

LANDLESS MEN ARE BORN SLAVES

(Contributed)

ECCLESIASTICUS XXXIV. 21-2. The bread of the needy is their life: he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. He that taketh away his neighbour's living slayeth him and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire is a bloodshedder.

Three things are needful for the existence of man on earth, and are freely given by God. They minister to the threefold nature of man: his spirit, soul and body. There is light, which sustains the spirit; air which retains the combined existence of the soul and body; and earth on which the body lives and moves and from which its sustenance is obtained.

It is in the power of man to deny to his brother man the gifts which God has so freely given.

The tyrant can put out the eyes of his captive. He can confine him in a dark cell. He can poison the air he breathes. Or he can deprive him of the use of land.

In any of these ways he can bring death upon him, gradual death perhaps, death in life, but certain death all the same. And in doing this he is guilty of his brother's blood.

But, you say, the times when such tyrants ruled the earth are gone for ever. Nay, verily, they still exist. The barbarities of ancient times may have disappeared, though some of them have been revived during the present war. No man gets his eyes put out or is poisoned through the air by way of punishment, but by the laws of most nations that are called civilised, mankind is denied the use of the land on which he exists, the proprietorship of which devolves upon a favoured few, who have thereby the means of taxing every soul that is born into the world. These landowners, as they are called, claim the right of the air, the light, and the land, but it is physically impossible for them to take possession of anything except the land.

So landless men are born slaves. This is the law of England, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, America, and all their dependencies. In fact, there is not a country on the face of God's earth in which, by a combination of a very small percentage of its people, the whole of the rest could easily be reduced to absolute starvation.

The landlords are, however, not so bad as the law allows them to be. They are human beings like the rest, often with generous instincts, always with bodily needs. They appreciate the good things of life, and to get them they must either let or cultivate their land. To cultivate it they need help, and prefer to pay others rather than work themselves. This plan has largely been adopted in Germany. In other countries the landlords prefer to run no risk of crops, and so they grant permission to others to work on their lands for a fixed annual sum called rent. They can thus live without working.

But the system has only to be stated to show its injustice, to show how utterly it is opposed to God's scheme of working, to God's plan of the universe.

Justice demands that every man should have the full value of his labour for his sustenance. Man-made law says he is only to get that portion of it which he can beg or wrest from the so-called owner of the soil.

If what I have stated is God's truth, 99 per cent. of the population of the world will admit that ultimately that truth will prevail. If this is truth the land systems of the world are false systems established by Satan for the overthrow of mankind, and everyone who upholds them is doing the Devil's work. But, objects someone, this is only a partial truth. The systems may act unfavourably against tillers of the ground, but nine-tenths of the population of this country have nothing to do with agricultural affairs. Have they not? The misappropriation of rent affects every man, woman and child in the country. BEFORE he can eat, everyone has to pay rent magnified in every process of manufacture and agriculture. Take wheat, for instance. Rent is paid for the land on which it is grown,

on which it is stored, the land occupied by the corn dealer, miller, wholesale and retail flour dealer, the baker, &c., and this rent plus interest on it is part of the cost of every pound of flour and loaf of bread that is consumed. He pays rent for the land on which he lives and his descendants pay rent for the grave in which he is buried. This rent, which represents the annual value of the land, God's free gift, never comes into his hands except through the fraudulent operation of the man-made land system.

Now there is nothing immoral in the payment of rent of land. I do not refer to rent of houses, which has nothing to do with my argument. The fault of our land system is in paying it to the wrong people, and in this way defrauding the right people. Rent represents the divisible value of the land of the earth. It is impossible, though it has been attempted, to divide the land of a country so that each person born should have an equal interest in it, but it is quite possible to divide the rentable value which is constantly increasing as population increases. This rent when collected by the State can be utilised for purposes of common benefit, and because it is not so used, but handed over to favoured individuals, the landless majority have to pay in the first place for the land they MUST HAVE TO LIVE, and in the second place for the ordinary cost of governing the country, BEFORE they can commence to earn their own living. The result is extreme poverty and extreme wealth. Many devices are used by the governing classes, chiefly landowners, to hide the enormous percentage of income that the poorest classes have to pay in the way of taxation. One of these is indirect taxation, which Mr. Gladstone long ago pointed out was the most costly way of raising revenue that could be devised, as the consumer had to pay probably three or four times the amount the State imposed.

All this may be quite true, say many people, but how can we alter the system without doing injustice to those who hold and believe they rightly hold the land? Justice SIMPLY could be done by taking away from them the right to hold the land. Justice and mercy combined, could be carried out by gradually taking away the land during the lifetime of a generation, *i.e.*, by taxing the rent received by the landholders, commencing at five per cent. and ending at 95 per cent., so leaving them permanently five per cent. for the trouble of collecting the rents for the State. Lands reverting to the State could be disposed of by auction on leases running for, say, 25 years, the existing lessee having the option of renewing the lease at the highest price offered. There would be no injustice in this and no harsh treatment of existing landholders, who during the 25 or 30 years of the transitional period, and in many cases with the enormous monetary reserve accumulated at the expense of the country, could easily manage to live during their lifetime, and would learn to live and teach their children to live a more wholesome life than simply existing at the expense of others.

The amount of land is strictly limited, and it is a national interest of the first importance that the land should be put to its best use. To secure that this shall be done may and will involve far-reaching changes, but these must be faced. Indeed, a start has already been made in certain sections of the Corn Production Act.—*Westminster Gazette, October 24th.*

To such a pass has the Liberal Press been reduced. The land, limited in quantity, must be put to its best use, and to this end we are solemnly advised by a leading Liberal daily to take the Corn Production Act, specially designed to advantage the landlord class, as a start in the right direction. This Act certainly does involve far-reaching changes but they are of the kind that makes for the humiliation of Liberalism, and for the certain destruction of the Liberal Party as a force for progress.