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FREE LAND AND PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP.

Arthur Arnold.

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We are on the threshold, as I believe and hope, of great changes in agriculture. The labourer is urging his claim for increased, or at least for undiminished wages; the farmer is embarrassed, and, in the corngrowing districts, is pinched by this pressure on the part of labour and by the low price of corn; the landlord, often with only a narrow margin of income after satisfying the incumbering charges upon his inalienable patrimony, is at his wits' end how to deal with entreaties for reduction of rent at a time when the cost of fashionable existence shows no sign of abatement. The agricultural labourer withholds his strength. An employer writes: 'I have known labourers decline to hoe turnips on piece-work, by which they might earn 48. a day, preferring to receive 2«. 6d. per day, and to limit the amount of work done.' The farmer is less careful in his cultivation. A farmer has stated that weeds have been allowed to get such hold upon the land that an outlay of 10,000,000*l.* would not suffice to bring back the higher cultivation which existed three or four years ago; and another, also in a letter to the *Times*, dealing with the same subject— the increasing impoverishment of corn land—declares that 'it is well known among farmers and agricultural valuers that there are hundreds of thousands of acres of land in this country which, even if prices and seasons were favourable, are not worth so much for occupation by fifty per cent, as they were a few years ago, because labour has been stinted.' The landlord, too, has not been backward in contributing to the decline of British agriculture. He has in all directions given permission for the conversion of arable land into grass, involving in the large majority of cases a certain diminution from the attainable production of meat.

The President of the Local Government Board has felt called upon to speak ' with reference to, the present depression in the agricultural districts.' I refer to his remarks because Mr. Sclater-Booth is the official representative of all the Poor-law guardians of England and Wales, and the Boards of Guardians include a majority of the landed gentry and a great number of farmers. Mr. Sclater-Booth is, moreover, an authority among County Members, who, when agricultural distress is prevalent, are especially

concerned in searching for the cause and in pointing out the remedy. What did Mr. Sclater-Booth say? He intimated that the depression was only of a temporary character, and he said 'it should be remembered that the manufacturing interest had suffered from the effect of over-production, and that where one interest was affected all must suffer.' Why should depression be temporary? The hay-crop of 1878 'was magnificent; the harvest was, in Mr. Caird's opinion, the best we have had for some years. The Times says (November 3, 1879) there has been no such wheat harvest since 1870. Why should depression be temporary? Mr. Sclater-Booth believes we have 'peace with honour;' that European Turkey, sprinkled with blood during his administration, is now to be waving with corn; that all Turkey in Asia, under the beneficent protection of England, is to produce abundance; he knows, or ought to know, ^that water-carriage and land-carriage in America are everywhere being improved; that the Mississippi has been dredged and deepened so that corn-laden vessels can now pass direct from the Western States to the London Docks; that the completion of the Indus Valley Railway will draw still larger supplies of grain from Northern India. These things lie on the surface of the question, and they forbid the supposition that the price of corn will tend to increase.

Why should the depression be temporary? The United States sent out more than 40,000,000?. worth of breadstuffs and provisions in 1877, of which nearly the whole was consumed in this country. The cost-price of that food would be considerably reduced if there were, as many think there will be, an acceptance on the part of the United States of the policy of Free-trade. Protection in the United States has loaded the railways with excessive expenditure—estimated at 500,000*l.* for one trunk railroad from Chicago to the east coast for steel rails alone—from which they might be liberated by opening the Atlantic ports to the free entry of British steel. Another example of the extent to which carriage is taxed in America by that which many believe to be the transitory policy of Protection, may be seen in the statement of 'one of the leading car-builders of the United States,' quoted by Mr. Wells at a Cobden Club dinner, ' that the cost of an ordinary passenger railroad car is directly augmented by reason of tariff taxes on its equipment and material to the extent of from $1,000 to $1,500.' Then again, there is not an implement used by the American farmer the cost of which is not directly or indirectly raised by Protection, a policy which affects in the same way the cost of their necessary clothing, as well as that of many of the luxuries they demand. The farmers of the United States can together control the Legislature; they have a deep interest in promoting Free-trade, and therefore I ask again, Why should depression in British agriculture be regarded as temporary? The Speaker has lent his great authority as a landlord and a practical agriculturist to the opinion that the depression of agriculture is of an exceptional and passing character, without, as I think, sufficient investigation.

Why should agricultural distress be temporary? The steam threshing-machine has gone east and west; and now the reaping-machine—of which one can do the work of ten men—is following it into all corn-exporting lands. There is no part of the world where the steam plough can be employed with greater profit or advantage than upon the flat corn lands of the Western States of America. I quite agree with Mr. Fordham, who in the Times signed himself 'Occupier of 600 Acres, and Vice-chairman of the Royston Board of Guardians,' that 'the price of grain and meat in this country in the future will be its price in the United States, with the cost of transport added.' My conviction is that the depression in British agriculture will not be of a temporary character unless the present system is abandoned; that it is not attributable in any great degree to the distress which has affected the trading and manufacturing interests; that there is no reasonable ground for expectation that this depression will pass away upon the revival of trade; in short, that it is due to faults in our agriculture, and to the maintenance of an obsolete land system, which has conspicuously broken down now that it has been brought, by the improvement of communication, in to competition with the limitless agriculture of other countries of the world. My present purpose is further to demonstrate this position by a survey of the condition and prospects of British agriculture, and once more to point, with the illustration of fresh evidence, to the means by which the agriculture of this country may be rendered far more productive, be relieved from depression, and placed in advantageous competition with that of the distant lands from which the British people already obtain so very large a portion of their supply of food.

