

maintenance (much more his whole earnings), so long as he replaces what he receives, is not cost of production but profit; —the labourer's share of it. If an industry does nothing more than maintain one man continuously, it is to that extent productive.

But the landlord's position is too strong for him to stand in much fear of such combinations as these, and the whole tendency of affairs is to increase his power.

The landlords as a class get more, without the least exertion, outlay, or risk, out of the labour of the community than they could if the whole working community were their slaves.

PROLETARIANISM V. SLAVERY.

Suppose I own a sugar estate and 100 slaves, all the land about being held in the same way by people of the same class as myself.

It is a profitable business, but there are many expenses and annoyances attached to it.

I must keep up my supply of slaves either by breeding or buying them.

I must pay an overseer to keep them continually to their work with the lash. I must keep them in a state of brutish ignorance (to the detriment of their efficiency), for fear they should learn their rights and their power, and become dangerous.

I must tend them in sickness, and when past work.

And the slaves have all the vices and defects that slavery engenders; they have no self-respect or moral sense; they lie they steal, they are lazy, shirking work whenever they dare;

they do not care what mischief their carelessness occasions me so long as it is not found out ; their labour is obtained by force, and given grudgingly ; they have no heart in it.

All these things worry me.

Suddenly a brilliant idea strikes me. I reflect that there is no unoccupied land in the neighbourhood, so that if my labourers were free they would still have to look to me for work somehow.

So one day I announce to them that they are all free, intimating at the same time that I will be ready to employ as many as I may require on such terms as we may mutually and independently agree.

What could be fairer? They are overjoyed, and, falling on their knees, bless me as their benefactor. They then go away and have a jollification, and next day come back to me to arrange the new terms. Most of them think they would like to have a piece of land and work it for themselves, and be their own masters. All they want is the few tools they have been accustomed to use, and some seed, and these they are ready to buy from me, undertaking to pay me with reasonable interest when the first crop comes in, offering the crop as security. As for their keep, they can easily earn that by working a few weeks on and off on any of the plantations, or by taking a job of clearing, fencing, or such like. This will keep them going for the first year, and after that they will be better able to take care of themselves.

But "Softly," I observe, "you are going too fast. Your proposals about the tools and seed and your own maintenance are all right enough, but the land, you must remember, belongs to me. You cannot expect me to give you your own liberty and my land too for nothing. That would not be reasonable, would it?" They agree that it would not, and begin to propose terms.

A fancies this bit of land and B that. But it soon appears

that I want this bit of land for my next year's clearing, and that for my cows, and another is too close to my house, and would interfere with my privacy, and another is thick forests or swamp, and would require too long and costly preparation for men who must have quick returns in order to live, and in short, that there is no land suitable that I care to part with. Still I am ready to do what I promised—"to employ as many as I may require, on such terms as we may mutually and independently agree to." But as I have now to pay them wages instead of getting their work for nothing, I cannot of course employ quite so many of them. I can find work for ninety of them, however, and with these I am prepared to discuss terms.

At once a number volunteer their services at such wages as their imagination has been picturing to them. I tell the ninety whose demands are most reasonable, to stand on one side. The remaining ten look blank, and seeing that since I won't let them have any of the land, it is a question of hired employment or starvation, they offer to come for a little less than the others. I tell these now to stand aside, and ten others to stand out instead. These look blank now, and offer to work for less still, and so the "mutual and voluntary" settlement of terms proceeds.

But, meanwhile, I have been making a little calculation in my head, and have reckoned up what the cost of keeping a slave, with his food and clothes, and a trifle over to keep him contented, would come to, and I offer that.

They won't hear of it, but as I know they can't help themselves, I say nothing, and presently first one and then another gives in, till I have got my ninety, and still there are ten left out, and very blank indeed they look. Whereupon, the terms being settled, I graciously announce that though I don't really want any more men, still I am willing (in my benevolence) to take the ten, too, on the same terms, which they

promptly accept, and again hail me as their benefactor, only not quite so rapturously as before.

So they all set to at the old work at the old place, and—on the old terms, only a little differently administered; that is, that whereas I formerly supplied them with food, clothes, etc., direct from my stores, I now give them a weekly wage representing the value of those articles, which they will henceforth have to buy for themselves.

There is a difference, too, in some other respects, indicating a moral improvement in our relations.

I can no longer curse and flog them. But then I don't want to; it's no longer necessary; the threat of dismissal is quite as effective, even more so; and much pleasanter for me.

I can no longer separate husband from wife, parent from child. But then again, I don't want to. There would be no profit in it; leaving them their wives and children has the double advantage of making them more contented with their lot, and giving me greater power over them, for they have now got to keep these wives and children out of their own earnings.

My men are now as eager to come to me to work as they formerly were to run away from work.

I have neither to buy nor to breed them; and if any suddenly leave me, instead of letting loose the bloodhounds, I have merely to hold up a finger or advertise, and I have plenty of others offering in their place.

I am saved the expense and worry of incessant watching and driving.

I have no sick to tend, or worn-out pensioners to maintain. If a man falls ill, there is nothing but my good nature to prevent my turning him off at once; the whole affair is a purely commercial transaction; so much wages for so much work. The patriarchal relation of slave-owner and slave is gone, and no other has taken its place.

When the man is worn out with long service, I can turn him out with a clear business conscience, knowing that the State will see that he does not starve. Instead of being forced to keep my men in brutish ignorance, I find public schools established at other people's expense to stimulate their intelligence and improve their minds, to my great advantage, and their children compelled to attend these schools.

