

LORD DUNRAVEN ON THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.

Writing to THE TIMES (October 23rd, 1912) on the subject of Land Purchase in Ireland, Lord Dunraven, an ardent supporter of this measure, makes some significant comments on the real causes of the agrarian struggle in Ireland. He says:—

Much misunderstanding exists concerning the land question in Ireland. Ireland is not responsible for the agrarian struggles that have torn her asunder, nor for the bitterness of feeling engendered by them. To seek for their origin we must go back to the imposition of an alien system hateful to the people, to the great confiscations, and to the penal laws that for centuries strangled the country. To come to more modern times we must consider the effect of Cobdenite principles in permitting all the horrors of the great famine—the starvation of the peasantry and the ruin of a land-owning class under whom the severities of an evil system were mitigated by ties of mutual affection and respect between landlord and tenant. To remedy the condition which arose a system of dual ownership was in recent years instituted. It gave immediate relief but was so manifestly ruinous to agriculture that a determined effort was made in the great Act of 1903 to do away with it in the only possible way—by re-creating single ownership.

Surely "the alien system hateful to the people" is the freehold system under which the control of the use of the land, necessary to the life of all, is placed in the hands of some, who are thus empowered to live upon the fruits of the labour of others. This "alien system" land-purchase perpetuates, does not abolish. Already we read of tenant-purchasers subletting their holdings at prices considerably in excess of the annuities they pay—thus reviving "dual ownership," rack renting, and all their attendant evils. The legislation of 1870 and 1881 left the fee-simple in the hands of the big landlords, but gave the Irish peasantry all they ever demanded, all they ever desired, fair-rents, fixity of tenure, and rights of property in their own improvements. It was not because this was so manifestly ruinous to agriculture, but because it was so manifestly ruinous to *landlordism*, as practised by the great Irish landlords, that we owe the reactionary, unnecessary and costly Land Purchase Act of 1903. Again "the horrors of the great Irish famine," during which food from Ireland was being exported from almost every Irish port in order "to pay the rent," was directly due to the extortions of landlordism. It was a "financial famine," not a "food famine," a famine made by man, not by Nature. It was *not* "the effect of Cobdenite principles," as Lord Dunraven would have us believe, but of the exactions of the land-owning classes, under whose benign regime, Lord Dunraven again asks us to believe, "the severities of an evil system were mitigated by ties of mutual affection and respect between landlord and tenant." In any case, however, it is very evident that "the great Act of 1903" removes few, if any, of the evils from which Ireland has so long suffered, but promises to intensify some of them; that it cannot prevent or hinder, but may well promote, another Irish financial famine, which may again result in "the starvation of the peasantry and the ruin of the [new] land-owning class." Such is the heritage of the class-legislation favoured and promoted by the bulwarks of the Tory Party of Great Britain, the British landlords and their parasites.

HENRY GEORGE'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE.

By WILLIAM REID.

Journalists and others who undertake to teach the public on such matters as the "Incidence of Taxation," seem to presume on the ignorance of their readers being even greater than their own. So far as the great majority of these writers are concerned it would hardly be possible to find anyone who knows much less about the subject than the teachers themselves. The Single Tax is referred to by such people as an invention of Henry George. This shows that they neither know what Henry George really invented, nor that the Single Tax was proposed by others before he was born. What Henry George did for Political Economy was to supply it with a Law of Wages to fit in with its already discovered Law of Rent. So perfectly did these Laws fit into each other that the Genesis of Political Economy had hardly been ushered in when its Exodus began. Vain attempts have been made by such men as Professor Alfred Marshall and Professor Francis Amassa Walker to answer George. To-day these vain attempts continue to be made. So unsatisfied are the other side with their champions that they are always on the look out for a new gladiator; their latest and—as I think—most successful champion being Captain E. G. Pretyman. Unfortunately for that gentleman, even his skill is unequal to the task of squaring the circle. There is in scholastic circles to-day

No Science of Political Economy

with any definite terms or fixed principles. Capital is sometimes described as the result of saving, and among such capital both land and labour are often included. A man might spare his labour, but how he is going to save it for later use, is one of the many mysteries that the teachers of Economics leave their students to solve. The saving of land is an equal impossibility, but the jumble of words which passes for Science performs its due function of mystifying the young fellows who try to master it, until they find it impossible to give an intelligent yes or no to any problem.