To enable us to judge fairly of the general condition of agriculture in these islands, we can hardly take a better guide than the treatise which was published in 1878 by Mr. Caird.[1] There is throughout it a very perceptible optimism, which however does not resist the admission of defects. His first sentence contains a test to which I should be willing to submit all the arguments and propositions I have ever advanced upon this subject. It is this:—'One of the most important functions of government is to take care that there shall be no hindrance to the people supplying themselves with food and clothing, which are the first necessaries of life.' Mr. Caird states that in twenty years the value of foreign cereal and animal food imported has risen from 35,000,000*l.* to 110,000,000*l.* 'The greatest proportionate increase has been in the importation of animal food, living animals,

1 The Landed Interest and the Supply of Food. By James Caird, C.B., F.B.S. (Cassell, Fetter, Galpin, & Co.).

fresh and salted meat, fish, poultry, eggs, butter, and cheese—which in that period has risen from an annual value of seven to thirty-six millions sterling.' Mr. Caird adds: 'More than half the farinaceous articles imported other than wheat are used in the

production of beer and spirits.' His summing up with regard to the home and foreign supply of bread and meat is as follows:—'In the last ten years there has been a gradual reduction of the acreage and produce of wheat in this country, and a more than corresponding increase in the foreign supply; the result of which is that we now receive our bread in equal proportions from our own fields and those of the stranger. In regard to meat and other animal products, ten years ago the proportion of foreign was one-tenth of the whole; it has now risen to nearly one-fourth.' We are further dependent on the foreigner for all, or nearly all, the addition that may be required by increased demand from the existing population, or from the growth of population, which in this country is increasing. It is not Mr. Caird's design to reproach British agriculture; indeed, he does not seem to think there is reproach in the assertion that in the last ten years there has been little increase in the home production of meat. There has been a great rise of price, but British agriculture has completely failed with regard to increase. It is in his dealing with this part of the subject that I am least satisfied 'with Mr. Caird's exposition. The matter is of the very first importance in deciding how we ought to deal with the agricultural depression which is now prevailing. Mr. Caird says (p. 6): 'Excluding good lands capable of being rendered fertile by drainage, we appear to have approached a point in agricultural production beyond which capital can be otherwise more profitably expended in this country than in further attempting to force our poorer class of soils;' and later (p. 143) he says, with still greater precision: 'The production of bread and meat within these islands appears nearly to have reached its limit,' and as there has been little increase (p. 6) in the last ten years, we may assume that, in Mr. Caird's judgment, the production of meat within these islands nearly reached its limit ten years ago. If I regarded that statement as true, I should think it one of terrible significance. As it stands, coming from so cautious and thoughtful a man as Mr. Caird, I think it by far the most important statement that has been made for a long time, with reference to British agriculture. I do not know that there is any personal opinion in which I could find refuge or comfort against that of Mr. Caird, and therefore I rejoice the more to think that I can indicate the error of this statement by the words of Mr. Caird himself. He admits (p. 9o) that 'nature has given us a climate more favourable to the production of meat than that of any other European State.' That is something towards the possibility of a large increase in production. It is pretty well known that thirty years ago only a very insignificant part «f the agricultural land of this country was efficiently drained.

Mr. Caird admits (p. 83) tbat' the extent of work still to be done far exceeds tbat which has been accomplished;' and he affords abundant proof of the large profit which attends land improvement by summarising (p. 93) 'a return of forty cases of outlays, not picked cases, but taken as they happened to come, with the increased rentals, subsequent to the improvements. Upon an outlay in the aggregate of 195,000*l*. there was an increased rental of 31,000*l*. (nearly 16 per cent.). This increase had been

obtained within seven to ten years.' Forty millions sterling would not suffice for the drainage of much more than 5,000,000 acres, and Mr. Caird gives 40,000,000 as the 'acreage under crops' in the United Kingdom (p. 158). Again, take what Mr. Caird says of Mr. Lawes' experiments in natural and artificial fertility. 'The average of the past twenty years shows that the natural produce (of grass land) may be doubled and even trebled, by the use of special manures.' With regard to arable land, Mr. Caird's report of Mr. Lawes' experience is still more striking. Mr. Lawes finds that on one plot to which no manure is applied weeds form fifty per cent. of the produce; and, as illustrating the benefits of high farming, which is very far from general in England, Mr. Caird gives Mr. Lawes' record of the production of two plots of land (p. 39), 'the soils exactly similar, and in the same field, strong land on clay with a substratum of chalk; the management is the same in so far as culture is concerned; both crops are kept equally clean and free from weeds; the same seed is used, and they are exposed to the same changes of weather. The only difference is that, in the one case, nature has been unassisted by manure, and in the other, the soil receives every year the various kinds of manure which have been found most suitable to the crop.' Mr. Caird gives the result with tabular precision:—

Corn Straw Total

1. Wheat grown continuously, without manure 730 Ibs. 1120 Ibs. 1850 Its.

2. Wheat grown continuously, with special manure ",'542 „ 4928 „ 7270 Ibs.

This is conclusive that the difference between the best and inferior agriculture on the same soil may be more than treble the produce. It must be remembered that in this case the inferior agriculture is by no means the worst agriculture. It is stated that in both cases the cultivation is the same; the only difference is in the expenditure for manure. If the land had been of the character which most requires drainage, and if, in addition to the want of manure, the first plot bad been undrained, the crop would hardly have amounted to one-fifth of that upon the second plot.

From what has been stated we may consider Mr. Caird as willing to admit,—

1. That not much more than one-fifth of the 'acreage under crops' has been drained;
2. That not more than 60,000,000*l*. have been expended in the improvement of the 40,000,000 acres ' under crops,' including the outlay in the erection of farmhouses and buildings and cottages, in the last thirty years—an amount equal to no more than 30s. per acre;
3. That the capital value of the landlords' interest has increased by the enormous amount of 321,000,000*l*. in no more than twenty years;

4. That, taking average cases of land improvement, the consequent profit not rarely amounts to more than 15 per cent.; and,
5. That the gentleman to whom British agriculture is, in Mr. Caird's judgment, more indebted than to any other living man, has shown that on grass-land the produce maybe trebled, and on 'arable land more than trebled, by special and suitable manures.

I submit that these admissions are utterly irreconcilable with Mr. Caird's conclusion that' the production of bread and meat within these islands appears to have nearly reached its limit.'

