

borders; therefore there will be no necessity for a standing army or navy. Land and other monopolies will not exist, as the government with the monies from the national fund and land-rent (Taxes) will furnish the people with the means of transportation and communication. Everyone able and willing to work will always be capable of making a comfortable living, so that worry, envy, class-hatred, theft, robbery, etc., (the results of poverty and the fear thereof) will not exist, and the expenses for the maintenance of police, prisons, asylums, etc. will be reduced to a minimum. And all the nations will come to learn from our example how to live peacefully—as it is said, “From Zion will come the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

THE GREAT INIQUITY

A TRUTH RE-STATED

PEOPLE WHO NEITHER TOIL NOR SPIN, YET LIVE IN LUXURY—ONE
DOMINANT CLASS WHO ARE ABOVE ALL HUMAN WANT—THE MASTER
PARASITES OF ALL THE AGES

(For the Review)

By W. B. NORTHROP

Throughout the “civilized” world today, there is one class of human beings who alone in all the affairs of men need have no anxiety, or fear. While millions of toilers know not from day to day where the next meal is coming from; while even the “captains of industry” plan, and scheme, and work, and worry over their gigantic ventures, which often crumble beneath disaster, while thousands of tradesmen, skilled artisans, and members of various professions struggle in a veritable war of death against the unequal odds of fierce competition, this one exempt class can rest content.

Every stroke of the workers, every penny of wealth created by the industry of the age, every improvement in social conditions, every invention, every step toward progress, only add to the earnings of this class.

This remarkable class forms an exception to the universal law of labor. They live solely by the industry of others. The harder others work, the less necessary it is for this class to toil.

This class thrives by the infringement of the natural rights of their fellow beings.

This class is made up of the people who claim to "own" land. This class, from the earliest ages—far back into the dim vistas of the past, before the Prophets of our Bible penned their scathing denunciations against them—dominated the fate of nations.

In the papyri of the Egyptians, in the earliest records of the East, in the first dawns of liberty in any nation, carved in stone, pressed with the stylus on the clay tablets of Babylon, written into the songs of the poets, woven into the religion of the mystics, we find protests against this class. In our own Bible, we find this class held up to the scorn and contempt of the brave men who felt that they held a mission from Almighty God to denounce these Master Parasites of all the Ages. The vast movement of the Israelites described in Exodus and Deuteronomy are efforts to escape from the oppression of this class.

"For the Lord thy God will bring thee into a good land, of brooks and of waters, and of fountains; in the plains of which and the hills deep rivers break out;

A land of wheat and barley and vineyards, wherein fig-trees and pomegranates, and olive yards grow; a land of oil and honey.

Where, without any want, thou shalt eat thy bread, and enjoy abundance of all things."—Deuteronomy VIII: 7-9.

It was to seek these things, and to find some place where, "without any want," people could live, that Moses organized his vast movement; and it was because of the wresting of these things away from the people by the land monopolists that, subsequently, the writers and prophets denounced the leaders and princes of the people:

"The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and its princes; for you have devoured the vineyard, and the spoil of the poor is in your house.

Why do you consume my people, and grind the faces of the poor?" —Isaiah III: 14-15.

Among those leading a pastoral life, to deprive the people of their "vineyards" was literally to consume them; and the taking away of their lands, was "grinding the faces of the poor."

That this was evident, is made quite plain by Isaiah when he says: (Chapter V: 8-9)

"Woe to you that join house to house and lay field to field, even to the end of the place; shall you alone dwell in the midst of the earth?

These things are in my ears, saith the Lord of Hosts, unless many great and fair houses shall become desolate, without an inhabitant." That is, unless these great estates shall be utterly broken up.

Even stronger yet than these words is the passage where the same prophet gives a picture of the poverty and the cause of poverty of his day. Practically the same conditions prevailed in those times, though the words of the ancient writer were penned so many thousands of years ago. Speaking of the "good time" that is coming—unfortunately, even now apparently still in the very distant future—he says: (Chap. LXV: 21-23).

"And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruits of them.

They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for, as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people, and the works of their hands shall be of long continuance.

My elect shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth in trouble."

However one may regard the Bible as an inspired book, whatever opinion we may hold in the light of "modern," or any other criticism, no one will cavil at accepting it as a history of the times in which it was written.

