

branded as "impossibilities" we should not be much moved. Our reply would simply be that "Impossible!" is an objection which man, with his finite intelligence and undefined perfectibility, should be most chary of using. Dogmatically to draw the precise line of demarcation between the possible and the impossible, is an arrogant assumption of infallibility. That boundary line has often been magisterially drawn; and just as often, subsequent experience has shown it to have been drawn in the wrong place. The list of actually accomplished "impossibilities" is an endless one. That fact should prove a rebuke to dogmatic sceptics, and an encouragement to the advocates of progress.

It may perhaps be said that the absorption of local and national interests into the wider and more general range of universal human interests will be destructive of patriotism. That depends on the meaning assigned to the word "patriotism." As long as it is, not the direct converse to, but a concentrated form of philanthropy, as long as it implies an intense desire for the special welfare of a man's native country, not as opposed to, but as connected with, the general welfare of mankind, no sentiment can be more in accord with the principles on which a friendly congress of nations would be founded.

But if patriotism is meant to confine its sympathies to the exclusive welfare of a man's native country at the expense of, and in contradistinction to, the general welfare of mankind, it subsides into a narrow, provincial, and selfish prejudice, founded

on the absurdly erroneous opinion that a country best prospers if, and when, other countries are unprosperous. Patriotism so construed is the apotheosis of a blunder. It is a defect wrongfully raised to the rank of a virtue. It is this fatuous feeling that inspired those wretched feuds which have marked the barbarism and hastened the decadence of contentious savage tribes. The same fatuous feeling gave rise to internecine and cruel wars between the petty towns of ancient Greece, and between the petty states of mediæval Italy. The ancient Lacedæmonians specially called themselves patriots, because they hated and despised everybody else; but, in truth, they were (begging Plutarch's pardon) nothing but a petty, savage, egotistical, bigoted, and cruel race of slaveholders.

CHAPTER XXI.

Land—Origin of Private Proprietorship—The World's Supply of Land—Its Gradual Absorption and Consequent Increasing Value.

WE must forbear from prolonging the list of those influences from which wealth-creation receives either hindrance or encouragement. By the time that public opinion throughout the civilised world has received sufficient enlightenment to appreciate, and gained sufficient strength to enforce, the reforms advocated in the preceding pages, the improvement in the condition of mankind will have become so mani-

fest that the remaining minor reforms will rapidly follow, and prove but feeble obstructions. Before, however, we proceed to summarise and comment upon the general principles which constitute, and the facts and reasonings which support, the argument propounded in this work, we must devote some share of attention to a few collateral issues, with which the main subject is more or less connected.

Of these, one of the most important relates to the peculiar conditions under which land is placed as compared with the other two factors of all wealth, viz., capital and labour. In the first place, the supply of capital and labour is, originally, scanty—it increases gradually—and to that increase no limit is assignable. It is different with land. Barring geological phenomena, the supply of land is a fixed quantity. Hitherto, the aggregate quantity of land which the world affords for man's use has been far beyond man's requirements. But it cannot always be so. As cultivable land becomes worked up and utilised by the joint action of capital and labour, its present excess of supply will be gradually reduced, and must, at some period more or less remote, become exhausted. The more rapid the progress of mankind and the increase of the world's population, the sooner the time will arrive when we shall approach the limit of the world's land-supply.

In densely populated countries the value of land has been continually rising, but, so far, the rise has been checked and rendered gradual and bearable by the influx of agricultural produce from

regions where land was cheap and abundant. How will it be when those regions shall themselves become more densely populated, and the supply of surplus land shall further diminish? The result will no doubt be a general and growing enhancement in the value of land, eventually culminating, should the present laws relating to landed property remain in force, in conferring upon its possessors, the unlimited, because undefined, privileges of a monopoly. These are not merely vague and distant speculations. It is a fact that there is a limit to the supply of land—it is a fact that the world's population is fast increasing and therefore using up that supply—and it is a fact that, as the demand becomes greater while the supply remains the same, a proportionate rise in value must ensue. Reason how we may, and infer what we may, those facts have to be confronted. Is it wise to adjourn the consideration of the pinch till the pinch itself shall come?

In the second place, while capital and labour are migratory and can, when required, remove from one locality to another, land is fixed and irremovable. Its products, indeed, are transportable, and may be conveyed to those places where labour is most efficient and capital most abundant; but in order to create that agricultural produce, capital and labour must go to the land. From the two peculiarities which we have pointed out as distinguishing land from its co-factors, capital and labour, various pregnant inferences are deducible, to which we may make some brief reference.

It will be necessary to say a few words as to (a)

the origin of proprietorship in land ; (b) the present distribution of the world's supply of land ; (c) the importance to mankind that land should be so treated as to extract from it the greatest possible amount of useful production ; and (d) the measures requisite to promote and ensure the most productive treatment of the land.

