

if it was depressed in certain places, there were other industries which were equally depressed. There was, to begin with, the tweed trade—(hear, hear)—which was in a very bad state at that moment, yet he did not hear of this landlord Government bringing forward any measure for the relief of the tweed trade. (Laughter and cheers.) And, indeed, they were not likely to hear of anything of the kind. They were ready to put money into the pockets of idle landlords—(hear, hear)—but they were not willing to extend their assistance to industrious manufacturers. But would there be any relief afforded by this measure to agriculture? (A voice, 'None at all.') In the first place,

WHO WERE THE AGRICULTURISTS?

There was first the agricultural labourer. If there was anyone entitled to relief it should be him. (Cheers.) In England the wages of the agricultural labourers in many counties were a mere pittance, ranging sometimes as low as 10s. a week, scarcely enough to keep body and soul together, so that if anyone engaged in agriculture required relief it was the agricultural labourer. Yet he was no better off after the passing of this Bill than he was before. Then they come to the farmer, who could also claim to be called an agriculturist. No doubt, there might be many farmers who were sadly in want of relief, but any relief they would get from this Bill would be a mere trifle. (Cheers.) There were other farmers who were doing well, and required no relief, but this Bill made no distinction between the distressed and the prosperous farmer. (Cheers.) But even the distressed farmer would get nothing in the long run by this Bill, for if he had to pay less rates on his farm it would only enable him to pay more rent to his landlord. Mr. Chaplin himself said in 1891—"If the rates were high the landlord got less rent, and if rates were low he got more rent," so that by making the rates low this Government was only enabling the farmer to pay more rent to the landlord. (Cheers.) But the landlord was not an agriculturist—(hear, hear)—and yet it turned out that he was the party who was getting the relief, although it was brought forward to relieve the agriculturist.

THE LANDLORD DID NOT PLOUGH

the land or sow the seed. (Cheers and laughter.) He did not, like the farmer, conduct and supervise the operations of the farm. He did nothing at all, but one thing which he did with remarkable ability, he pocketed the rents. (Loud applause.) It therefore turned out that this Bill, which was brought forward to relieve the depressed agriculturist, did not relieve either the labourer or the farmer, who are engaged in agriculture, but went to relieve a person who did nothing, and who had no connection with agriculture whatever, viz., the landlord. If they wanted to relieve the agriculturist, if they wanted to relieve the farmer, why did not they reduce the rents? (Loud cheers.) Although that would afford no relief to the labourer, it would help the farmer at any rate. He found some very interesting figures bearing on the matter. He found that the agricultural rent of England, which was divided amongst a comparatively small number of individuals, amounted to £49,000,000 a year, while the wages of the whole of the labourers amounted to only £31,000,000 a year, and had to be divided amongst 852,000 labourers, giving an average wage of 14s per week. (Shame.) Yes, if they wanted to relieve the farmers they might well relieve them out of the £49,000,000 paid as rent, not to speak of the labourers at all. If they wished to relieve agriculture they must

RELIEVE IT OF THE LANDLORDS,

who constituted the most intolerable burden it had to bear. What was the cause of agricultural depression? He would tell them. The cause of agricultural depression was to be found in landlordism—(loud cheers)—and the true remedy for agricultural depression was to be found in the destruction of the monopolistic power which the landlords exercise over the land. Free the land from the landlords and they would hear no more of agricultural depression. It was landlordism which they had to fight both in town and country. (Cheers.) In the towns they played the same game. There, under the form of ground rents, feu-duties, and all these other forms of extortion, they preyed like locusts on the industries of the people—(loud cheers)—just as they preyed on agriculture in the country. In both town and country they acted the part of lookers-on, who did none of the work, but who pocketed the plunder—(cheers)—and he told them that until they destroyed landlordism, root and branch, until they smote it hip and thigh, they would never succeed in making any real progress in the social, material, or moral elevation of the people of this country. (Loud cheers.)

The Landlords' Relief Bill.

By L. H. B.

