there were any to be had, or even in building one for himself, as the Scotch crofters have done, who have security of tenure and fair rents, with no fear of their rents being raised, or having to pay rates on their buildings and improvements.

When I hear of Acts for the Housing of the Working Classes, I sometimes wonder who it is who is going to provide houses for the working classes except the working classes themselves. And I ask myself what is now preventing the working classes from providing themselves with the houses they want. And the more I think about it the clearer it seems to me that all they want is the use of a piece of land as a site for house and garden, paying only what that site is worth, and then being secure there with no fear of being turned out at a landlord's whim, or of being called upon to pay anything more in rates or taxes because they have built and made improvements.

The people who want houses are there, everywhere, waiting for them; builders are there ready to build; it is the land that it is so difficult to get. The land is there too; land there is in plenty for cottages and gardens, but it can't be had, or can't be had at a fair price, not at ten times, nor twenty times, nor a hundred times the price that an owner puts on it when he has to pay rates and taxes on it. Do you know for instance what happened in Richmond in Surrey? The Town Council of Richmond wanted to build some workmen's houses, and they cast their eyes on a piece of land which was lying idle right at the far end of the town. It was not very easy to get at, and they thought to themselves it couldn't have much value, and they'd get it rather cheap. But did they? The land appeared in the Rate-books as of the value of £4 an acre, and as it was called "agricultural" land the owner only paid rates on £2 an acre. Well! he asked the Town Council £2,000 an acre for that land, and he got it! And the result was the Town Council had to squeeze forty houses on to two acres! And who was it who suffered? The ratepayers who had to find the money; the working men who had to live in the houses without proper air-space and garden; and still more, the men who couldn't get cottages at all in consequence of the high prices demanded for land.

What on earth is the good of trying to build houses for the working people as long as at the same time we encourage, as we do by the present system, landowners to withhold their land or sell it only at such monstrous prices?

Land there is in plenty also, suitable for cultivation, but again it can't be had, or can't be had at fair prices. At a meeting of the Surrey County Council (held on the 9th May, 1911) it was reported that the Earl of Dysart asked £200 an acre for Small Holdings, land for which he was paying rates on a yearly value of £1 an acre. How can Small Holdings Acts and Housing Acts help the people as long as prices like these are asked for land, and other land is held back altogether because the prices asked no one could possibly pay and at the same time make a living out of the land.

Why can't the people get land at fair prices? Because at present land which is not used is let off almost altogether from taxation. Every encouragement is given to a landowner, or land speculator, to hold back his land, to refuse to allow it to be used, and every difficulty is put in the way of those who want to use the land, make it productive, and get all they can out of it. At present a landowner has two values for his land, one value, a low one, when he is asked

to pay rates and taxes, and another value, a very high one, when he wants to let or sell it. A small piece of land, for instance, that I bought recently in Sussex, was paying rates on a yearly value of £2 before I bought it, but the owner asked and got from me £650, or 325 years' purchase!

How are these bad things to be put right? Steps must be taken which will make it worth the landlords' while to let their land be used. The present state of things, which rewards those who keep land out of use, and punishes those who put it to use, must be reversed. How can this be done? By putting a tax on the value of all land, apart from the improvements made in or upon the land; on all land, according to its true value whether it is used or not. This would be a relief to the man who is making good use of his land, because he would have no rates to pay on his buildings and improvements. On the other hand it would very soon induce landlords who were holding back their land either to use the land themselves (thus giving employment, and increasing production), or to let others use it. If a landlord had to pay on the land he kept idle, as he did on the land which he allowed to be cultivated, and which was bringing him in something, he would soon be anxious to cultivate his idle land, or to get rent for it by letting it, to help to pay the tax upon it.

The land which would thus be brought into use would be more than sufficient to provide small holdings for those who wanted them, and for cottages and gardens. By a natural process, men would be put on to the land, and the "Housing Question" would solve itself.

In my next letter I shall show how these changes can be brought about.—Your affectionate friend,

M.

### THE MARTIAN.

BY DR. GEORGE W. CAREY.

During the course of his journey on the Earth, the inhabitant of the planet Mars reached a large and marvellous country. Majestic rivers watered it, and its soil, which stretched out of sight, was of a remarkable fertility. The Martian surveyed the country with pleasure, when he saw coming towards him an Earth citizen, looking rather melancholy.

"Good morning," said the Martian.

"Good morning."

"Well, what's the matter with you?"

"I'm hungry."

"Why don't you eat, then?"

"I've got no money."

"Work and earn some money."

