

interest and curiosity. On the other hand, enormous sums of money have been paid in times of scarcity or during a siege for the commonest necessaries of life, or, failing these, for substitutes that have been requisitioned for human food, the use of which would make one shudder in circumstances of less pressing necessity. Now the land is strictly a commodity that belongs to this class. It is limited in extent, and no human power can enlarge or extend its area. The competition for it is excessive, and the competitors are struggling for its attainment—not for the purpose of satisfying a taste for the fine arts, or to gratify a passion for the rare or the beautiful, but to secure a necessary means of existence; for they must live *on* and *by* the land, or they cannot live at all. The owner, therefore, of that land can put on it any rent he pleases, and the poor people competing for it have no choice but to accept his terms or die in a ditch or a poor house. Under the present system of land tenure, the owners are not only enabled, but actually exact for the use of the land the last shilling the tenant is able to pay, leaving him only what is barely sufficient to keep him from dying. Mr. Mill, who is the highest of all authorities on this subject, thus writes on the letting of land as it is actually carried out in Ireland: "With individual exceptions (some of them very honorable ones) the owners of Irish estates do nothing for the land but drain it of its produce. What has been epigrammatically said in the discussion on 'peculiar burdens' is literally true when applied to them, that the greatest 'burden' on the land is the landlord. Returning nothing to the soil, they consume its whole produce, minus the potatoes strictly necessary to keep the inhabitants from dying of famine."

Landlordism Confiscates the Work of Improvers.

But the present system of land tenure not merely enables a class to exact from the people of the country a famine price for the use of the land which God made, but it also enables them to charge a rent for the use of the improvements on the land, which the people themselves made, which is purely the result of their own industry and capital, and which, in fact, is, on the strictest principles of justice, their own private property. With the knowledge and experience which we have acquired all our lives long of the transactions that are daily taking place between landlords and tenants, the clearest and most convincing proof that can be given to this fact will perhaps be found in the plain and simple statement of it.

The land of Ireland would at this moment still be in its original state of nature, had it not been drained, cleared, reclaimed and fertilized by the enormous outlay of labor and capital which has been expended on it by the people of the present day and their forefathers in past generations. The land-

lords contributed nothing, or next to nothing, for its improvement.

Mr. Mill thus writes of the improvement of land in Ireland: "Whenever in any country the proprietors, generally speaking, cease to improve their lands, political economy has nothing to say in defence of landed property as there established. * * Landed property in England is very far from completely fulfilling the conditions which render its existence economically justifiable. But if insufficiently realized, even in England, in Ireland those conditions are not complied with at all. With individual exceptions (some of them very honorable ones), the owners of Irish estates do nothing for the land but drain it of its produce."

But further argument in proof of this fact is quite unnecessary, seeing that both houses of the legislature bear emphatic testimony to it in that section of the land act of 1870, which declares that "all permanent improvements in the soil and on the farm are assumed to have been made by the tenant, except in those cases in which it has been clearly proved they have been made by the landlord." The vast property thus created by the labor and capital of the people, in the permanent improvement of the soil and on the buildings and equipments of their farms, and which has been growing and accumulating for centuries, covers a very considerable part of the aggregate value of the land of the country.

The essential and immutable principles of justice used certainly to be—that everyone had a right of property in the hard-earned fruits of his labor; that whatever property a man had made by the expenditure of his capital, his industry and his toil, was really his own; that he, and he alone, had a right to all the benefits, the advantages and enjoyments that that property yielded; and that if anyone else meddled with that property against his will, or interfered with him in its enjoyment, he was thereby guilty of the crimes of theft and robbery, which the eternal law of God, as well as the laws of all nations, reprobated and punished with such severity. But the principles which underlie the existing system of land tenure, and which impart to its specific and distinctive character, are exactly the reverse of these. The principles on which that system is based are—that one privileged class do not require to labor for their livelihood at all; that they have an exclusive right to all the advantages, the comforts and enjoyments that can be derived from a splendid property; which exacted no patient, painful or self-denying efforts of labor to create it or acquire it; and which, in fact, they inherited without any sacrifice at all. That being a singularly favored race, and being all God's eldest sons, the rest of the world must humbly acknowledge themselves to be their inferiors in rank, lineage, condition and dignity. That this superiority of rank gives them a right to sell out God's gifts