We would draw the attention of our readers to the debate in the House of Lords on the second reading of the above Bill, more especially to the speech of the gentleman who now occupies the proud and honourable position of Prime Minister, and whose words in consequence merit, if not our respect, at least our attention. "The benefit of this Act," he told his hearers, "is for the freeholders, the occupiers, and those who hold their land by annual tenure." [Not, of course, for the landlords, not for those who hold their land by feudal tenure, but who have legally relieved themselves of their duties while retaining their privileges.] "We have adopted this particular mode of procedure," he continued, "because we wished to make a breach in the present vicious system of taxation, and to mark the injustice, of which we [the House

of Landlords, we presume, he means] all complain, under which there is exemption of personal property, being about five-sixths the property of the country, from bearing those burthens which all property should bear alike."* (The italics are ours.)

Here, then, we have a plain statement of the principle on which the policy of the present Conservative party is based. They, at least, face the situation, and boldly grasp the nettle that, if handled more tenderly, might sting them. They accept things as they are, and cannot or will not recognise any essential distinction between property and property. Whatever a man may legally own—be it houses, machinery or land, dogs, cattle, or slaves—is to them "property;" and in the sacred name of Justice they demand that all property should be treated alike. Their position is logical and consistent. If all property be really the same in kind, why make any invidious distinction? In the mouth of Tories this argument may sound somewhat strange, but it requires answering. And Lord Rosebery's manifest endeavour to avoid answering it robbed his official answer of all point and force. When an opponent claims support for a measure on the grounds of justice, it is worse than useless to ask him to consider "Was the game worth the candle?"

But leaving Lord Rosebery out of consideration (for from him many Liberals, including the present writer, expected nothing, and have not been disappointed), the question of immediate interest is as to whether the Liberal party is prepared to pick up the gauntlet so recklessly thrown down by Lord Salisbury, and do battle with him on the issue he himself has chosen. Are they prepared to answer him as Portia answered Shylock, "For, as thou urgest justice, be assured thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest"? Will they openly proclaim that, as has been so conclusively demonstrated by the now orthodox economist, John Stuart Mill, "The laws of property have never yet conformed to the principle on which the justification of private property rests. They have made property of things which never ought to be property, and absolute property where only a qualified property ought to exist"? Will they boldly inform Lord Salisbury and his supporters that "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 does not apply to what is not the produce of labour, the raw material of the earth"? Will they, in short, defend the principle they have avowedly espoused, viz., the Taxation of Ground Values? or will they, while prating of Freedom, Justice, and Progress, studiously avoid taking any steps that may tend to secure these blessings?

These are the questions aroused in our mind by a perusal of the debate to which we have referred our readers; and we give them utterance in the hope to receive a speedy and definite answer. We have no wish to weaken or discredit the Liberal Party. Indeed, we only desire that they should be true to the principles they have espoused. Most of us were Liberals before we were Land Reformers; and becoming Land Reformers has only made us better Liberals, more ardent Radicals, in the true sense of these terms. Freedom is the cause that the progressive party in this country, by whatever name it may have been known, has always espoused. Freedom is the goal towards which we aspire. But true freedom cannot be secured to all until all are secured equal rights to the bounties of Nature. This is the question that will divide political parties in the near future. On the one side will be ranged the supporters of Privilege and Monopoly, the adherents of institutions based on Might, on Injustice; on the other will be ranged the supporters of Freedom and Equality of Opportunities, the adherents of institutions based on Right, on Justice. Lord Salisbury and his followers have chosen their side—we have chosen ours; and however much the leaders of the Liberal Party may desire to delay taking sides, the bold tactics of the present Tory Government must force them to arrive at a decision. In the meanwhile they cannot be

* Considering that it was but last year that the Conservatives opposed the equalisation of the Death Duties, this argument may sound somewhat strange in the mouth of a Conservative Leader, and may well arouse suspicion as to why it is now used.

surprised if both Conservatives and Reformers alike treat them with suspicion. For in both these camps the feeling is spreading that those who are not for us are against us.

Sea-Lords.