"I can't find any work."

"Work on that piece of land. Start growing some wheat, some potatoes; it doesn't matter what."

"The owner doesn't wish to employ me."

"The *What*?"

"The owner."

"What do you mean by an 'owner'?"

"Forsooth! It is he who owns the land."

"Owns the land?"

"But . . . naturally . . ."

"What the dickens! . . . Say, but is it not Nature that created this Earth?"

"So it is said."

"And was it not made for everybody, to the end that they might live on it?"

"So I am told. . . . I don't know. . . ."

"Then, how is it that a man comes to be owner of the land?"

"The law gave it to him."

"Who made the law?"

"But . . . it was us."

"Who's us?"

"Us, the electors. I and all the others."

"What! You the supreme people, you make laws which give fields like that to a man—to a man who has the right to refuse you work when you are begging, and when you are dying of hunger?"

"Alas! . . . Yes."

"Will you be so good as to remove your hat and allow me to look at the shape of your head?"

And the Martian raised the anchor of his airship and cried, as he rose up in the air:

"What madmen are the inhabitants of the Earth."

## THE COAL STRIKE.

### A SERMON: AND AN OPEN LETTER.

At the Coatdyke (Lanarkshire) Parish Church Men's Own Meeting on Sunday, March 10th, the Rev. J. Cromarty Smith gave an address on the Coal Strike, a report of which appeared in the local paper, the COATBRIDGE (LANARKSHIRE) EXPRESS, Mr. John Cameron of the Scottish League took advantage of the opportunity to send to the Editor a reply in the form of an Open Letter, which duly appeared in the COATBRIDGE EXPRESS and which we reprint in full as a very excellent exposition of our case.

#### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE REV. J. CROMARTY SMITH.

Reverend Sir,—I beg to thank you for your address on the present labour unrest. It is much that a minister of the Gospel should on the Lord's Day, consider it his duty to discuss those momentous labour and social questions which affect the very lives of the people. The masses are steadily drifting away from the Church. Earnest social reformers have long looked upon it as the willing hand-aid of tyranny and privilege; as an institution which stands paralysed and inert in presence of the most glaring injustice. While, therefore, grateful to you for trying to teach the Church its duty, I venture, on behalf of the movement with which I am connected, to criticise some of your remarks and point out several inconsistencies. Of your own sincerity we have no doubt whatever. A part of the truth you undoubtedly see, but your failure to grasp the entire truth has led you into pitfalls; has made your deductions valueless and your proposals incongruous and impracticable, being, as they are, subversive of the rights of true property. My object is not so much to dissect your utterances as to advance a principle which I believe to be the only thing which will save society from the many dangers which now threaten it.

In discussing the coal strike, such subjects as the rights of property and the rights of labour are brought into sharp prominence, and before we can think or act correctly the first question we must answer is—To whom do the coal-fields of Britain rightfully belong? A mere layman might be excused if he looked upon present possession as being sufficient title to exclusive ownership, but a minister of Christ and a scholar like yourself cannot be excused for blindly accepting such claims without questioning. Into this subject of a just and moral basis for property you did not enter in your speech, but your remarks regarding the State taking over the mines, where you say that "no one-to-day advocated confiscation," and that "the present owners would be paid out at a reasonable and well-considered figure," show that you favour the coal-owners' right to mineral land in preference to the people's claim. Now, we disciples of Henry George, and who, on account of the form which our political proposals has taken, have come to be called Single Taxmen, hold views diametrically opposed to those suggested by your remarks. We hold that this earth, with all its natural forces and elements—air and water, the light and the heat of the sun, the land (including, of course, mineral land)—were provided free by the Father of all and given to His children that they might use them for their subsistence while sojourners upon earth. We insist that no man-made law can set aside this decree of Providence. This doctrine of equal rights to the use of the earth is graven upon the face of Nature, and the moral sense that is within every man responds to the truth of it. Not only have our beliefs the Divine sanction, but they have also the highest legal support, for no less an authority than Chief Justice Coleridge has declared that the land of a country belongs to the people whenever they choose to resume possession of it.

And it must be so. The land is our storehouse; the reservoir from which everything must come, and without access to which nothing can be produced. Everything that man eats, drinks, wears, or uses in any form comes from the land. From it our very bodies are made, and to it they shall return; we are as truly children of the soil as is the blade of grass or the flower of the field. You will see, therefore, what a tremendous, an unjust power we have placed in the hands of those to whom we have given exclusive ownership of the earth. The land-owner exerts a more baneful influence than any autocratic