Looking back into the dim ages of the past, we see the protest that is raised against the privileged landed classes, and those who had stolen the vineyards from the poor. Even in those far away ages, we find that the poor were ground down beneath the iron heel of these Master Parasites, who set up their unholy claim to title in the land.

Though the Bible tells us that "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," and though throughout these writings it is made quite plain that all the iniquity of those ancient times, all the oppression of the masses by the classes, have sprung from monopolistic ownership of natural opportunities, we still in these days perpetuate these ancient privileges. The entire basic principle of modern society is founded on the right of certain individuals to claim as their own certain sections of the earth's surface.

But, even if none of the prophets of old wrote, if none of the economic writers of any time had spoken against these evils, it would need nothing more than a common conception of elementary justice to tell us that no men or generation of men have the right to a square foot of the ground of this earth to the exclusion of other men. The use of this earth belongs to the men of the present generation, unbound by acts of former ages. We of this day merely have the right of temporary abidance. As former generations of "the sons of men" have had no right to inflict the imprint of their dead hands on the people of this day, neither have we, in our time, by laws, or otherwise, any right whatever to convey lands or dispose of them to the exclusion of others who may come after us; or who may live contemporaneously with us.

By the passage of venal laws by the landed classes themselves, the inalienable rights of all men to the earth as the common property of all have been lost sight of. By legislative measures deliberately engineered at the direct instance of the pretenders to private ownership of land, it has been so made to appear that these men have the right to land as if it were something which they had actually created, or brought into the world by some personal exertion of their own; or, if not by their own exertion, at least by that of their ancestors.

There can be no absolute title to land. As well claim there could be conveyed title to the sunlight, to the ocean, or to the air we breathe. If a syndicate were formed to pump all the atmosphere into reservoirs and then sell it back to the people at so much per foot, it would be equally as unjust as present land-holders who so dispose of the land. If a company were formed to capture, through various reflectors, and other appliances, all the sunlight, and sell it to the people at so much per ray, it would be as unjustifiable as the present pretended ownership of land. Pretenders to land—let us no longer confuse the issue by calling them “landlords” or “land-owners”—can produce no substantial claims to this property, every inch of which is held as against the universal rights of all other men. The hand of the land-pretender is against his fellow-man.

Concerning the very broad principle enunciated above, there seems to be a general misconception, and yet it is a principle that every human being in this world should be able to grasp. It does not strengthen the position to be told that certain learned legal lights have admitted this principle. It should not make very much difference whether prophets of old, modern or ancient economists, or profound reasoners of every description have stated that land belongs to all men for the use of all; and for the individual ownership of none.

Every individual born into this world, from the tiniest infant to the oldest human being, has an equal right to the surface of the earth, or the surface of the water, or the equal use of the air, or of the sunlight. We need no one to tell us these things. The light of reason is the only illuminant whose clear ray is required in order to recognize this fact.

Naturally, it is comforting to find that not only the prophets of old, but all modern economic philosophers, and even many of the most learned legal minds, have recognized this principle, and put themselves on record as upholding it.

But, if all legal minds, all sages of old, all modern thinkers, were absolutely against the admission of this principle, it should make no difference. The principle stands just the same, and is unchallengeable.

The law of gravitation is said to have been “discovered” by Newton, the periodic law in chemistry by Boyle, and other well-known “laws” in various departments of science have been announced from time to

time by learned men. And yet, before Newton, was gravitation; before Boyle, was chemistry. Before the inspired writers who denounced land-pretenders, was justice. And justice is all that is needed in order to recognize the principle that no human being has a right to claim as his own a particle of land, or sea, or air, or sunlight.

Of course, under modern conditions, it may be convenient to make certain restrictions as to the manner in which the surface of the earth, or of the ocean, may be used by men; but this is merely a matter of convenience, and has nothing whatever to do with the fundamental principle that land cannot be owned by any human being on the same basis as he can possess some article that he has fashioned by his own labor. The artist who creates a picture owns the picture; the man who makes a spade, owns the spade; the man who builds a house, owns the house. His labor has brought these things into being. His ingenuity has fashioned them from cruder elements into what they are. But to speak of anyone "owning" land, which he has not created, and which it is impossible for him to create, is a contradiction in terms.

While the principle is not affected by the opinion of sages, prophets, "discoverers," or legal minds, as to the so-called "ownership" of land being among rights which no human being can claim without doing a positive injustice to all other men, still it is very satisfactory to find that all the great thinkers who have given their attention seriously to this subject, have pronounced land "ownership" impossible.