We may learn from the experiments of Mr. Lawes that industrious cultivation, aided with abundant capital, will, either upon grass or arable land, treble the produce which would be obtained when the cultivation was bad and the working capital insufficient. But to the consumer there is an essential difference between the product of grass and of arable land. What may the conversion of an acre of arable into grass imply to the community? I will place, as I ought to place, their interest first. The conditions of management being the same, it may mean the loss of at least one-half of the productive powers of the land. And it implies not only a reduced power of producing food, but also a diminished demand for manufactured goods—a diminished purchasing power abroad and a lessened demand at home. I will call Mr. Caird himself as a witness to prove the case by some of his earlier writings. Mr. Caird has stated, I think in his work on British Agriculture—at all events I have his words quoted in Mr. Mechi's book [2]—that it takes three acres of good land in the Vale of Aylesbury (see Caird) to keep a cow, winter and summer, in proper condition;' that is, three acres of some of the very best grass land in the country to produce the milk of one cow. Perhaps more land, or other food in addition to the grass, would be required to produce one fat bullock, yielding, without offal, 400 Ibs. of meat. Of wheat, the average produce, in England, is, according to Mr. Caird, 28 bushels per acre (p. 157). But if we take land equal in quality and character of produce to the grass land of the Vale of Aylesbury, we must not assume that the average crop will be less than 40 bushels per acre, which, at 60 Ibs. to the bushel, would give a total of 2,400 Ibs., or, for three acres, of 7,200 Ibs. In 1877 Mr. Caird[3] put forth very careful calculations as to the quantity of wheat consumed per head by the population of the United Kingdom. He arrived at the conclusion that 'the home-grown wheat annually consumed by each person is now 158 Ibs., and the foreign 183 Ibs.,' making a total of 341 Ibs. for each person. We have, then, from

2 How to Farm Profitably, p. 175.
3 *Transactions of the Social Science Association.*

these figures this result: that the three rich acres which would, under grass, produce the milk of one cow, would, under wheat, produce sufficient bread for the supply of more than twenty-one persons.. A cow in 'good condition' would not weigh anything like 400 lbs., but let us assume that the three acres of grass would produce 400 lbs. of meat, what would be the daily ration of twenty-one persons? It would not be an ounce per day; a man could send his share in a penny letter by the post! Which would more nourish his body,—a pound of wheat made into good bread, or half an ounce of roast meat? Of course, the comparison is absurd. I have seen land no better than that in the Vale of Aylesbury, and in no higher condition, producing 50 bushels of wheat to the acre, which would give 9,000 lbs. for three acres, and would afford daily bread for twenty-seven persons. Now that which arable land can do for the bread of man it can accomplish for the food of animals, and thus we arrive at a position to see how injurious to the interests of the consumer is the conversion of arable land into grass. Arable land will certainly be converted into grass land if the production in the former condition is not more than sufficient to pay the cost of cultivation. It is, I think, beyond doubt, that the production of wheat in England is at present upon certain lands unprofitable. Taking 28 bushels as the average of England; knowing that some land produces 50 bushels, and much land 35 and 40 bushels per acre, there must be a wide extent under wheat which yields less than 24 bushels per acre. The cost of 24 bushels, or 3 qrs., of wheat of average quality at recent prices is about *61.* 6s. There must be a large extent of poor clay land, undrained and ill-farmed, which does not produce so much. But if we assume the rent of land which produces 3 qrs. per acre to be no more than 1?., and take only another *21.* per acre for the cost of manure, the receipt of *61.* 6s. would leave the farmer in debt at least to the amount of his rent. What Mr. Mechi has termed the 'unescapeable expenses' even of such miserable farming—entirely exclusive of any manure and of anything like very careful cultivation—amount to *51. 5s. 3d.* per acre. The farmer in this case would have the straw from which to pay his rent, to provide for the maintenance of himself and his family, and to renew the exhausted fertility of the land. But it is doubtful if he could sell the straw, as farmers are not seldom bound by conditions of tenancy to use all straw upon the land.

Now if I understand Mr. Caird's argument aright, we are to accept the disappearance of wheat crops upon this sort of land, or the continuance of such miserable production, as a matter due to economic laws; we are to accept his opinion that' we have approached a point in agricultural production beyond which capital can be otherwise more profitably expended in this country than in further attempting to force our poorer class of soils.' It would be a national calamity if Mr. Caird's view of this matter were to become general. I should defer to his opinion upon any matter connected with agriculture, hut, with his own figures before me, I am emboldened to say that I do not know any employment for capital in these islands, possessing equal security, which would yield anything like so large a return as expenditure upon the drainage and

improvement of such lands. No one in England is better acquainted with land of this description than Mr. Mechi,[4] who asks himself the question: 'How are you to get a full crop on such soils? By drainage, by a good farm road, by deeper cultivation, and by a quadruple supply of manure.' He continues: 'But how is the latter (the manure) to be got? By selling all the produce of the farm (except wheat) to your animals. Make up your mind to manufacture 5*l.* worth of fat meat for every acre of land that you hold, and I will promise you a success that you never dreamed of.' If a man on such land made 5*l.* worth of fat meat per acre, his wheat crop would more nearly average forty than twenty-four bushels, and so the production of bread and meat, which Mr. Caird thinks has reached its limit, would be enlarged. Mr. Mechi goes on to say to the farmers of the undrained clay: 'It is all very well to say, Where is the money to come from? We all hold too much land, and I see before me a -man who lost most of his money upon fifty acres, but now, keeping the same amount of stock upon ten acres, he is recovering himself and paying his way.' I like Mr. Mechi's view of the matter better than Mr. Caird's. I will venture to say it is a truer view, and that to enlarge immensely our production of meat and, if we please, of bread, in England, it is only needful that there should be security of tenure, and much more abundant capital, especially upon such lands as those to which we have been referring.

4*How to Farm Profitably,* p. 500.

