



B RITISH landlords evidently perceive that the collapse of their ancient land system is near at hand. While their income on paper runs into princely figures, the amount coming to them, after settlements and mortgages have been provided for, is, in many cases, too small to enable them to pay their way, rents having declined with the price of farm produce. In old days, when they were supreme in Parliament, they kept up the price of wheat by artificial means. In 1689 they voted themselves an export bounty. England, at that period, grew more than she could consume, and the bounty, Adam Smith tells us, "was an expedient to raise it to the high price at which it had frequently been sold in the times of Charles the First and Second." Roughly speaking, the bounty was continued in force until the Corn Laws were adopted, that is to say, till the landlords, finding they could no longer export, resolved to bolster rents by imposing import duties. The bounty ran away with a good deal of public money; from 1741 to 1750 it absorbed over a million and a half pounds, and in the single year of 1749 amounted to £325,000. But the worst of it was that it made bread dear even in years of plenty. "In plentiful years," says Adam Smith, "by occasioning an extraordinary exportation, the bounty necessarily raises the price of corn above what it otherwise would be." In years of scarcity it was usually suspended, but "by the extraordinary exportation which it occasions in years of plenty, it must frequently hinder the plenty of one year from compensating the scarcity of another." The Corn Laws also plucked the consumer, but, like the

bounty, they kept up rents, and the landlords did not look beyond that.

Mr. James Lowther, in behalf of the territorial aristocracy, is agitating for the revival of the Corn Laws in some shape, but Lord Salisbury says flatly that the thing is impossible. The "anthem of the poor," directed against the "small loaf" of the Corn Laws, had a revolutionary ring:

"When wilt Thou save the people,
O God of Merey, when?
Not kings and lords, but nations,
Not thrones and crowns, but men!"

As Lord Salisbury virtually put it, what would happen now if the masses, vastly more powerful numerically and politically than in the period of the Anti-Corn Law league, were asked to return to the "small loaf," in order that a semi-feudal land system, which has lodged the soil of the Three Kingdoms in the hands of a few thousand persons, might be preserved? Mr. Lowther and his friends allege that they do not want Parliament to restore the Corn Laws for the aristocracy alone; if, they say, colonial wheat and other produce were admitted free, as now, while imports from foreign countries were taxed, the world-wide British family would be consolidated. But this attempt to secure higher rents for the landlord by pretending to legislate for the good of the Empire, does not meet with much favor. In 1894, the value of the food imported from foreign countries and colonies together, though chiefly from the former, exceeded £100,000,000 sterling. To tax the foreign supply would undoubtedly be a good thing for the home landlord and colonial farmer, but the British people are firmly per-