(a) *Proprietorship in land is a human institution*, not a natural ordinance. Whatever origin be assigned to man, whether special creation or gradual evolution, it is clear that at some period more or less remote, and for a period of greater or lesser duration, the land was as free to the common use of mankind as the air we breathe. Indeed, it is still so in several parts of the globe. As long as hunting, fishing, and a few wild fruits and berries supplied the wants of a sparse population, necessity prompted no change. But some primeval Triptolemus discovered that by cultivation, that is by clearing the ground of useless, and substituting for them useful, plants, by loosening and turning over the land and so converting it into soil, by sowing it with cereals, &c., a very large quantity of human food could be raised from a given area which, in its state of nature, produced next to nothing. Who, however, would undertake the performance of work so arduous, in the expectation of advantages so tardy and uncertain, unless assured that those advantages would undividedly accrue to themselves? But in order that those advantages should be exclusively assigned to them, the rest of the tribe or community must be debarred from the use of the area thus cultivated.

Hence the specific appropriation to the cultivators, of that area which was before common to all. Thus, practically and in a broad sense, has arisen the substitution of private for public proprietorship of land.

As a general proposition, viewed apart from the question of social expediency, such an abstraction of land from the common use of all, and its conversion to the separate use of individuals, was undoubtedly an injury to the commonalty from whom that extent of land was sequestered. Their hunting or wild-fruit bearing grounds were by so much diminished in extent, and, *pro tanto*, the benefit to a few became a detriment to the many. It is in this sense that Proudhon's exaggerated dictum, *La propriété c'est le vol* ("property is robbery"), has a certain degree of foundation in truth. What was everybody's became somebody's, and was everybody's no longer. It is in this sense that injustice has undoubtedly been done to the indigenous tribes of the American hemisphere who, having for untold centuries freely and in common, tenanted that vast continent, have been ousted, and themselves nearly extirpated, by the encroachments of civilised races. This process is still in operation wherever the land is held in common, and wherever communism in its completest form is the prevailing practice among the indigenes. The loose hold exercised over the land by the native tribes who use it in common, is everywhere giving way before the energy and intensity of individualism ; and in spite of the restraining influence of benevolent philanthropy, the aboriginal

racés, which can neither resist, nor co-exist with, civilisation, seem doomed to speedy extinction.

But these evils, deplorable as they are, sink into insignificance when compared with the innumerable advantages attendant on land-appropriation. Without separate and secure proprietorship (whether individual or corporate), there could be no cultivation; without cultivation there could be no abundance; without abundance, no wealth; and without more or less of wealth, there could be no progressive civilisation. The same area of land which under proprietorship and cultivation could maintain in comfort several millions of human beings, had, when unappropriated and uncultivated, afforded a bare and precarious maintenance to a few thousands. Reflection and experience led to identical conclusions, so that, finally, by the universal consensus of nations, the principle of land-proprietorship has been adopted, legalised, and enforced.

Land is therefore held, not by any abstract or natural right, but by a conventional and legal right conferred by the will, as defined and upheld by the law, of the community. Might had, in many instances, conferred the land on the original appropriator before society conferred on him the right to hold it. That right was conferred, not from a sense of fairness, since it involved unfairness to the aboriginal common occupants; but from a sense of expediency, because the system presented many material advantages.

In this brief review of the conversion and distribution of unappropriated land into private or

corporate properties, we have necessarily confined ourselves to the broad and salient features of the subject. We have made no reference to those intermediate and transitional relations between land and its possessors that have existed at certain periods and in certain places, such as the various and complicated forms of feudal tenures, the ryot and zemindar system of India, the Russian mir, the nearly extinct village communities, &c.* These form interesting and suggestive topics for inquiry, but they have only an indirect bearing on the subject before us, which is simply the "origin of proprietorship in land." Our task has been to show that the division of the habitable surface of the globe (that general inheritance of all mankind) into private ownership is a social arrangement open to modification; not a law of nature from which there is no appeal.

(b) *The present distribution of the world's supply of land.* In newly-settled countries, and especially in those which have been colonised by the Anglo-Saxon races, the modes in which the present owners of land have become possessed of it are simple enough. In a few instances, the land has been bought for a nominal value from certain indigenes, whose power to sell and to give a title was exceedingly doubtful. In the majority of cases, however, the land has been, under various pretexts, taken from the natives by main force and appropriated by

* Those who wish for information on these subjects should consult Mr. J. W. Probyn's excellent collection of the best treatises on the various systems of land tenure, published by Cassell & Co.

the government of the new state. Thereupon naturally followed the gradual distribution of the land, by allotment or cheap sale, among immigrating settlers. Much of it still remains undistributed in the hands of the various states, and its sale constitutes a large source of revenue. In most new countries land-ownership has thus arisen.