Abandoning as old fashioned Adam Smith and Ricardo some of the teachers find it convenient to reintroduce things which Adam Smith himself abandoned as untenable. An intelligent parrot could utter all that they have to say as to how taxation should be based. "Ability to pay" with them has become almost as sacred as that blessed word "Mesopotamia." If such people think that Adam Smith was against peculiar taxation they are grossly mistaken. He—like John Stuart Mill, Henry George and others—thought that land was peculiarly suitable as a basis of taxation. His oft-quoted canons of taxation need not be discussed for no serious attempt has been made to show that the Taxation of Land Values invalidates any principle contained in them. Whether there is any other tax that meets the requirements of Adam Smith in the matter of raising revenue is a matter for discussion, but it can be easily shown that even

An Income Tax Arrives too Late.

It does not come in time to break the power of monopolists as does a tax on land values.

It is worth while noticing that the most widely accepted canon of taxation was never mentioned by Adam Smith. Belonging—like the writer—to the race which requires a surgical operation in order to understand a joke, he probably did not realise that the great majority of people had unconsciously formulated their own canon of taxation. This canon assured them that anyone else except themselves ought to pay the taxes. The landlords—being human—thought the same, and they had an advantage over

the rest of the people. Finding that they were paying taxes when they had it in their power to impose their burdens on other people there were only two possible ways in which the question could be satisfactorily settled. Either the people must obtain equal power with the landlords, or the landlords should use the power which they exclusively possessed. In the contest the landlords were easily first and managed to shift their burdens before the people got into power. It now remains for the people to shift the burdens back again. If they have any doubt about the wisdom of doing so, they could do worse than refer to some of the people who are supposed to be opposed to this plan.

To begin with Adam Smith did not agree with those journalistic teachers who pretend that the landowners put as much in as they take out of land. The passage is too long to quote but it can be found in Book I., Chapter XI., and I content myself with the following quotations. "The landlord demands

A Rent even for Unimproved Land,

and the supposed interest or profit upon the expense of improvement is generally an addition to this original rent." Also, "The rent of land, therefore, considered as the price paid for the use of land, is naturally a monopoly price. It is not at all proportioned to what the landlord may have laid out upon the improvement of the land, or to what he can afford to take, but to what the farmer can afford to give." On the question of the Taxation of Land Values reference can be made to Book V., Chapter II., on taxes. He says, "Nothing can be more reasonable than that a fund which owes its existence to the good government of the state should be taxed peculiarly, or should contribute something more than the greater part of other funds, towards the support of that government." He is referring here to ground rents, or what in modern language would be called site values, but he is not against taxing what he calls the ordinary rent of land.

Having put Adam Smith into the witness box I shall now call on John Stuart Mill. In Book II., Chapter II., I find the following: "The essential principle of property being to assure to all persons what they have produced by their labour and accumulated by their abstinence this principle cannot apply to what is not the produce of labour, the raw material of the earth." Further on in the same chapter I read: "To me it is almost an axiom that property in land should be interpreted strictly, and that the balance in all cases of doubt should incline against the proprietor." To save a long quotation I must again just offer a reference and merely quote the following on taxes. "A certain amount of revenue may, as we have seen, be obtained without injustice by a peculiar tax on rent," Book V., Chapter VI. In Chapter II. of the same I find the author discussing the peculiar nature of rent. As far as I understand him, he is arguing for the position stated in an earlier part of his work.

The Greatest Burden on the Land

is the landowner; he grows richer in his sleep and so on. He wants to know what wrong would have been done to landowners if society had from the beginning reserved a right of taxing the spontaneous increase of rent" to the highest amount required by financial exigencies." It does not seem as if he would have been content with a 20 per cent. tax on future increment. What is true, is, that he respected the claim of landowners to what they might own when the valuation of land was made. Lloyd George worked on this basis and fixed the date at April, 1909 A.D. The followers of Henry George would tax this same increment dating if necessary from April, 1909 B.C. That is because Single Taxers do not hold the same respect for contracts as did John Stuart Mill.