We congratulate the *Montrose Review*, which has always been in the van of Scottish Radicalism, on its up-to-dateness in regard to the infamous Rating Bills. In the course of a forcible article the editor says that the true method of "dealing with the burden of rates is to heavily tax ground values or the unearned increment." How many Liberal papers might have touched the spot in this homocœan fashion and have failed to do so! "Single Taxer" has been contributing a series of articles to the *Review* on "The Divine Right of Landlords," "The Land Question for Townsfolk," "Montrose Sandlords," &c., from one of which we take the following fable, illustrative of our wonderful land system and Relief of Distress Bills:—

There was once upon a time a great kingdom by the sea. The inhabitants gave it the name of Merryland, because the people were the happiest, and the best, and the wisest, as well as the most practical and the most respectable in the whole world—at least in their own estimation. The chief industry of the country was the great Shipping Interest, and it had a wonderful system of sea-tenure and an equally wonderful race of sea-lords, who were popularly supposed to be the envy of the surrounding nations.

The Shipping Interest consisted of these sea-lords (who were a very small fraction of the community), the shipowners and the sailors. It was a favourite "figure of speech" among the sea-lords that "all three sailed in the same boat," although, of course, their "functions" were different. The sea-lords owned the sea, most of them having very large water estates, over which no ship could pass without paying tribute to the owner.

They were mostly descended from the Lords of the Admiralty of ancient times, and from large shipowners who, because they used the sea, thought they had a right to own it, and by fraud and violence enforced their claim, finally passing laws to make the whole arrangement legal. They found that the lord who owned the sea practically owned both ships and shipowners, and the sailors as well, for they could exact as sea-rent all the earnings beyond a bare living and the average return on capital. This was denounced at the time, but the consecrating lapse of time gradually turned the wrong into "a right."

Now, it happened—also in about the same lapse of time—that the shipowners and the sailors fell into sore distress, and there were great discussions as to the cause of it. Some declared it was all on account of the competition of foreign vessels, and proposed that these should be kept out, so that the native shipowners might be able to charge higher freights. They would thus be able to pay their sea-rents without having to be sold up. Others said the shipowners didn't use their brains enough, and had too many antiquated paddle-boats. They should go in for screw-steamers with "forced draught" and "tubular boilers." This was the only way to keep their heads above water and pay the sea rents.

At last a man came along, called George Henry, who pointed out, in the name of Christianity and common-sense, that the sea was the gift of the Creator, and was the great highway of nations, and that all men had equal rights to the use of it; and he advised the people to resume their rights. His plan was "not to kick the sea-lords out, nor to buy them out, but to tax them out" by levying an impost on the annual value of their monopoly. Some of the people at once "saw the cat in the picture," but most of them declared that it was sheer robbery—downright confiscation; that if people were allowed to have equal rights to the use of the sea there was an end to all rights of property whatever.

The fraudulent trusteeships of the sea-lords had now become vested rights, and could neither be abolished nor reformed in any way without full compensation to all concerned, including unborn heirs to the third generation; and where was the money to come from? Besides, this class was the mainstay of society, the class which furnished officers for the army and navy, M.P.'s, J.P.'s, Directors of Chartered Companies, subscribers to voluntary schools, to local cricket clubs, smoking concerts, and other philanthropic and social objects; the dispensers of coal, blankets, and soup among the poor, and especially among the weather-beaten, rheumatically old sailors. As hereditary legislators they were well worth all the money for they were raised far above all class prejudice, and therefore studied only the best interests of their country. The classes that, at first at least, were loudest in their denunciations of George Henry were, curiously enough, the shipowners and the sailors, for they could not get over the fact that it was the sea-lords who "furnished the sea" for them to sail over. The shopocracy, too, were staunch opponents of all reform, for they counted the sea-lords as their best and altogether indispensable customers, and therefore to be kept plump and sleek whoever suffered.

But at last a Government particularly friendly to the sea-lords came into power, and they passed a Bill for the relief of the "Shipping Interest," and this was how they did it. They put a poll-tax of 1s on the whole community, including the shipowners and the sailors, and the grand total they handed over to the sea-lords!

"This fable teaches"—but I think the reader will be able to draw the moral for himself.

"Are you in favour of Taxing Land Values?"