In old countries, the existing distribution of land has been arrived at through many circuitous processes. Besides the original act (justifiable or not) of diverting land from the common use of all to the special use of a few, the transmission of the land from generation to generation has, many times and at many periods, been deflected from its legal course by conquest, confiscation, rapine, fraud, and violence of all kinds. The title to many a fair domain now peacefully enjoyed, may be traced back to the might to seize and the power to hold exercised in troublous times. But all land-ownership, whatever its origin, once defined and sanctioned by law, becomes sacred in the eye of the law, and is under its guardianship as long as that law remains in force. The firm maintenance of legal rights is essential to the very existence of social organisation.

On the other hand, society has not abdicated its prerogative of modifying the law itself. The superior controlling power of the state is constantly being exemplified. In all cases of public improvements, such as roads, canals, railways, street alterations, harbours, &c., the legislature overrules proprietary objections, and decrees compulsory transfer of the necessary land on terms to be privately or juridically arranged. Even in the

disposal of personal property the state has sometimes specially interposed. Thellusson, in 1797, left by his will £600,000 to trustees to be invested for accumulation (before distribution to the heirs) for a period of about a century, by which time it was calculated that the amount would have expanded to £140,000,000. This singular devise induced Parliament, in 1799, to pass an Act to prevent testators from exercising any power over their personal property beyond twenty years after their decease. As it happened, Parliament underwent needless alarm, for litigation brought about a premature distribution of the Thellusson property in 1859, and meanwhile the law expenses had devoured the accumulations, so that the amount distributed hardly exceeded the amount originally bequeathed. Still, the legislature herein exercised its privilege, and evinced its determination to interfere with proprietary rights when they were deemed incompatible with the public weal.

The Irish Land Act of 1881 is the most striking as well as the most recent instance of legislative control over land-ownership. By fixing rents (though under exceptional circumstances), it interferes, to however limited an extent, with the freedom of contract and with the natural relations of supply and demand. But the evil was a special one and required a special remedy. The evil was that in Ireland the article legislated upon, land, was in limited supply and in excessive demand. Hence exorbitant and impossible rents (at least in many cases) which legislative interference alone could reduce. The case is, no doubt, a special one, but it

may not long remain a solitary or even an exceptional one. As the population of the world continues to increase while the supply of land throughout the world continues limited, the problem which the Land Act was framed to solve in Ireland will, sooner or later, obtrude itself in other places, or in other forms. Land everywhere tends to increase in value, and that tendency is most rapid and pressing when and where the density of the population is greatest.

Moreover, there are certain tacitly understood limitations to the rights conferred by society on land-proprietorship, and certain implied conditions to their exercise. It has become a common saying that "property has its duties as well as its rights." This doctrine, if it really means what it really says, is a very sweeping one, and raises questions which its author probably never intended. For, as the performance of the duties and the exercise of the rights are made correlative, it implies that where the duties are unperformed, the rights lapse. Without going so far as that, it is undeniable that there are certain limits and conditions to the legal rights of land-owners which, without being specifically expressed, are practically annexed to them. These limits and conditions are intimately connected with the primary origin of the private ownership in land, which was, its necessity in order to extract from the land a larger yield of useful productions. That was the plea for, and the justification of, such ownership. Otherwise, what was the object of securing the land from the wild state in which it was common to all?

There are cases, however, in which the proposed result does not ensue. For instance, such an exercise of proprietary rights as should, on a large scale, leave the land as waste as it was before it was appropriated, would be an infringement of the very purpose which society had in view, in conferring those rights. Let us suppose that two or three millionaires clubbed together to purchase 100,000 acres of the fine wheat lands of Lincolnshire, in order to oust the farmers who now cultivate them, and to convert the whole into a game preserve; what then? There is nothing in the laws affecting land to prevent such a purchase, or to prohibit the conversion of the land to such uses. The effect would be that the production of wheat in this country would be diminished by 300,000 to 400,000 quarters annually, that food for nearly half a million of human beings would have to be imported instead of being grown, that the farmers and labourers who before raised the wheat on the land would have to find other employment or emigrate, that the increased competition for land in other parts of England would cause a general rise in rents, and that the area of England, as a food-producing country, would be smaller than before by 100,000 acres of her finest land. A scheme so rife with evils, so cynically selfish and devoid of all consideration for others, might indeed rouse the indignation and provoke the interference of the community, but in the present state of the law it would be quite feasible and strictly legal.

