

Its writer, however, says one or two things for which space must be found.

Above all, the farmers or landowners must not adopt nor act upon the pernicious principle already referred to: "This land is mine and I'll do what I like with it." Land, it cannot be too clearly emphasised, is a form of property different from any other. No man whether landlord or tenant farmer, has the right to do what he likes with the land he owns or occupies. The principle is equally binding upon the purchased-out tenant farmer of our day and upon the landlord, present or past. If the principle of absolute ownership is admitted, Clanrickard would have the same right to turn countrysides in Galway, or Carden or Scully the plains of Tipperary into vast ranches as the farmer of to-day in Galway and Tipperary has to turn his holding into a miniature ranch.

So that while with regard to chattel property a man may fairly claim to "do what he likes with his own," that claim cannot properly be advanced with regard to land.—"Circumspect" in the *GLASGOW OBSERVER*, January 27th.

BOOK REVIEWS

CREATION AND POSSESSION

Radically-minded people will gladly associate themselves with most of the principles laid down by Mr. Bertrand Russell in his views on Social Reconstruction. In his recently-published series of eight lectures,* he brings to the touch-stone of philosophical Liberalism such questions as the State, War as an Institution, Property, Education, Marriage, and the Churches. If politics were a religion, we should say that Mr. Russell has given us here the kind of literature the radical revivalists will welcome for their inspiration in the new fight for the restoration of democracy. His style is brilliant and full of charm, and for that reason his criticisms of the laws and institutions that produce social wrongs and international bloodshed are all the more destructive. We are interested specially in what he says about the land question, and find in his chapter on Property one good cause why the late Lord Cromer, in his review in the *SPECTATOR*, has dubbed the work a "thoroughly mischievous book":—

Private property in land has no justification except historically through the power of the sword. In the beginning of feudal times, certain men had enough military strength to be able to force those whom they disliked not to live in a certain area. Those whom they chose to leave on the land became their serfs, and were forced to work for them in return for the gracious permission to stay. In order to establish law in place of private force, it was necessary, in the main, to leave undisturbed the rights which had been acquired by the sword. The land became the property of those who had conquered it, and the serfs were allowed to give rent instead of service. There is no justification for private property in land, except the historical necessity to conciliate turbulent robbers who would not otherwise have obeyed the law. This necessity arose in Europe many centuries ago, but in Africa the whole process is often quite recent. It is by this process, slightly disguised, that the Kimberley diamond-mines and the Rand gold-mines were acquired in spite of prior native rights. It is a singular example of human inertia that men should have continued until now to endure the tyranny and extortion which a small minority are able to inflict by their possession of the land. No good to the community, of any sort or kind, results from the private ownership of land. If men were reasonable they would decree that it would cease to-morrow, with no compensation beyond a moderate life income to the present holders.

The mere abolition of rent would not remove injustice, since it would confer a capricious advantage upon the

occupiers of the best sites and the most fertile land. It is necessary that there should be rent, but it should be paid to the State or to some body which performs public services; or, if the total rental were more than is required for such purposes, it might be paid into a common fund and divided equally among the population. Such a method would be just, and would not only help to relieve poverty, but would prevent wasteful employment of land and the tyranny of local magnates. Much that appears as the power of capital is really the power of the landowner—for example, the power of railway companies and mine-owners. The evil and injustice of the present system are glaring, but men's patience of preventable evils to which they are accustomed is so great that it is impossible to guess when they will put an end to this strange absurdity.

Holding these views, and suggesting the results of extortion on the distribution of wealth, Mr. Russell, however, is not so convincing in the emphasis he lays on mere impulses as the cause of war and strife. He discounts more than once the influence of economic conditions and how they have distorted men's minds through their effects in unequal possessions. He sees the solution not so much in improved social environment, but in the diminution of the impulses and desires that centre round possession. The two warring forces that act as incentives in human action are the "creative" and the "possessive," and we are told that:—

The ultimate fact from which war results is not economic or political, and does not rest upon any mechanical difficulty of inventing means for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. The ultimate fact from which war results is the fact that a large proportion of mankind have an impulse to conflict rather than harmony, and can only be brought to co-operate with others in resisting or attacking a common enemy. . . . The impulse to quarrelling and self-assertion, the pleasure of getting one's own way in spite of opposition, is native to most men. It is this impulse, rather than any motive of calculated self-interest, which produces war, and causes the difficulty of bringing about a World-State.

It is a familiar idea to picture man as ruled by opposing influences or spirits that are eternally in combat for the possession of his soul—God and Satan, Ormuzd and Ahriman, good and evil. The late L. H. Berens wrote of the "industrial and the predatory instincts," forming the same conception as Mr. Russell with his "creative and possessive impulses," but he did not overlook the fact that the predatory instinct can only be exercised in a condition of license and injustice. What makes the predatory instinct dangerous and destructive of society is not the fact of its existence as an inevitable part of human nature, but that economic conditions have made it possible and easy for some human beings to be birds of prey and parasites on other human beings. Given a state of affairs in which tribute can be levied under the law, in which the appropriation of rent is made over to individuals as an accepted institution, in which a tariff makes theft legal, the predatory instinct gains full sway, and both victims and victimised desire nothing higher than a hand in the spoil.

The economic and political circumstances making for excess wealth side by side with extreme poverty cannot be so under-rated. It was once said "Lead us not into Temptation." But the world—the economic world—surrounds us with temptations to commit the gravest of social sins, the enjoyment of wealth without producing it, by obtaining the possession of land for which others must pay rent. There should be no temptations to be led into, and none to incite the predatory instinct. The earth should be for all, and if each lived in it, commanding no service from another unless he gave an equivalent service by his own labour or industry, there would be no occasion for strife and certainly no possible outlet for that brutal passion which Mr. Russell calls the "possessive impulse."

A. W. M.

* *PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION*, by Bertrand Russell, F.R.S. London: George Allen & Unwin.