

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

WE sometimes think that perhaps many of the difficulties in the world arise from the multiplicity of words. People were able to think clearer when there was only a small dictionary of perhaps twenty thousand words. Look at Shakespeare. He had all the vocabulary he needed; when he wanted a new word he invented it. If he had lived in this age of more words he might not have done so well; indeed he might have been overwhelmed with the weight and volume of them.

WE are not joking. We think much of the obscurity of present day writing by writers of innumerable books, much of their failure to think at all, are due to the dictionary makers. If you can substitute for an idea a word or two, or many words, that is so much to the good and where there are innumerable words there are that increased number of substitutes for ideas.

AND it must be remembered that these larger vocabularies are the possession of the few. They are therefore at the service of privilege. The masses have few words and fewer ideas; they are able only to understand what is conveyed in their limited vocabulary. When the authorities, the teachers and preachers, the statesmen and politicians, launch out at them with their formidable armory of words in books and newspapers, words that conceal ideas, they lose the power of thinking.

GOETHE once declared that the highest cannot be spoken in words. Conversely it may be held that the simplest truths—the lowest and most obvious, if you please, can only be expressed in the fewest words. They may have to be reiterated a number of times, but the words are few. Think of the simplest truth, for example, that all men have an equal right to the use of the earth. Now the opposite of this, if there be an opposite, requires a perfect avalanche of words, pamphlets, books, etc., to evade or conceal it. You do not have to deny it. Just write *away from it*; drown it with words drawn from many lexicons; write as if it didn't exist; talk in a stream; start the faucet of words and let it run on like Tennyson's "Brook." The method is well understood by writers of the modern school who know the admonition of the cynic that it is the purpose of language to conceal thought.

IT requires more words to write when one ignores fundamentals. The work of concealing thought calls for a largely increased vocabulary. To ignore certain factors and certain relations between these factors demands ever so many more words and what Al Smith calls "langwidge." Volumes are written on the relations of Capital and Labor. They are voluminous because in the desperate effort, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or by mere force of example, to avoid all mention of land—that third factor in distribution—they must for such avoidance substitute "langwidge" for ideas. We are confident that we owe much of the confusion in modern thinking to the multiplication of dictionaries and larger vocabularies.

OF course, the time never was when men wholly discarded the habit of talking and writing without thought. But the multiplicity of words increased their opportunities. The fatal facility of writing *around* a subject instead of *at* it was enormously increased by new terms, verbal additions, and the strange resemblance of words to ideas, all made necessary by a deliberate plan of avoidance. Take up almost any of the popular works dealing with social or economic problems and you will see what we are driving at.

IN a thoughtful article published recently, Bertrand Russell says: "I rejected the view that the origins of war are always economic, for it was obvious that most of the people who were enthusiastically in favor of the war were going to lose money by it."

According to Mr. Russell, "The question involves a story of malevolent passions and, in turn, the theory of education." It is evident here that Mr. Russell gives a too narrow interpretation to the word "economic." Yet he destroys his own thesis by implication in what follows, for he says: "With poverty eliminated, men could devote themselves to the constructive arts of civilization—to the progress of science, the elimination of disease and the impulses that make for disease."

WE agree with what Mr. Russell says of nationalistic passions and the need of international government in human affairs. But that is a part of the question of amicable relations between peoples. Mr. Russell says people fight because they wish to fight, yet he recognizes that the impulse to fear is what urges them to fight. He