

The Single Tax, August, 1901

A NECESSARY WARNING.

"THE LAND AND THE LABOURER."

A lively correspondence on the above subject has been carried on in the columns of the London Daily Chronicle. Several of those who contributed to it ventured to suggest that some reform in our system of land tenure might tend to improve matters. The following is from a very interesting letter by Mr. L. H. Berens, who wrote from the National Liberal Club :—

"THE LAND AND THE LABOURER."

To the Editor of the " Daily Chronicle:

LEWIS H. BERENS. National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, S.W.

SIR,—In his letter on the above subject your correspondent L S. R. ventures to suggest that it is possible that our " land laws need overhauling and reconstructing to meet the exigencies of a new period and a changed order of society." His idea seems to be to break down land monopoly, at all events, in the rural districts, so that it shall be possible for our farmers and agricultural labourers to settle down as independent yeomen on their own holdings, to accumulate capital for themselves and the further development of their industry, instead of paying the greater part of their earnings away as rent; and thus to give them the opportunity of restoring British agriculture to its former prosperous condition. Any such step would have a far-reaching influence over every other department of industry. If sufficient quantities of good agricultural land were made available to our agricultural workers, then manifestly no agricultural worker would toil for another, or in another employment, for less than he could earn for himself by producing direct from Mother Earth. Thus, though the agricultural workers would tend to become good customers of our town workers, they would no longer flock into our towns to take their places in time of a strike, or to compete for any work they are capable of undertaking. The abolition of land monopoly would tend, not only to increase the demand for the products of our manufacturers, now ever crying aloud for fresh markets, but also to increase the earnings of both skilled and unskilled workers both in town and country. This may seem a good thing for the many who work, but it may not prove so advantageous to the few who, without sharing in the labour, are now allowed to command such a satisfactory share of the fruits of the labour of others. For, we must remember that, as Charles Booth tells us, in his "Labour and Life of the People," "The modern system of industry will not work without some unemployed margin, some reserve of labour." And manifestly with land monopoly, this reserve of labour would vanish, and this would necessitate a total reconstruction of the present

system of industry, as well as secure a very different distribution of the fruits of the united activity of our people.