Paper by Wm. Houston, M.A., Read at Social Problems Conference, Toronto.

The purpose of this brief paper may be best served by throwing what I have to say into the form of answers to three interroga-

L. WHAT IS THE "LAND" QUESTION? To those who are familiar with current conomic discussions no definition of the term "land" may appear necessary, but to others it is indispensable. The ordinary meaning of the word "land" is here entirely inadequate. The "land" question has to do with other things than farms, market gardens, building sites and timber limits. "Land" in this connection includes all mineral deposits, all fisheries, and in short all spots on the earth's surface or accessible from its surface, the possession of which enables the owners to control the application of labor—their own or others'-to the production of wealth. "Land" in this wide sense is practically equivalent to "opportunity," where opportunity is the outcome of merely national

Defining "land" as "natural opporcunity," it is manifest:

conditions and is not itself the product of

1. That the supply is theoretically limited by the physical limitations of the earth as the home of man.

2. That it is practically still more limited by the actual conditions under ism and of collectivism lie such slavonic which opportunities of various kinds have countries as Russia and Bulgaria, where been appropriated by some members of society to the partial exclusion of others. For example: The total supply of coal in England is at present controlled by a few men, in virtue of their being owners of that part of the earth's surface under the suspensive of the earth's surface under the suspensive and the standpoint of a land reformer to deny the facts cited, or even to that part of the earth's surface under which the coal deposits lie. Recently a progress in civilization is due in large part dispute arose between the owners of these coal deposits and the men who take the coal to the surface for market. owners refused to pay the wages which the miners declared to be necessary to support the lives of themselves and their families. The men refused to work for the wages offered them. In an inclement leason of the year the supply of fuel for domestic purposes was suddenly shortened, and the industries dependent on coal for power-producing purposes were paralyzed. The crisis has been tided over for the piesent, but it may recur at any time, and with far more disastrous consequences. The supply more disastrous consequences. The supply of petroleum in the United States has sed virtually into the ownership of one private corporation, which can raise or lower the price of coal oil for illuminating purposes. If the present price is not exorbitant to the consumer, that is due not to any spirit of benevolence but to enlightened selfishness, and perhaps also to the competition in recent years of electricity for illuminating purposes.

Many able-bedied, right-hearted and strong-minded men and women are in want of the necessaries of life, not because of of the necessaries of life, not because of indolence or vice, but simply because, is that all that is good in individualism though willing to work, they can get no work to do. There may be other causes for this state of affairs; but one cause unthis state of affairs; but one cause under the will enable the aggregate wealth of the will enable the aggregate and the will enable the aggregate and the will enable the aggregate and the will enable the aggregate wealth of the doubtedly is the manner in which, and the extent to which, natural opportunity has been put by social systems and arbitrary laws, under the almost absolute control of laws, under the arguming of others.

we shall always have with us, so long as we have deserving paupers who are starving in the midst of plenty, and are asking, not for the midst of plenty, and are asking, not for the midst of plenty. The fairer distribution in fact.

portunity is at the very best a nature eignificant. capacity of numbers though much unoccupied or historically to generally to be for of subsistence. not dwell together, of life "the land was them." For the same ing" lands of Texas, to and the Canadian North into agricultural lands, and "ranching" will give place turage, as pasturage is in our fact that holds true of human beings as it does of other animals. On the other hand, the law of diminishing returns from the application of capital and labor to part. plication of capital and labor to natural portunities, prevents wealth from it ing as rapidly as population may favorable circumstances increase, and these two laws depends to some extent existence of the "land" question.

2. But opportunity has been made.

2. But opportunity has been made an 2. But opportunity has been made an artificial even more than a natural menopoly. The latter would have been more distinctly discerned by students of sociology had its effects not been overshadowed by those of the former. By dint of force and of fraud, and of both, under cover of unjust laws, some members of the community have been clothed with almost absolute power over the earth's supply of absolute power over the earth's supply of the things necessary to maintain human life and promote human progress in lands where population has become somewhat where population has become somewhat dense. The growth of population is the dense. The growth of population is the dense which creates a demand for opportanity; and when this demand gives opportunity; and when this demand gives opportunity a value, society unwisely encourages tunity a value and tunity and tunity and tunity and tunity and tunity

THE "LAND" QUESTION. England, where the proverbial "three acres poses. There are various ways in which and a cow" is the ideal of the agricultural this might be done without throwing any and a cow" is the ideal of the agricultural laborer, once on a time the common people owned all the land in common, and it was owned all the land in common, and it was to the land of the allotted to them for temporary use, subject to periodical re-allotment. The process of Britain to or by a few individuals has an leaving him in absolute ownership of the interesting history. Many acts of Parliament were passed during bygone generatical difficulty of making a fair valuation of tions providing for the inclosure of com-mon lands and the creation of private estates. That the public sense of proprietorship was outraged is shown by the old ditty:

