

LAND AND CAPITAL.

BY RICHARD WHYTE.

The distinction between the things produced from land by labour, which things alone are properly embraced in the category of wealth, and land itself, is indeed clear and well defined. The one species can be brought forth without limit by human exertion. The other is a fixed quantity in nature. The one tends to decrease in value as material progress cheapens the cost of production; the other steadily rises in value as population increases and the arts advance. The one tends constantly to decay and to return back again to nature; the other remains while men come and go; it is the standing place, the reservoir, the workshop, of generation after generation. The existence of the one is due to man's activity; the other was here before man came, and in all likelihood will be here after man and all his works shall have disappeared. Ownership in the one springs from the right of the individual to himself, to the use of his own powers and the fruit of his own exertions; it is essential to the production of wealth and the advance of civilisation. Ownership of land, on the other hand, springs only from appropriation and force. It is an impairment of the rights of the individual to himself. It compels him to use his powers for others, to give his exertions, or the fruits of his exertions to others, for permission to use what nature clearly intended as fully for him as for them. There is and can be no other foundation of the right of property than the right of the producer to the thing he produces. The individual ownership of land is a denial of his right as it compels the producer to share his produce with the non-producer. There is, in short, as clear a distinction between the right of property in the things produced by labour from land, and the right of property in land itself, as there is in the right of property in a fish pulled from the ocean, and the right of property in the ocean itself, between the ownership of "a pound of beefsteak" and the ownership of all land.

Whatever varying social relations may exist amongst men land always remains the prime necessity—the only indispensable requisite for existence, and in the production of all things which men desire land is the raw material from which they must come. It is thus seen that in the last analysis all the evils of our present industrial system are traceable to the fact that land, which is necessary to all, is made the property of a privileged few. A tax on the value of all land would bring all land into use, as landlords could not afford to keep useful land out of use, as they can at present; and the stiffer the tax, the more useful would land become to the community at large, and, of course, the more useless to the non-productive section—landowners. A tax on land values would make it impossible, for instance, for men to shut up mineral resources, as a certain Scotsman shut up a mine employing a large number of hands, saying he could afford to keep it idle as it would "not eat anything."

The vast deposits of iron ore, shale, coal, &c., were not produced by any human agency. They are the gifts of nature, and by nature not surely intended to benefit a privileged few. It is not equitable surely that the enormous annual royalties, or rents, should go into private pockets. Give that to each that each produces. Give that to all which nature and society as a whole produce.

If I spend money on improving land—true investment—then I am entitled to all the interest I can get on the value I have made, but in so far as I have purchased a natural or communal value that neither I nor any other individual has made, then I have only acquired an opportunity to fleece or bleed my less fortunate fellow beings. I have made no real investment of capital, I have only got hold of a right to levy a toll on a natural fertility or opportunity which is not the result of anything done by me as possessor of the land.

Several times a day I stumble through a suburban street which is neither paved nor lighted, because it is only partly built. The avenue is kept in this condition because the landlord of the vacant lots is "holding for a rise"; in other words, he is waiting until the enterprise of his fellow-men has made the district respectable, and the onrush of increasing population required the vacant land at any price, *i.e.*, the landlord's price. Then he will sell; but in the slang sense of the word. Briefly, this man prevents the development of the locality as long as he can, and then levies a price on the community for having developed in spite of him.

The position is simply this: Shall we uphold this proud supremacy of splendid idleness, or give to industry, mental and physical, its natural opportunities for earning wealth and enjoying liberty.

SOUND ADVICE TO THE UNIONIST PARTY.—Protection with Preference is impracticable. Protection without Preference is sordid and unfair. The Unionist Party will not get out of its impasse by dropping the one expedient and clinging desperately to the other. Its only avenue to stability and usefulness is to abandon "Tariff Reform" in any shape and return to the policy of Free Trade, which was "good enough" for every Conservative leader between Peel and Mr. Balfour, and good enough for all Conservatives, except a few powerless faddists, till a Radical orator turned Imperialist suddenly "found salvation" in an economic system which he had never really studied.—Autonomus, "The Nemesis of Tariff Reform," in THE FORTNIGHTLY (February).

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