

leave of any man, once he has paid the trifling license fee exacted of the small oysterman. Plainly enough, then, no able-bodied man of reasonable energy will hire himself to a farmer for much less than he can earn upon the free waters of the Chesapeake. Farms are often neglected because labor cannot be had to work the crops. The capitalists who own and operate oyster boats have to import some of the worst and most shiftless residents of city slums, because thousands of local laborers, black and white, are self-employing oystermen.

It is natural and proper that these self-employing oystermen should watch with suspicion all legislation for the protection of the oyster, lest it result in their being driven from the natural oyster beds and made the hired men of farmers ashore, or of those who own land under water and private oyster beds.

The new law, which was drawn with the view to enabling as large a number of persons as possible to avail themselves of riparian rights, is condemned by many of the self-employing oystermen, and the operation of it is being keenly watched.

Some such protective legislation is needed if the oyster industry is to be preserved, but if the effect shall be to drive many of the smaller oyster men out of employment there will be a strong movement for its repeal or amendment.

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RUSSIA'S LAND PROBLEM.

From an Editorial in the London Tribune of December 6, 1906.

More interesting than the dismal chronicles of repression and scandal are the measures which M. Stolypin is taking to transform the Russian land system.* Good or bad, they are certainly revolutionary, and Liberals of all shades are bound to protest against them, as the moderate "Party of Pacific Regeneration" did, because they are an autocratic exercise of legislative powers which ought to belong to the Douma. But, quite apart from the party politics of Russia, they have for all the world an immense sociological interest. They seem to destroy, or at least to doom, the oldest system of land tenure in Europe, that communal ownership which historians still study as the type and survival of an arrangement which once flourished in one form or another among so many primitive agricultural peoples.

In the Russian Mir the land is the common property of all the families of the village, who also pay their taxes in common, and claim by virtue of this obligation a patriarchal power over the movements of every member of the community. The fields are redistributed periodically, but while each family cultivates its own lot, it may neither be alienated nor transferred, and returns at the end of a term of years to the common stock. The advantages of the plan are obvious. The inequalities of soil and situation are shared fairly; no family can become landless and desperate; even a peasant who, with the consent of his village, has gone to work in a town, knows that his wife and his heirs retain their right, and remain members of a brotherhood which will respect it. The disadvantages are equally obvious. Since there is no fixity of tenure, the peas-

ant is tempted to do as little as possible for the soil, and to take the utmost out of it. The method of tillage has remained wasteful and primitive, and the Mir system undoubtedly plays a part second only to that of bad government in explaining the listlessness of the peasantry and the poverty of rural Russia.

It is easy to guess the political reasons which have induced M. Stolypin to attack the Mir system by allowing peasants to detach themselves from it and to claim their present lot or its equivalent as their permanent private property. He is afraid of socialism, and the Mir is a species of primitive communism. He is also fighting Liberalism, and hopes no doubt to create a class of peasant farmers who may become a conservative element. The liberated peasant, left alone with his inadequate plot of land to face the tax collector and the money lender, may sell out, and drift into the class of the landless and voteless laborers. He is thereby eliminated from politics. But the land remains, and must pass into the hands of someone, whose interest may perhaps lie in maintaining the status quo.

But is there no alternative to individual peasant ownership, with its danger of alienation, and this communal system with its wasteful tillage? The "Temps" tells the Russian Liberals that they ought to remember that the prosperity of France is founded on peasant proprietorship. It forgets that this replaced a bad system of dual ownership, and that the French peasants acquired not merely the poor land they had cultivated before the Revolution, but the rich land of which the church and the emigrant nobility were despoiled. There was no tradition of communal ownership in France, on which an even better scheme could have been grafted.

We, for our part, regret that Michael Davitt's views were not followed in Ireland; we rejoice no less that in its Scottish Land Bill our own government, while giving the crofters security of tenure on their allotments, has reserved the ownership of the land to the public. This method gives to the tiller the security which alone can develop private resource and energy. It also preserves the nation from the monopolist, prevents the growth by purchase of vast estates, and secures the land as a means of livelihood to the largest number of independent families. The Mir system could easily have been modified in this sense, and so evolved as to develop the habit of co-operation.

Let us hope that when at length, a free Douma meets it will have the power to save the precious tradition of common ownership and mutual aid, which made the Mir system one of the most hopeful germs for the creation of a free rural community.

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THE CREATOR OF WEALTH.

An Editorial from the Pittsburg Evening Leader of Dec. 15, 1906.

Andrew Carnegie clearly recognizes and points out the inequities of our present system of taxation, to which is due the accumulation of fortunes swollen to danger point and a distribution of wealth that has caused both political and commercial corruption in the life of the nation. But the remedy he pro-

*See The Public of December 1, page 824.