Mr. Caird is so candid that I have great confidence, when he next addresses the British people upon the general condition of their agriculture, he will confess that the system of large farms in this country has been overdone. The exclusive system of large farms was at no time the best system, either for landlords or tenants. Where there is not free land, there will always be a tendency to distribution in large farms, because it is suitable to the dignity and management of large estates. Of course, it has been and is lauded by land agents. At one time, not many years ago, when farms were being generally enlarged, it was said that farms must be large because of the rapid improvement in agricultural machinery. But, in fact, the machinery has outstripped the farms, and now, even upon what are called large farms, it is no uncommon thing to find that the steamplough, or the threshing-machine, or the reaping-machine, is hired, and is really, just as is the case on peasant farms, the property of some one who is only thus indirectly engaged in agriculture. The pressure of competition from abroad, the pressure of hired labour at home, and the demand for the more costly products of agriculture, to the best production of which the large farm system is unsuited, is bringing about the breakdown of the agricultural system of England. It will be happy for this country if the real and abiding causes of the depression which is observed in agriculture are understood and appreciated. The effect of foreign competition is plain enough: it tends to keep the price of wheat down to about 45s. per quarter; and but for that competition meat would certainly be Is. 6d. a pound. It is less easy to mark the

influence of the increasing demand of the agricultural labourer. But it must be evident to any one that the conditions of superintendence are—for the interests of the employer—at the worst in extensive agriculture. I have known the time when agricultural labourers could be forced, owing to the relation of supply and demand, to undertake piece-work at which, with the utmost exertion, they could not earn more than '2s. a day. Then, if a farmer had a hedge to trim and repair, a ditch to dig, a road to mend, manure to spread, or crops to hoe, it made no great difference in the day's work whether he stood over the men or not. He saw them once in his daily round. They did not work as men would labour upon land of their own, and as for himself, he did, as now be does, no manual labour. But now the price of piece-work is doubled, although the price of wheat is no higher than at the former period. The farmer of a large breadth of land is at a great disadvantage as compared with other employers, when the wages and conditions of labour have become, as they have in Great Britain, much the same in town and country. He cannot so easily overlook his operations. It is only upon land of certain quality and condition— and we may add, of position also—that a farmer can now-a-days earn a considerable percentage upon his capital in the shape of wages of superintendence, and what is still more important to observe, it is the fact that there are only certain men who can earn that percentage. Whether a man would have greater proportionate success as a large shopkeeper or a small shopkeeper, as a largo farmer or as a small farmer, does not depend merely on the amount of capital he can command. Few unite the requisite habits of economy with skill in supervision; many can be stimulated to great bodily exertion and to the^habit of small economies by self-interest.

There would be no depression in agriculture, but great prosperity, if in the spots where that depression prevails the land were divided into such areas as would quadruple the capital employed, and would enable the farmer to engage himself most profitably, and to overlook with no loss of time the assistance for which he paid wages. That is a change which the increasing strain upon the British farmer must in time produce; it is a change which will come quickly if the landlords refuse, as I trust, in the interests of production, they will refuse, to submit to a large reduction of their incomes. The farmers have two resources in these circumstances of depression, to which I have no doubt they will resort before seeking to enlarge their capital by diminishing their holdings—the conversion of arable into grass land, and a reduction of rent. The first has been and will be made available. Wages of superintendence can be most easily obtained by looking after cattle browsing upon pasture. It may be that the land is such, in point of convenience or quality, that it would produce double the quantity of meat if it were arable; but the farmer's capital is not sufficient and his farm is too large to admit of close and careful overlooking, and the margin of his profit is made larger by conversion into grass. He can better leave the pasture without manure; he has a quieter

time, and under cover of the plea as to the depression of agriculture, he gets permission to convert the ploughed land into grass, or to sow with grass seed the land lately reclaimed, without any alteration as to rent—for of course, under ordinary circumstances, the rent of grass land is higher than that of arable land, and this is the point at which the landlord's interest is opposed to that of the consumer of meat. Grass land fetches, by what Adam Smith called 'the higgling of the market,' a higher rent, because labour does not demand so large a share of the profits. On arable land profits have to be divided between landlord, farmer, and labourer; on grass land the labourer is practically not in competition at the division of profits. 'Such lands,' says Mr. Caird (p. 38), with reference to the richest alluvial pastures, 'as they require neither labour nor manure, yield the largest rents to their owners.' Under existing circumstances the tendency to conversion must continue; production is diminished, and the recalcitrant labourer is discharged to make the dense population of towns yet more overcrowded; but, on the other hand, the farmer finds himself in easier circumstances as to capital, and the landlord, if he obtain no increase of rent, has at all events the knowledge that he has pleased his tenant and that his rent is more secure.

Mr. Lawes is much of Mr. Caird's opinion as to increase of production; but Mr. Caird has no doubt as to increase of demand. 'In ten years more,' said Mr. Caird, in 1877,5' there will be another 3,500,000 to be provided for, if no check occurs, so that the question of still larger supplies of animal food is a pressing one. What is to be done?' Mr. Caird's policy for the reform of the tenure and transfer of land is scattered throughout his treatise. But I must not complain, for if the production of bread and meat cannot be increased, reform is a question of no great importance to an agricultural economist . I am indeed rather surprised that Mr. Caird has been at the pains to put forward so many distinct propositions if he believes that their enactment would have no substantial influence upon production. I must say I prefer Mr. Caird's propositions to his inferences; they 4 Tfama:-t!i-Hi ufthe Social Science Auodation.