Here, then, is an act which transgresses no law, and only violates the tacit limitations and condi-

tions which attach to the law; nevertheless, such an act would not be tolerated. Its very enormity would furnish its own corrective, and the legislature would amend the law to meet the case. It is true that such an act, on such a scale, and in its naked features, is not likely to be attempted. It must, however, be remembered that similar violations of the unwritten spirit of the law, on a reduced scale and in a less obtrusive fashion, are by no means uncommon in countries where the land is owned in large masses. The love of sport which impelled William the Conqueror to convert Hampshire into a deer forest still survives, and prompts miniature imitations (under cover of the law) of a deed that overrode all law. There are, indeed, many practices with regard to land which are strictly within the letter of the law, but which thwart and frustrate its spirit. The existing relations between the land and its owners cannot, therefore, be regarded as final, and circumstances may arise which will subject them, in some places sooner, in others later, to revision and modification.

(c) *The primary importance of such a mode of treating land as shall secure from it the largest amount of useful production* is too obvious to need much comment. If, as we have endeavoured throughout to show, it be a sin against wealth-creation to waste capital and labour because such waste lessens the common stock of useful things for distribution to the world, it must be a still greater sin to waste the productive powers of land, since its supply is a fixed quantity, whereas capital and labour are reproducible to an indefinite extent.

The utmost amount of production is obtainable when all the three factors of wealth—land, labour, and capital—are combined in their requisite proportions. Land, when its co-factors are absent, is simply barren; and when they are present, but in relatively insufficient supply, it produces less than it might and ought. Even when all three factors co-operate in due proportions, the result may be abundant production, but not necessarily useful production. For instance, the cultivation of poppies for the manufacture of opium ministers to a far lower class of human wants than the cultivation of cereals for the purposes of food, or of cotton for the purposes of clothing.

As long as extensive tracts of land exist in various parts of the globe fitted for, and waiting for, man's cultivation, the importance of making cultivated land yield its utmost does not so impressively come home to us. But when it is borne in mind that man's reserve of cultivable land, though large, is yet of limited extent, and that each year we are encroaching on that reserve, it surely behoves us to take into consideration, boldly face, and gradually prepare for, a contingency which may be more or less remote, but to which the progress of civilisation is irresistibly leading us.

(d) *As to the measures best adapted to secure such a treatment of the land as shall be the most productive*, that is far too vast and complex a question to be discussed within the limits of the present work. Indeed it hardly comes within its scope, and lies mostly in the domain of politics and agriculture. It is sufficient here to point it out as

a subject of pressing and growing importance that has attracted, and will yet more attract, the attention of able thinkers. The land question in its full range involves many more problems than have as yet been broached. In densely populated countries the struggle for land is becoming intense, its value is rising, and it must continue to rise until it may reach such a height as shall prove intolerable, unnatural, and injurious to the common weal. The period must come when some corrective will have to be found to counteract that tendency to monopoly which is more or less inherent in land, from its limited supply, as compared with the unlimited growth of population and capital.

We must here close these perfunctory remarks on a subject so vast and so important. It will before long occupy the minds and test the powers of the greatest statesmen and thinkers. The necessity for decisive action may not arise soon, nor everywhere at the same time. It may be postponed by palliative remedies. Indeed, in abstract theory, it might never arise at all, if science could devise means to raise food and raw materials in ever-increasing quantities out of the same area of land, so as to meet the ever-growing requirements of an ever-growing population. But in our present state of knowledge, and with our present command over the forces of nature, we have, or shall some day have, to confront the uncomfortable possibilities arising out of the contrast between limitless requirements for cultivable land and its limited supply. Meanwhile, we have no faith in the devices hitherto proposed to meet this eventual emergency.

CHAPTER XXII.

Contempt for Wealth-Producers—The Poor would be Largely Benefited by Increased Wealth-Creation.

WHILE we have a firm trust in the future of civilised man, we fear that there are some races of men of whom, from their inaptitude for progress, we must despair. It is in the highest stages of civilisation that the art and practice of wealth-creation will attain the fullest recognition and the most ample development. The initial start must depend on the power to rise from a state of nature to a state of progress. True that the desire of possession being innate in man, it is as strong in the lowest savage as in the most cultured Caucasian; but the former neither knows the true use and value of wealth, nor the most effectual modes of acquiring it. He snatches at the objects of his desire as the means of gratifying his immediate appetites, and has but elementary notions as to the multiplication of those objects with a view to future fruition. Can he be taught to adopt the habits, join in the labours, and submit to the restraints of civilised life? Some races have done so, although in only a limited degree, but, in their case, a certain advance having been made, a farther advance may be hoped for.

But, on the other hand, there are other races, on whom the experiment has been tried in vain. The indigenous possessors of the soil in America and Australia on whom civilisation has encroached,