Private "ownership" of land has never been recognized, even by famous legal intellects whose conservatism on such points would naturally lead us to look at least for silence on their part in a matter which, carried to its logical conclusion, means the complete reconstruction of the social fabric as at present constituted.

It is as well, perhaps, for the sake of those who fail, at present, to recognize the broad principle that land cannot be "owned," to quote at some length opinions of various doctors of the law who have made serious pronouncements on this subject:

Let us begin, then, with the words of Blackstone, the founder of the study of the law as a modern science:

SIR WILLIAM BLACKSTONE:

Accurately and strictly speaking, there is no foundation in nature or in natural law why a set of words on parchment should convey the dominion of land.

Allodial (absolute) property no subject in England has; it being a received and now undeniable principle in law, that all lands in England are holden mediately or immediately of the King (i. e., people).

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE COLERIDGE:

These (our land laws) might be for the general advantage, and if they

could be shown to be so, by all means they should be maintained; but if not, does any man with what he is pleased to call his mind, deny that a state of law under which such mischief could exist, under which the country itself would exist, not for its people, but for a mere handful of them, ought to be instantly and absolutely set aside.

SIR FREDERICK POLLOCK—On "English Land Laws":

It is commonly supposed that land belongs to its owner in the same sense as money or a watch. This is not the theory of English law since the Norman conquest, nor has it been so in its full significance at any time.

No absolute ownership of land is recognized by our law books, except in the Crown. All lands are supposed to be held immediately or mediately of the Crown, though no rent or services may be payable and no grant from the Crown on record.

WILLIAMS (Real Property):

The first thing the student has to do, is to get rid of the idea of absolute ownership ((of land). Such an idea is quite unknown to the English law. No man is in law the absolute owner of land.

All landowners are merely tenants in the eye of the law.

MR. JUSTICE LONGFIELD:

Property in land differs in its origin from property in any commodity produced by human labor; the product of labor naturally belongs to the laborer who produced it, but the same argument does not apply to land, which is not produced by labor, but is the gift of the Creator of the world to mankind. Every argument used to give an ethical foundation for the exclusive right of property in land has a latent fallacy.

PROFESSOR W. A. HUNTER, M. A., L L. B.:

The English landlord system, so far from having any moral basis, is founded upon a supercilious contempt of the only moral principle that can afford any justification for private property in land.

PROFESSOR ZACHARIE (the eminent German Jurist):

All the sufferings against which civilized nations have to struggle, may be referred to the exclusive right of property in the soil as their source.

It will thus be seen that the claim of anyone to legally own land—"to do as he likes with," as the phrase goes—is an absurd one, on the very face of it. Popular error imagines that there can be legal claim to land, and that a "set of words on parchment" can convey this title. There is no legal title to land in that sense, as has been shown above.

The consensus of opinion of our great thinkers on the effect of our so-called land-laws on society as constituted today is truly marvellous, when we come to consider the varying intellects which have been brought to bear on the

subject, each one recognizing the same truth from a different aspect.

It is so essential to place before the reader a proper conception of this greatest of all iniquities, that it is necessary to quote some of these opinions at length.

PROFESSOR ALFRED MARSHALL (Principles of Economics)

All writers on economics are compelled to make a distinction between land and other things.

CARDINAL MANNING:

The land question means hunger, thirst, nakedness, notice to quit, labor spent in vain, the toil of years seized upon, the breaking up of homes, the misery, sickness, deaths of parents, children, wives, the despair and wildness which spring up in the hearts of the poor when legal force, like a sharp harrow, goes over the most sensitive and vital right of mankind. All this is contained in the land question.

ALFRED RUSSELL WALLACE:

We permit absolute possession of the soil of our country with no legal rights of existence on the soil to the vast majority who do not possess it. A great landowner may legally convert his whole property into a forest or hunting ground, and expel every human being who has hitherto lived upon it.

In a thickly populated country like England, where almost every acre has its owner and occupier, this is a power of legally destroying his fellow creatures; and that such a power should exist, and be exercised by individuals, in however small a degree, indicates that as regards true social science, we are still in a state of barbarism.

HENRY GEORGE:

It one man can command the land upon which others must labor, he can appropriate the produce of their labor as the price of his permission to labor. The fundamental law of nature that her enjoyment by man shall be consequent upon his exertions is thus violated. The one receives without producing, the others produce without receiving. The one is unjustly enriched, the others are robbed.