are all admirable, and coming from him in a report, or at the tail of a report, to the Royal Agricultural Society, they are of considerable importance. In order to see these proposals to the utmost advantage, we must take first Mr. Caird's statements with reference to the distribution of land in this country. He admits (p. 40) that this is 'constantly tending to a reduction in the number of small estates; * that'this tendency is further promoted by the law which permitsentails and settlements, thus hindering the natural sale of the land so dealt with, and also by rights of primogeniture, which prevent subdivision of landed property among the family in case of intestacy.' But he would have us learn from the ' New Domesday Books ' that (p. 44) ' every twentieth head of a family ' is an agricultural landowner. Mr. Caird can however hardly expect that with the figures before us we shall accept this statement, which is quite unworthy of Mr. Caird's reputation for accuracy. He assumes that all personsreturned in those

books as owners of land, the extent of which is not less than one acre, are ' properly agricultural landowners,' 320,000 in number. That is an unwarrantable assumption. There are tens of thousands of villas, with purely ornamental grounds of an acre or more, the proprietors of which are in no sense agricultural landowners; there are thousands of clergy included in Mr. Caird's misleading roll of 'agricultural landowners,' who are merely official tenants during good behaviour of a parsonage house and a large garden; there are thousands of Sir. Caird's 'properly agricultural landowners ' who are returned as owners of an acre or more of land in a street covered with houses. Mr. Caird says (p. 44): 'They [the tenant farmers] are 1,160,000 in number, and, when added to320,000 owners of one acre and upwards, make 1,480,000 altogether engaged in the ownership and cultivation of the soil.' Mr. Caird! cannot doubt that these 320,000 include tens of thousands—I should say hundreds of thousands—of urban residents; and on p. 43 he writesof' urban populations having little other connection with the land than that of affording the best market for its produce.' He is wrongon p* 44 and right on p. 43. What connection with agriculturehave the thousands of proprietors of villas standing in one acre and upwards in the two counties of York and Lancaster? Mr. Caird isnever accurate in his references to the 'New Domesday Books.' Hisare probably the most incorrect propositions that have been drawn from those fallacious volumes.

When Mr. Caird gets clear of the ' New Domesday Books,' his remarks about landowners and landowning are more valuable, and are always tending in the right direction. For instance, in dealing (p. 61) with the ' duty of property,' he asserts that ' a most important part of that duty is to see that no good land upon it is suffered by neglect or mismanagement to remain unproductive.' If that duty were strictly fulfilled, what would become of Mr. Caird's statement concerning the production of meat and bread? I wonder whether Sir Garnet Wolseley had orders to repeal the Turkish law in Cyprus which decreed that if any owner neglect this part of his duty for more than three years ' without good excuse,'6 the State will claim his land. I am no advocate of such a law for England. But if there were a law decreeing that land must, in a reasonable manner, be subject to the best agriculture for the food supply of the people, and that if this were not done it should be forfeited, what millions of acres in England would yield double the present produce! If Mr. Caird's moral code were carried out, how unsound bis economic prediction would appear as to the supply of bread and meat!

I am afraid the French economists who have read Mr. Caird's treatise with respect, have thought him somewhat'insular' in his reference to the extent and value of agricultural property which changes hands annually in this country. Mr. Caird says that 'landed property of the value of several millions sterling a year changes hands, and as there is necessarily a larger body of persons capable of competing for small

properties, there is a natural tendency to subdivision in sale.' What is the fact? Taking out the town houses and the landed estates selling for more than 10,000?., do the annual sales of land in England amount to 5,000,000?. or to 2,000,000?.? In France the annual sales of real property reach 80,000,000?. Here we touch one of the typical points of our land system, and Mr. Caird whitewashed it so that the traces of feudalism should not appear among English 'exhibits' at Paris. If Mr. Caird had told the World that were the feudalistic laws and customs laid aside in this country—without imposing any form of compulsory distribution upon testators—the sales of real property in England would amount to ten times their present sum, which would then be distributed by the natural law he speaks of, at higher values than are at present attained, he would have said that which is incontestably veracious. His treatise contains not a few contradictions. On p. 66 Mr. Caird says 'there is a natural tendency to subdivision on sale;' on p. 67 he says: 'In short, our system is that of large capitalists owning the land.' Elsewhere he displays the fact that it is something else—that it is a system of large capitalists depopulating the land. Mr. Caird says (p. 51): 'It is worthy of note that the strictly rural parishes of England exhibit some decline of populatioa. And it is quite certain that this continues.' And again, on p. 92: 'Within the period between the census of 18G1 and 1871 there has been a decrease of the country population in every county of England except five; and it is only in the suburban counties and in the manufacturing and mining districts that an increase has taken place.' 1 regard all these facts as of the utmost gravity. Against Mr. Caird I contend that when the sales of land are thus restricted—as in Eng'Timci Correspondence, October 24, 1878.

land they are restricted by entail, settlement, and the difficulties of purchase—production must greatly suffer, for it is absolute truth that' whatsoever facilitates land passing into new hands tends to increase its productiveness, and thereby its usefulness, to the nation at large; since those among the owners who are least provided with skill, enterprise, and capital are those who are under the strongest inducements to sell their land.'7

I am sad when I think of the harm which Mr. Caird's ill-judged opinions have achieved. No increase of produce possible! I have before me the particulars of the result of a purchase six years ago by a Manchester man of 200 acres of land that had been long settled in an embarrassed family, in the hapless condition of millions of acres in Engkndat this moment. Fortunately for the interests of production, the male line in this noble family became extinct, and their Cheshire property was sold. When my informant purchased, there was barely food for thirty sheep upon the impoverished pasture, and there was not a load of hay—indeed, his expression was 'You could cart all the hay in a wheelbarrow.' In six years, by the skilful application of capital upon this land, so happily freed from that blight of settlement which more or

less injuriously affects probably four-fifths of the United Kingdom, be had raised the produce to fifty loads of hay, and he had six hundred sheep upon the land which under' the English Astem' barely afforded food for thirty. I see, too, the depopulation of rural England with deep sorrow and concern. Not only does it of a certainty imply diminished production of food, but also a reduction in the standard of health and vigour throughout the whole population. These are the most grave and menacing features in the social life of England, and I hope that the first action of the agricultural labourers on obtaining the suffrage will be to follow bravely and boldly the lead of those who will seek to render the land system in accord with the rational interests of the country. Mr. Caird alludes to the important matter of labourers' cottages. He admits (p. 65) that' in many parts of the country there is much room for improvement,' and on p. 89 points to the difficulty that ' labourers' cottages are reckoned the least remunerative of all buildings.' Mr. Caird's remedy is that'adequate cottages for the work-people, with the farm and all other necessary buildings, should be let to the farmer at a rent which should include a fair return on the landlord's capital, and the farmer and the labourer should be left to deal with each other on the basis of adequate remuneration for useful service, regulated by the ultimate rule of demand and supply.' I have seen that plan many times in operation, and in my opinion it involves a step backward in the direction of serfdom. The labourer's home is then at the mercy of his employer, and in bargaining for his labour he is placed at the greatest disadvantage, because his home, as well as his em