It is quite evident however that John Stuart Mill would have supported the Single Tax principle in the absence of such contracts. Going back on an immoral contract is

to my mind more moral than abiding by it, but in practical politics we are not called on to decide such fine points. Nothing was ever done in a hurry in the British Parliament except the rushing through of Acts of Parliament for the enclosure of land.

It is worth noting that

Herbert Spencer can be Quoted

in favour of the theory of a Single Tax. I imagine his early writings at least did not even find him making qualifications as to contracts. In discussing the resumption of land by the State he gives consideration to the question of improvements. This is as it should be to my mind. In Chapter IX., "Social Statics," we find him saying, "Equity therefore does not permit property in land." After showing possible evils which might follow the acceptance of the principle of private property in land he leaves the possible conditions and comes to the actual circumstances. He says, "Passing from the consideration of the possible to that of the actual, we find yet further reason to deny the rectitude of property in land. It can never be pretended that the existing titles to such property are legitimate. Should anyone think so, let him look in the chronicles. Violence, fraud, the prerogative of force, the claims of superior cunning—these are the sources to which those titles may be traced. The original deeds were written with the sword, rather than with the pen: not lawyers, but soldiers, were the conveyancers." He then goes on to ridicule people who say that time "is a great legaliser." He wants to know at what rate per annum wrong becomes right and so on. An attack is made on Dukes that would make

The Orator of Limehouse Astonished

at his own moderation. We are further informed that "nobody does implicitly believe in landlordism." That I should say is an exaggeration.

When Spencer asks himself the question as to where this doctrine of equal rights to land leads, he answers, "Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body—Society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. Instead of paying his rent to the agent of Sir John or his Grace, he would pay it to an agent or deputy-agent of the community." It is only fair to say that Herbert Spencer recanted, but I think the virile writings of a young author are more important than the things which he writes in his old age. Of one thing we may be satisfied and that is that Spencer could not reply to himself.

It will be seen from the foregoing that if Henry George erred, he did so in good company. No doubt Henry George

Popularised the Idea of a Single Tax.

The somewhat vague references of the writers I have quoted required to be reduced to a system and this Henry George did. There were people who advocated a Single Tax before Adam Smith's WEALTH OF NATIONS was published in 1776. Very soon after the publication of that book the public were offered another book by another Scottish Professor—William Ogilvie, of Aberdeen. Both had been travelling tutors to Dukes and both had come in contact with the Physiocrats of France who advocated *L'impôt unique*. Ogilvie took his lessons and tried to impart them to his own countrymen. How Adam Smith viewed these doctrines of the Physiocrats is largely a matter for conjecture. The treatment meted out to land reformers of that time—to Tom Paine, Robert Burns, Thomas Spence, William Ogilvie and others, leads one to think that any approval of the Physiocrats that might conceivably have crept into the WEALTH OF NATIONS would require to be severely sub-edited. These were the days of a landlord-ridden country, when people were

imprisoned for attending meetings for the enfranchisement of the people; when they were liable to imprisonment if they neglected to go and hear the parson counsel them to obey their masters and be content with their lot.

Such was the Genesis of Political Economy; it came into existence at a time when the landlords were

Shuffling off a Part of their Taxes,

the result of which was the tea tax; the sinking of tea in Boston harbour and the American "Declaration of Independence" in the same year as the publication of the WEALTH OF NATIONS. A few years later we had the French Revolution and in another few years the ill-fated Union of the Parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland. With such a Genesis can we wonder at the Exodus of Political Economy when a man of the people—an inspired genius—applies the Science of Political Economy to the problems of life with a view to the realisation of justice. Such a man is difficult to answer, and we may well pity those who have made the attempt.

East-end Clergyman (anxious to interest lady in his parish): "Well, what do you think of the life these poor people lead? Awful, isn't it?"

Society Lady (who thinks everything a craze): "Dreadful! I'd no idea. But isn't it rather overdone?"
—PUNCH, November 20th.

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LEADING HIM ON.



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MACBETH (Mr. Lloyd George): "How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags. What is't you do?"

WITCHES (Messrs. Wedgwood, Outhwaite and Hemmerde): "A deed without a name."

—PALL MALL GAZETTE, October 23rd.