That a people can be enslaved just as effectively by making property of their lands as by making property of their bodies, is a truth that conquerors in all ages have recognized, and that, as society developed, the strong and unscrupulous who desired to live off the labors of others, have been prompt to see.

WILLIAM SAUNDERS:

Every month, landlords kill more children than Herod destroyed in his lifetime; and yet, they are all honorable men. But this circumstance

does not lessen the fearful consequences of the system of which they are the agents.

JOHN STUART MILL:

No man made the land; it is the original inheritance of the whole species. The land of every country belongs to the people of that country.

GLADSTONE:

I fully admit this: that if the time came when the British nation found that the land should be nationalized and it would be wise to do it, they have a perfect right to do it.

CARLYLE:

The notion of selling for certain bits of metal...the land of the world Creator, is a ridiculous impossibility.

The widow is gathering nettles for her children's dinner. A perfumed seigneur, delicately lounging in the Oeil de Boeuf, hath an alchemy whereby he will extract the third nettle and call it rent.

Properly speaking the land belongs to these two: To the Almighty God and to all His children of men, that have ever worked well on it, or that shall ever work well on it. No generation of men can or could, with never such solemnity and effort, sell land on any other principle. It is not the property of any generation, we say, but that of all the past generations that have worked on it, and of all the future ones that shall work on it.

THOROLD ROGERS:

Every permanent improvement of the soil, every railway, and road, every bettering of the general condition of society, every facility given for production, every stimulus applied to consumption, raises rent. The landowner sleeps but thrives.

FRANCIS W. NEWMAN:

The history of the gradual, stealthy, but really nefarious revolution in which landlords, by their own legislative power and their influence over lawyers, changed themselves into landowners, needs to be popularized.

JOHN RUSKIN:

Bodies of men, land, water, and air are the principal of those things which are not, and which it is criminal to consider as personal or exchangeable property.

To these names might be added others equally distinguished in law, letters, and economics, who have placed themselves on record on this great question. Without here quoting their actual words, we might mention the names of Richard Cobden, James Anthony Froude, Sir Henry Maine, Emile de Lavelaye,

Sismonde, Romaine Delaune, and hosts of others, all of whom have shown the utter absurdity of the claim to private ownership of land.

With such a consensus of legal opinion absolutely against private ownership of land, and the equally strong confirmatory expressions of some of the greatest thinkers the world has produced, can anyone in these days expect to uphold, "with what he is pleased to call his mind," the validity of such a claim?

And yet, in the face of all this evidence, what is the condition which presents itself in this country today? Every square inch of the country is "owned" (?) by certain individuals—usually termed "great landlords"—(railroad or timber or mining corporation or others) who claim to have a right to deal with this land as if it were their absolute possession. Property is today sold, as Carlyle says, for "certain bits of metal," or, if it is not sold, it is held in defiance not only of law as well as equity, but of the rights and privileges of the disinherited, landless helots of this country. The extent to which private ownership in land is carried is little known to the general public. The incomes which many "great families"—great simply because of this very land-monopoly—derive from these lands are almost inconceivable.

The entire land of the country is literally in the control of a handful of people.

It has been made quite clear in this article that these people cannot claim any legal right individually to own this property, as against the rights of all other inhabitants of this country. Every child born into this world has an equal right to his or her share of the earth. "But," you say, "what would you do—evict all the present holders and give the land to another lot of people; give each man his little lot, to do what he likes with?"

Not at all. It would not be necessary to disturb anyone. Let all who now possess land, or, rather, who are in possession of it—by what they consider legal means—continue to hold it. Only let them admit the title of all others to share in the revenues which these lands are bringing in.

At present our poverty is caused by the fact that the lands of the country are held by people who take not only their own share, but everybody else's share as well.

Let the present so-called land-lord keep his share; but tax him on his land holding to such an extent that, when he pays this land tax, he will thereby recognize in a substantial way the right of others. This whole proposal can be carried out practically without disturbing an existing title. The inauguration of the taxation of land values as advocated by Henry George would accomplish this object. Until this is done, there will continue to be injustice in the affairs of men.

WE all make mistakes but more and more grievous ones are made by trying to tell others what we do not know ourselves than by illustrating folly by our example.—JAMES BELLANGE.