ployment, is at stake. That this should be the only remedy occurring to a mind so fertile as Mr. Caird's displays one of the permanent difficulties of the English land system. The agricultural labourers in England are badly lodged, and in some places overcrowded. We know that the Belgian peasantry are less crowded. From an official return made in 1856 we learn that the number of families for every 100 bouses in the rural districts of East Flanders was 101, in West Flanders 102, and in the entire kingdom 104;8 and we know why their condition is in this matter superior to that of the English.

Mr. Caird is not, as I have already intimated, insensible to those which I regard as abiding causes of agricultural depression. Nor is Mr. Caird unmindful of the large production, in certain circumstances, of small farms. On page 19 he admits that increase of produce is obtained where the agriculturist is free to follow a rational system of farming, and that the agriculturist has not this rational liberty is not only a fact which is patent upon the face of every county, but it may also be gathered from Mr. Caird's treatise. On page 107 Mr. Caird says that if landowners had ready powers

of sale it would not be difficult to point out cases in which sales might be made with immense advantage to the landowner, the neighbourhood, and the public. It is not for me to explain why, if Mr. Caird believes we have so nearly reached the limit of production of bread and meat, he should be anxious for rational leases, for ready powers of sale, and, on page 109, for limiting settlements of land to ' lives in being' and for ' an improved system of transfer.' I do not see why he should denounce ' tenancy-at-will' (p. 148), and assert that, 'with a year's notice, however favourable the conditions of compensation for unexhausted improvements, it cannot give the farmer security beyond the year;' why, above all, he should declare that' the sooner the principle of security of possession for a definite and lengthened term becomes generally recognised in England, the better will it be for the individual and public interest;' why should he plead, as he does plead (p. 150), for the extension of the 'Bright Clauses ' of the Irish Land Act to England and Scotland? I do not however complain when I see that Mr. Caird's suggestions again defeat his argument, or that in undertaking to inform the Royal Agricultural Society of landed gentry and the world at Paris that the agricultural system of England scarcely in point of production admitted of improvement, he has marred his own success. Mr. Caird knows too much for thorough-going optimism, and those who read his treatise with care and with knowledge •will find substantial indications of the need for reform, which though, as I think, very insufficient, must yet certainly lead to such changes in British agriculture as would in the end prove, to no one more surely than to Mr. Caird himself, that the power of production of bread and

» *The Land System of Eelyiwn.* By M. Emile do Laveleye.

meat at present prices within these islands is far indeed from having reached its limit.

Mr. Caird has again glorified our land-system by a comparison of

the English produce of wheat with that of France, of Germany, of

Russia, and of the United States. It is an easy victory, and no

one knows better than Mr. Caird how very little it is worth. I am

sure he must be aware that deplorable as is the starvation of much of

the land of England for want of capital, the condition, especially of

the larger farms of those countries, is still worse in that respect.

What then is the use of such a comparison? I set no great value

upon comparisons in agriculture, because in different countries there are different conditions of labour and capital. But I must say that comparison, where it is closest, and most in point, is dead against Mr. Caird. If he seek a true and valuable comparison, touching what might be the production of England, let him compare some of the Duke of Bedford's farms with those of the many embarrassed landed gentry; and if with the closest possible application he wishes to compare the English land-system with another, why go outside the limits of the United Kingdom? Comparison with the Channel Islands is far more scientifically accurate than with France. In Jersey there are 30,000 acres of land, with little of very superior quality, subject to British rule, but not to British laws. I would rather be Governor of Cyprus in summer-time than Governor of Jersey with orders to introduce the English land-system. Just as much as the farms of Kent are the farms of Jersey cultivated for the supply of produce for the London market. Why, then, do not the farms in Jersey grow large, why does not the rural population decline, why are not the cottages wretched, why is the farming capital per acre three times and the price of land at least twice as high as in England; and, lastly, why are the crops of all kinds so much heavier than those poor averages of England, which Mr. Caird does not do well or wisely to boast? It is not because of the law of compulsory subdivision; that in Jersey

fe restricted, and has practically little operation; it is not because of peculiarities of climate or soil, for the land of Jersey is hardly so well suited for general production as is the land in many parts of England. It is because the conditions of tenure and transfer of land are such that the price of land forbids aggregation, with all its evil consequences. The farms are small, but the steam-engine is more often seen at work in Jersey than in England; the reaping-machine, too, is there; and a Jersey fanner whose crop of wheat does not yield on an average more than half as much again as Mr. Caird's highest average for England would be regarded by his neighbours as one who was on the road to ruin. An Englishman is astonished to find the house of a Jersey farmer of 15 acres generally as good as the house of an English farmer of 150 acres, and when his operations are investigated it is seen how large a number of English would be benefited by reducing their holding to as small an area.