The law; will punish man or woman Who steals the goose from off the common;

Who steals the goose from off the common; But lets the greater villain loose Who steals the common from the goose. But the people who were thus plundered were powerless to prevent the depredations of the class who thus helped themselves under cover of statutes which they were privileged to enact, and now the cry for redress fis met successfully by the plea of

A prejudice in favor of the present system

vidual control of opportunity has been created by the rapid progress made by those societies in which this system obtains, enjoy the rest. Succession duties, like those societies in which this system obtains, enjoy the rest. Succession duties, like as compared with those societies where fiscal levies, should be graduated so as to communistic ownership has survived. A be as fair and as little burdensome as pos comparison is made between such countries as Canada, the United States and Great Britain on the one hand, and such countries as China, Hindostan and Tartary, ot to speak of our own tribally organized American Indians, on the other. way between such extremes of individual. progress in civilization is due in large part to permanent private control over natural opportunty. And, with an ardent desire The to see some remedy for the existing distress,

Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

has III. WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO THE "LAND

QUESTION?

Various answers have been given, and here also the disputants have never hesitated to use strong language to and about each other. What are some of these answers?

1. Let well enough alone. If civilization has progressed with phenomenal rapidity as the result of the individual ownership of land and control of opportunity, why run the risk of checking progress by interfering with them? One answer to this objection creating or even permitting such extremes laws, under the almost ansolute individuals, to the exclusion of others whose consent has never been obtained or whose consent has never been obtained or most justify the statement that a system of most justify the statement that a system of From the point of view indicated above individual ownership tends to make the it is safe to say that the "land" question rich richer and the poor poorer. It is a cad

the midst of plenty, and are asking, not for pity, but for justice; not for charity, but for opportunity; not for tood to eat, but for their share of the curse of Eden—"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground."

II. WHY, IS THERE A "LAND" QUESTION?

Various answers have been given to this query by able thinkers on economic questions, and the disputants have not always to some collectivist organization—the only great collectivist organization—the only tions, and the disputants have not always intained their contentions good-natured intained their contentions good-natured. tained their contentions good-natured-the answer I propose to give here is fold: ortunity is at the very best a onopoly. So far as we know, the owers of the earth, on which we limited, though the extent to have been utilized is as yet in On the other hand, the the human race for increasing is exceedingly great, and in or the earth's surface is still or true, that "population is the form of treating on the heels ice," A braham and Lot could over to private persons who also do their over the proposal control of the carth's burface is still or true, that "population is the form of treating on the heels ice," A braham and Lot could might legitimately be adapted to a collectd treading on the heefs braham and Lot could cause with their mode as not able to hear its reason the "ranch. e Western States ments by which our "nationalist" or "collectivist" fellow reformers support and enwest are passing lectivist" fellow reformers support and enforce their theories. All I have to say is that pending the still far off time when State pending. The Malindividualism the exception, there are some individualism the exception, there are some

3. While retaining individual ownership 3. While retaining individual ownership and control of national opportunity, restore to the people whatever value has been given to opportunity by the development of the community and not by the efforts of the individual owner. In other words, those the individual owner. In other words, those ward harly half a century ago: "The uncarned nearly half a century ago: "The uncarned individual owner in the value of the land should force before to the community which has produced it." There are two ways—there may be others—in which this can be brought about with some degree of fairness may be others—in which this brought about with some degree of fairness to the general public without in any way to the general public without in any way

State and the share created by himself, and appropriation of the surface of Great tax the one entirely away from him, while tical difficulty of making a fair valuation of these shares, get at the same result ap-proximately by putting all taxes on land unimproved and leaving all products of labor untouched. Under such a system one's

house must be left as free from assessment as his coat or his hat. There is force in som

tem which makes this possible. It is not of individual ownership of land and indi- asking too much to require that some porsible. That goes without saying, and I cannot enter into details here. All I need point out is that if anything like the amount of the unearned increment in land were restored to the community by taxation, and if a fair share of accumulated fortunes were given up to the community when estates pass from the dead hand to the livings one, many social burdens that now press severely might be lightened, and life for those who are thus oppressed might be made negatively, if not positively, bet-

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etc.

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and I don't believe you can, with the house two blocks away." "I didn't say I could, but I see the company all leaving."
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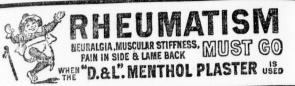
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