

Land Reform in Germany.

Writing of Germany the late Ambassador Morier says: "Three great countries, England, France and Germany, began their political life from a similar agricultural basis. In each of them the great conflict between *immunity* and *community*, between *demesne* land and *tenant* land, between the *manor* and the *peasant*, had to be fought out. In England the manor won; the peasant lost. In France the peasant won; the manor lost. In Germany the game was drawn and the stakes have been divided."

Prior to the advent of socialism in Germany, to the work of Lassalle, Rodbertus and Marx, land reform consisted essentially of what we call peasant proprietary movement. On the one hand peasant proprietary was advocated by such men as Baron Stein as a means of rendering the people conservative by creating a bulwark between the aristocracy and the proletarian, and as stimulating the principle of nationalism. On the other hand it was advocated as the means of producing the most from the soil, of giving the peasant the greatest security in the results of his labor. This idea was supported by the advocates of *petite culture* and by those who believed in the "magic of property" as expressed by Arthur Young. In this land reform was merely a question for agriculturists; and as both the peasant and the aristocracy were interested in a development of small proprietors, much of the land of Germany came into the hands of peasant farmers.

With the evolution of manufacture and the consequent rise of urban population, a new factor came into play. The agricultural peasantry, though drifting into the hands of the money lender, was still comparatively prosperous. The artisan or urban problem grew the most needful of solution. The existence in cities of poverty almost side by side with wealth, the rise of rich merchants and manufacturers side by side with masses of workers, working for a bare subsistence, begot the great socialist movement with which Germany is always associated in most minds.

Many of the great socialist workers of Germany saw clearly enough the fundamental nature of the land. Marx in "Das Capital" traces the development of capitalism from the institution of property in land, but as he goes into details he loses his grip of the base and sees in capitalism a self-existing cause of poverty.

Karl Rodbertus saw clearly the fundamental nature of land. In his book on "Over-production and Crises" he is oftentimes as conscious as Henry George was of the nature of land monopoly. He traces the poverty both of Ireland and of Prussia to the rise in rents.

Perhaps what urged these reformers more than anything into socialist schemes for the nationalization of everything was their failure to see any simple means such as we have in the taxation of land values, of bringing about a social reconstruction without revolution.

We know what a wonderful influence "Progress and Poverty" had among English-speaking peoples, how it has raised up men in every corner of the English-speaking world to battle against poverty and want springing from property in land. The influence of "Progress and Poverty," though not so evident, though not permeating the masses of the people of Germany and the continent, has been quite as marked among the file-leaders of men on the continent. It has influenced there also men who are in the battle against land monopoly for life.

Professor Schär, of Basel, writing in the German land reform organ, "Deutsche Volksstimme," after showing how he expected by increase of education and knowledge to solve the problem of poverty, says:

"I saw the grievous crises of 1870 and 1880, the decline in agricultural population, the impoverishment of the peasantry, and the want and poverty of the working classes of the cities, and I began to have doubts as to the efficacy of palliative means. In the current works of political economy—Smith, Ricardo, Rocker, Mill, Schäffle—which I eagerly studied, I found no solution. I was on the point of becoming a socialist, and finding safety in new state regulations. How much against the grain it was to pass from the richness of individual freedom under the yoke of a socialist state. Then there came into my hands that wonderful book which to so many hundreds of thousands of thinking men appears as indeed an evangel, the 'Progress and Poverty' of Henry George. It led me into the path where I stand today. It found for itself friends whom it similarly convinced and overpowered, and in 1889 we formed at Baden the Freiland Bund (Free Land League), with the task of starting an active propaganda against private property in land in a manner in

accord with our national characteristics."

"Progress and Poverty" had the same influence upon others, notably upon Michael Flürschenn, who, in his "Rent, Wages and Interest," speaks of it as taking him out of the ranks of the self-satisfied wealthy class.

Through the influence of "Progress and Poverty," and of such men, Free Land Leagues and Land Nationalization Societies have been started in many places all over the continent.

The most active of these associations is Der Bund der Deutschen Bodenreformer (German Land Reform League), which carries on from Berlin an active propaganda against the institution of property in land and in favor of the taxation of city and suburban unearned increments and unbuild land.

Though not single tax, as we understand it—not standing for the taxation of land values and the abolition of all other taxes as a direct method—they are thoroughly single tax in spirit, and sooner or later will come to see that the uniform policy of taxing land values is the easiest, the most just and the most merciful method.

The president of the Bund, Adolf Damaschke, is a most enthusiastic land reformer, is editor of their fortnightly organ, "Deutsche Volksstimme," and lectures in season and out of season against the policy of the Social Democrats and Karl Marx, and in favor of the policy of land reform and Henry George.

This association, besides its fortnightly organ, issues thousands of leaflets and pamphlets on various phases of the land question. Before me there lies one with the heading of "Zur Erlösung aus Sozialer Not" (On Redemption from Social Privation), with a fine portrait of Henry George and the following underneath:

"Henry George, born September 2, 1839; died October 29, 1897.

"On October 31, 1897, New York saw a strange sight. In the hall of the Grand Central Palace lies a coffin; more than 30,000 pass in in turn to see for the last time the face of the dead. Catholic, Protestant, and Jew stand there in silence. In the pulpits of all denominations, from the strongest orthodox to the freest ethical communions, homage is paid to the dead. Who was this man? Was it a Newton, who had discovered a new physical law? Was it a general who had freed his country from the foe? Was it a king

ruling over millions of men? It was the author of a book; the author of 'Progress and Poverty.' It was Henry George."

Then followed a résumé of the teaching of "Progress and Poverty," and an appeal for support to the German followers of Henry George.

Mr. A. H. Pohlman, another enthusiastic German land reformer and member of the Bund, who is presently in England, writes me that at the present time land values are rising tremendously all over Germany, owing to the improved trade of this last year or two, and that poor people are everywhere being robbed by the speculators. An agitation has sprung up in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin and most of the German cities against increasing house rents, and land reformers are taking advantage of this to show the people that it is not the value of the houses that have increased, but the values of the land.

The Bund has issued a leaflet with the heading "Mieter" ("To Tenants"), showing the relation of land speculation to house rents.

In the new German colony in China, Kiautchou, steps have been taken by the German Government to secure part of the values of land for common purposes, and German land reformers are using this as showing the practical nature of their demands.

Through the course of the past year Messrs. Damaschke, Pohlman and others

have been lecturing in Berlin, Hamburg, Darmstadt and all the chief towns on such subjects as "Zum Gedächtnis Henry George's" ("On the Memory of Henry George"), "Henry George and seine Sehnen" ("Henry George and His Teaching"). At different places Henry George celebrations were held. The lecturers began by showing a portrait of the master, and then went on to speak of the teaching of this great foreigner as the salvation not only of America and Britain, but of Germany and the world. This in the land of Karl Marx speaks much for the enthusiasm of German land reformers.

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