I do not say that England will ever be a country of small farms, but I am certain that when we obtain adequate reform, the time will not be distant when the largest average produce in the island will be gathered from small farms. An Englishman, it is quite proverbial, rarely succeeds as a Jersey farmer; he has been trained in a land where, as a rule, the example of frugality has never been before his eyes. The Jersey farmer, unlike the British farmer, is never idle, and as a sample of his industry, I may mention that in the 5,000 acres which in Jersey are every year planted with potatoes, there is not a potato put into the ground which has not, after a careful handling, been 'sprouted' in boxes, stored one upon another either in the farmer's barn or in some out-building. Jersey is prosperous because the people have free land; because, with insignificant exceptions, the land is saleable, because insolvency is followed by sale, and the price is high because there are many buyers. The cost of commodities is generally greater in Jersey than in England. But the soil is not, as is ours, blighted by entail and settlement, and by a system of conveyance and mortgage made to suit entail and settlement. Perhaps some one will say that by their toil the Jersey people do no more than employ and feed the greater labour which is devoted to their land. Let us see. The total area of

Jersey is 28,717 statute acres. The cultivated portion is 20,623 acres. The number of occupiers of agricultural land is 2,309,9 giving an average of about 9 acres for each holding. If we take each occupier, as Mr. Caird does (p. 44), to represent 5 persons, we have at least 11,545 engaged in the cultivation of the soil. The total population of Jersey, according to the census of 1871, was 56,627, of whom more than 34,000 were resident in the parish and suburbs of St. Helier's. An estimate of 15,000 for the agricultural population, including the labourers, cannot be very incorrect, because in each of the other eleven parishes there is some nonagricultural population. In addition, the agriculture of Jersey supports during the summer months an average of about 4,000 visitors. My assertion concerning Jersey is this: these 15,000 farming people produce a far greater quantity of food from 20,000 acres than any other equal number of people upon any equal and continuous area in the United Kingdom, and with greater profit; all of which is, I think, proved, if further proof be needed, by the fact that in addition to supplying this very large non-agricultural population and visitors, Jersey exports agricultural produce to the value of more than 150,000?. a year.

I have often used the term ' free land,' and for the attainment of free land I_have put forward suggestions, which it is necessary to repeat because of the supposition advanced by Lord Salisbury and • Parish Returns for 1876,

others as to wild proposals for compulsory subdivision of agricultural lands. The suggestions are the following:—

1. The devolution of real property in cases of intestacy in the same manner which the law directs in regard to personal property.

2. The abolition of copyhold and customary tenures.

3. The establishment of a Landed Estates Court for the compulsory sale of encumbered settled property.

4. Completion of the Ordnance Survey.

5. Registration of fee-simple title; compulsory upon the sale or transfer of property (the registration of lesser interests to follow that of the freehold), and a reduction of the limit for investigation of title to twenty years.

6. Abolition of entail and settlement, with exception as to settlement in the case of widows and infant children.

No writer, with whose work I am acquainted, has suggested direct measures, except the extension of the Bright clauses of the Irish Land Act, for the establishment of

peasant proprietorship in England. There is, however, no matter connected with the ownership and occupation of the soil which is the subject of more thoughtless dogmatism and ill-considered judgment. If in any ordinary company one were to express an opinion favourable to the results of peasant proprietorship, there is a probability almost amounting to certainty that some one, in a tone of authority, and with the air of superior knowledge, would expect the topic to be quashed by reference to some scarce examples of small proprietorship carried on in the midst of that which Lord Ripon has lately condemned as a system for centralising the ownership of land in huge estates. No one, so far as I am aware, with the slightest claim to authority, has ever supposed or suggested that a peasant proprietary can flourish where the land is not free; that a population will display the methods and habits indispensable to the success of small farming, where the general condition of the soil is the opposite of freedom, and where, consequently, peasant proprietary can exist only in a few and isolated cases, always tending to decay and disappearance.

Lord Beaconsfield, although he has evidently no taste for agricultural pursuits, has thought it his duty as a landlord and a county magnate to study the economic laws which regulate the productiveness of agriculture. But is it not astonishing to find Lord Beaconsfield, at Aylesbury in September last, framing an argument against peasant proprietorship in this country from observation of the agriculture of Canada and the United States of America? It seems almost incomprehensible that a statesman in the position of Prime Minister should on the one hand ignore the very disadvantageous extent to which we in this country are dependent upon the Continent of Europe for fruit, vegetables, and dairy produce, and on the other hand should appear so unsuccessful in mastering the economics of agriculture as to propound the obvious fact that small farms are not adopted in a new country. Last autumn, upon inquiry in London and in many southern towns, I found that a very large quantity of cabbages, lettuces, and other green vegetables were imported into this country, than which there is no part of the world better suited for the production of such commodities. In London a vast import of potatoes is received from Germany. The German farmers, like the Jersey farmers, are more successful than the British in the production of potatoes. We have seen what is the careful method of Jersey husbandry in dealing with this delicate crop, and it is easy to understand how impossible it is for equivalent success to be achieved by farmers who, in British fashion, give nothing but superintendence to agriculture. In the production of vegetables, the minute details of husbandry are all-important, and there can be no equal competition between the farmer who superintends these details upon an area so large that he can rarely be upon the spot, and one who has a personal interest in the proper handling of every plant and of every potato. The people of England are paying to foreigners for fruit, vegetables, and dairy produce, a heavy sum—for foreign butter alone we pay 10,000,000?. per annum—of which a great part is a tribute to the peculiar institutions of this country

affecting the distribution of the soil. It is in a country such as ours, where the demands are of this kind, that a peasant proprietary—the proper meaning of which I take to be a proprietary by whom the greater part of the manual work of the farm is carried on—is much needed. The conditions of agriculture are, almost as far as possible, reversed in the United States and in Canada. There the simplest and least laborious agriculture wins the most reward; there the least perishable crops must be produced at the least cost. This is so evident that it is indeed surprising to find the Prime Minister expounding the plain facts of American agriculture, apparently with the notion that he was refuting the ideas of English reformers. Said Lord Beaconsfield: 'Now, it is a peculiar circumstance, but to be noted, that the Dominion of Canada is not in favour of peasant proprietorship,' and then he proceeded to state that Canadian farms are generally 160 acres or more in extent. Virtually, the principle of peasant proprietary does obtain in Canada, because even upon those considerable farms the larger share of the labour is performed by the proprietor and his family. But, of course, the agriculture which is most profitable is utterly dissimilar from that which would win the greatest profit in this country.