The service I get, too, being now voluntarily rendered (or apparently so), is much improved in quality.

In short, the arrangement pays me better in every way.

But I gain in other ways besides pecuniary profit. I have lost the stigma of being a slave-driver, and have acquired instead the character of a man of energy and enterprise, of justice and benevolence. I am a "large employer of labour," to whom the whole country, and the labourer especially, is greatly indebted, and people say, "See the power of capital! These poor labourers, having no capital, could not use the land if they had it, so this great and far-seeing man wisely refuses to let them have it, and keeps it all himself, but, by providing them with employment, his capital saves them from pauperism, and enables him to build up the wealth of the country, and his own fortune together."

Whereas it is not my capital that does any of these things. It is not my capital but the labourer's toil that builds up my fortune and the wealth of the country. My capital at the most only puts a few better instruments into his hands than he could procure for himself.

It is not my employment that keeps him from pauperism, but my monopoly of the land forcing him into my employment that keeps him on the brink of it. It is not want of capital that prevents the labourer from using the land, but my refusing him the use of the land that prevents him from acquiring capital. All the capital he wants (to begin with) is an

axe and a spade, which a week's earnings would buy him ; and for his maintenance during the first year, and at any subsequent time, he could work for me or for others, turn about, with his work on his own land. Henceforth, with every year, his capital would grow of itself, and his independence with it ; and that this is no fancy sketch, anyone can see for himself by taking a trip to our North-West Coast (Tasmania), where he will find well-to-do farmers who began with nothing but a spade and an axe (so to speak), and worked their way up in the manner described.

But now another thought strikes me. Instead of paying an overseer to work these men for me, I will make him pay me for the privilege of doing it.

I will let the land as it stands to him or to another, to whomsoever will give the most for the billet.

He shall be called my tenant instead of my overseer, but the thing he shall do for me is essentially the same, only done by contract instead of for yearly pay.

He, not I, shall find all the capital, take all the risk, and engage and supervise the men, paying me a lump sum, called rent, out of the proceeds of their toil, and make what he can for himself out of the surplus.

The competition is as keen in its way for the land, among people of his class, as it is among the labourers for employment, only that as they are all possessed of some little means (else they could not compete) they are in no danger of immediate want, and can stand out for rather better terms than the labourers who are forced by necessity to take what terms they can get.

The minimum in each case amounts practically to a "mere living," but the mere living they insist on is one of a rather higher standard than the labourer's ; it means a rather more abundant supply, and better quality of those little comforts which are next door to necessaries. It means, in short, a

living of the kind to which people of that class are accustomed.

For a moderate reduction in my profits then (a reduction equal to the tenant's narrow margin of profit), I have all the toil and worry of management taken off my hands, and the risk, too, for, be the season good or bad, the rent is bound to be forthcoming, and I can sell him up to the last rag if he fails of the full amount, no matter for what reason, and my rent takes precedence of all other debts.

All my capital is set free for investment elsewhere, and I am freed from the odium of a slave owner, notwithstanding that the men still toil for my enrichment as when they were my slaves, and that I get more out of them than ever.

If I wax rich while they toil from hand to mouth, and in depressed seasons find it hard to get work at all, it is not, to all appearance, my doing, but merely the force of circumstances, the law of nature, the state of the labour market ;—fine sounding names that hide the ugly reality.

If wages are forced down, it is not I who do it, it is that greedy and merciless man, the employer (my tenant), who does it. I am a lofty and superior being, dwelling apart and above such sordid considerations. I would never dream of grinding these poor labourers, not I! I have nothing to do with them at all, I only want my rent—and get it. Like the lilies of the field, I toil not, neither do I spin, and yet (so kind is Providence!) my daily bread (well buttered) comes to me of itself. Nay, people bid against each other for the privilege of finding it for me; and no one seems to realise that the comfortable income that falls to me like the refreshing dew is dew indeed, but it is the dew of sweat wrung from the labourer's toil. It is the fruit of their labour which they ought to have; which they would have if I did not take it from them.

Is this caricature?

Take the farm of 640 acres before referred to, rented at

£150, and keeping two labourers. Could I, the landlord, make £150 a year net profit out of the labour of these two men if they were my slaves, and the tenant my hired overseer, working them under the lash? I trow not.

I should have to pay him about £150 a year as overseer instead of getting it from him as a tenant, which makes £300 a year leeway to make up, to begin with. I should have to find all the capital which he now finds (practically) for my use; to run all the risks where I now run none; while the men, working in sullen discontent, would not produce near as much as they do now. No, thank you! If the lot were offered me as slaves for nothing, I wouldn't have them at the price. I get more out of them as things are, and I give absolutely nothing in return; all that I get is pure blackmail.

Some of these days the labourer will wake up to the facts of the situation. If the awakening be sudden and universal, he will seize the broom and make a clean sweep, taking small account of the beetles he may tread upon, or the crockery he may break. An awakening of this sort happened once in France, and we know what it was like. He had terrible wrongs to avenge, and he went mad over them, and in his madness committed great crimes; but where he swept he swept clean; the abuses he swept away have never shown their heads since.

But there was one abuse that he did not recognise to be an abuse, and so he left it standing—to his loss.

Next time he sweeps he will clear that away too.

There is small fear of his ever going mad over it again, for his knowledge, and the consciousness of his power are growing year by year; and by the time that he recognises the facts of the situation, and sees what the change is that is wanted, he will be strong enough to say calmly, "Let it be done"; and it will be done forthwith without violence or wrong.