Lord Salisbury, also, has been dealing with the subject, and has adopted to the fullest possible extent the fallacy which I thought I had destroyed by an article in an early number of the *Nineteenth Century*, entitled 'The Abuses of a Landed Gentry;' the argument that the man who can afford to be a peasant proprietor will prefer to be a tenant farmer, and make five or ten per cent, on his money,

whereas he could only make two per cent, as an owner. Can Lord Salisbury really suppose that the French, or the Belgian, or the Jersey peasants, who give much higher prices for land than are obtained in this country, are blind to their own interest? The first cause of peasant proprietorship is that where the great landlord makes Lord Salisbury's two per cent, by ownership, the peasant makes ten per cent, by security. Lord Salisbury puts the average price of agricultural land in England at 50L an acre. I visited lately every farm I could find for sale in Jersey, and found the average about 190?. per acre. Lord Salisbury says of France: 'The land there is as dear as here.' I should say it is much dearer. Why? Because competition is extended to a class who can make so very much more out of possession than is possible for landlords owning upon the English system. Let us turn to unquestionable authority on this point, Mr. James Howard's work on *Continental Farming and Peasantry.* Subdivision in France is most notable in the north-west. M. Hamoir,. the best known agriculturist of the department of the Nord, states that twenty-five acres are considered a large farm, and that, as in Jersey, ten acres may be taken as the average. M. Hamoir has known agricultural land in that department sold to peasant proprietors at 192?. an acre. As usual with large farmers, or great proprietors, he deprecates such an outlay; he thinks

it'better that the small farmer should not be a proprietor or landowner at the price he pays.' Then M. Hamoir, in a paraphrase of Lord Salisbury, says: 'The interest of his [the peasant's] money invested in ordinary securities would permit him to hire, even at a high rate, double the quantity of land that he could hold as an owner, but he does not enter upon this path.' This French peasant, taxed all over the world with morbid thrift, with unnatural frugality, is told that he is reckless in the outlay of his painful savings, and the M. Hamoirs look upon him as a stubborn, contumacious creature, with a wonderful faculty for existing on hard fare, and for raising the price of land, which last trait is very disagreeable when they desire to be purchasers. Is it likely to be true, is it reasonable to suppose, that the people who, generation after generation, have put sou to sou, and franc to franc, till a purse was made for purchase—is it not in fact silly to suggest that they would be duped in their expenditure? M. Hamoir, to do him justice, does Dot believe this, though he professes to trace such conduct in part to the ' ignorance' of the Continental peasantry. M. Hamoir gives, in Mr. Howard's pages, a subordinate place to that which is obviously the real and the sufficient motive. The purchase is, in truth, the result of prudence, not of ignorance. The peasants know that their unremitting labour will turn even sand to gold, and they know that there is but one way to security, that of ownership. As M. Hamoir puts it, the peasant buys because he fears ' the short duration of leases at the end of which he dreads to be ousted for some competitor.' There it is. That is the whole story; the full and complete justification of the peasant's prudence and judgment. To be secure he must be a proprietor. It is, I think, unworthy of Lord Salisbury— if only because he was draughtsman of the Lords' Report on Agriculture in 1873—to meet the claim for free land with the rejected and futile plea, that modern settlements contain a power of sale. That power has no analogy to a free sale of land, or to the simple responsibilities of freehold tenure. I am pretty well acquainted with Lord Salisbury's estate; I have walked over most, if not all, of his lordship's farms, and I can say that high farming is not the 'note' of Hatfield. Yet there is a fixed idea in the minds of most English landlords, that high farming and large farms are strictly connected; an idea which was very conspicuous in Mr. Fronde's essay. I dealt at the time of its appearance with Mr. Froude's essay on 'The Uses of a Landed Gentry.' No one seems to have thought the economists, from Adam Smith to Mill, all wrong and Mr. Froude all right, and the essay has since been very appropriately placed among *Short Studies of Great Subjects.*

I repeat that the end of those who seek the establishment of free land is not the creation of a peasant proprietary. But they regard the fact that free land would have the result of greatly increasing the number of proprietors as a matter of political, social, and economic importance. They know that the demand for legislative changes will not be idly made; that the people at large must be convinced of the advantages: first, in regard to increase of production, and second, in regard to the closer association of a larger body of the people with the soil. Those who prophesy terrible

things concerning the future of Russia will, I fancy, find themselves mistaken. Perhaps to the impossibility of exciting general resolution in Russia may be ascribed some part of the fanatical violence of a few who find no sympathy among the great mass of the population. The hold of the peasantry upon the soil of Russia will probably secure steadiness, though progress in so poor a country must needs be slow. It is well in this connection to observe that which the military correspondent of the *Times* (October 16, 1877) in Bulgaria wrote of the Russian soldier: 'A popular fallacy in England is that the Russian soldier lives in an atmosphere of blows—that the knout and the stick are his only ruling motives. The fact is that nowhere, not even among the Germans, is the soldier managed more entirely by moral means. A word, or even a look, from his officer suffices. He seems to feel a reproof—and it is rarely deserved—as much as an Englishman would a blow. The bulk of the Russian privates are themselves small landowners, and have an interest and a stake in the country accordingly.'

I see that in England there is a 'National Thrift Society,' of which the Lord Mayor of London has lately become a patron. How is it that we so grievously need, and that other populations have no such need for, encouragement in carefulness? Is it not because our people are debarred from learning lessons of frugality from the land, the mother of all thrift? What is the first supreme lesson in economy, which, indeed, is taught to all people and to all countries, but least of all to the people of England? Is it not the dependence of man upon the harvest; is it not in the fact that there is a seedtime and a harvest; that there is no continual harvest; that store must be made for those seasons in which there is no harvest? The people who have been withheld from that school—the primest and chief of all schools—have never displayed, and never will display, the cardinal virtues of thrift and frugality. In the subservience of our Legislature to the maintenance of those perishing laws and practices which favour the aggregation of land in a comparatively few families, there have been now and then displayed feeble and futile efforts to inculcate carefulness. But it would be as easy for well-meaning philanthropists to push this island from its solid foundations in the earth to a junction with France, as to make the English people thrifty so long as they are divorced from the soil. The true and the best ' National Thrift Society' will be composed of those who are the most earnest and the most successful in the demand for free land.