

## THE SOCIAL REFORMER.

Issued monthly by the Toronto Single Tax Association. Subscription prices: For eight copies for one year, twenty-five cents. Forty copies, one year, one dollar.

These low rates are to facilitate distribution by our friends.

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Wellesley Street, Toronto.

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VOL. II.—No. 4.

TORONTO, APRIL, 1892.

PRICE ONE CENT.

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# BACK TO THE LAND.

By Bishop Nulty.

[Again a double number of the SOCIAL REFORMER is issued. This time it is to enable us to publish the letter of Bishop Nulty to the clergy and laity of his diocese. The letter was the result of the independent observation and study of a Catholic divine, whose orthodoxy and theological learning no one could question, whose life had been spent in a purely agricultural part of Ireland, and who, as this letter shows, was disposed to view the land question from that standpoint. The letter attracted widespread attention at the time of its publication. Our eight pages will not contain the whole of the letter, and we have therefore been reluctantly compelled to omit several paragraphs.]

### Dedication.

*To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Meath:*

Dearly Beloved Brethren—I venture to take the liberty of dedicating the following essay to you, as a mark of my respect and affection. In this essay I do not, of course, address myself to you as your bishop, for I have no divine commission to enlighten you on your civil rights, or to instruct you in the principles of land tenure or political economy. I feel, however, a deep concern even in your temporal interests—deeper, indeed, than in my own; for what temporal interests can I have save those I must always feel in your welfare? It is, then, because the land question is one not merely of vital importance, but one of life and death to you, as well as to the majority of my countrymen, that I have ventured to write on it at all. With a due sense of my responsibility, I have examined this great question with all the care and consideration I had time to bestow on it. A subject so abstruse and so difficult could not, by any possibility, be made attractive and interesting. My only great regret, then, is that my numerous duties in nearly every part of the diocese for the last month have not left me sufficient time to put my views before you with the perspicuity, the order and the persuasiveness that I should desire. However, even in the crude, unfinished form in which the essay is now submitted to you, I hope it will prove of some use in assisting you to form a correct estimate of the real value and merit of Mr. Gladstone's coming bill. For my own part, I confess I am not very sanguine in my expectations of this bill—at any rate when it shall have

passed the lords. The hereditary legislators will, I fear, never surrender the monopoly in the land which they have usurped for centuries past; at least till it has become quite plain to them that they had lost the power of holding it any longer. It is, however quite manifest to all the world—except, perhaps, to themselves—that they hold that power no longer. We, however, can afford calmly to wait. While we are, therefore, prepared to receive with gratitude any settlement of the question which will *substantially* secure to us our just rights, we will never be satisfied with less. Nothing short of a full and comprehensive measure of justice will ever satisfy the tenant farmers of Ireland, or put an end to the land league agitation.

The people of Ireland are now keenly alive to the important fact that if they are loyal and true to themselves, and that if they set their faces against every form of violence and crime, that they have the power to compel the landlords to surrender all their just rights in their entirety. If the tenant farmers refuse to pay more than a just rent for their farms, and that no one takes a farm from which a tenant has been evicted for the non-payment of an unjust or exorbitant rent, then our cause is practically gained. The landlords may, no doubt, wreak their vengeance on a few, whom they may regard as the leaders of the movement; but the patriotism and generosity of their countrymen will compensate them abundantly for their losses, and superabundantly reward them for the essential and important services they have rendered to their country at this critical period of its history. You know but too well, and perhaps to your cost, that there

are bad landlords in Meath, and worse still in Westmeath, and perhaps also in the other counties of this diocese. We are, unfortunately, too familiar with all forms of extermination, from the eviction of a parish priest, who was willing and able to pay his rent, to the wholesale clearance of the honest, industrious people of an entire district. But we have, thank God, a few good landlords, too. Some of these, like the Earl of Fingal, belong to our own faith; some, like the late Lord Athlumny, are Protestants; and some among the very best are Tories of the highest type of conservatism. You have always cherished feelings of the deepest gratitude and affection for every landlord, irrespective of his politics or his creed, who treated you with justice, considerateness and kindness. I have always heartily commended you for these feelings. For my own part, I can assure you, I entertain no unfriendly feelings for any landlord living, and in this essay I write of them not as *individuals*, but as a *class*; and further, I freely admit that there are individual landlords who are highly honorable exceptions to the class to which they belong. But that I heartily dislike the existing system of land tenure, and the frightful extent to which it has been abused, by the vast majority of landlords, will be evident to anyone who reads this essay through. I remain, dearly beloved brethren, respectfully yours,

+ THOMAS NULTY.

Mullingar, 2nd April, 1881.

### THE LETTER.

Bishop Nulty commences with the following propositions:—

Private property in land not justified by its general acceptance.

Human slavery was once generally accepted.

Even Christians recognized slavery.

The approval of the world cannot justify injustice.

Private property in land is the twin sister of slavery.

Natural right, not vested right, should control.

The bishop then proceeds as follows:—

#### Justice of Private Property in the Results of Labor.

The following are the acknowledged principles of justice that have a practical bearing on the question.

Every man (and woman, too) has a natural right to the free exercise of his mental and corporal faculties; and whatever useful thing any one has produced by his toil and his labor, of that he is the rightful owner—in that he has in strict justice a right of property.

The two essential characteristics of property, therefore, are: First, the thing itself

must be useful for some purpose; and, secondly, it must be the product or the result of our labor.

Now, the effort or the exertion demanded by labor is irksome, distasteful and repulsive to the indolence and self-indulgence that is natural to us, and, therefore, no one will voluntarily subject himself to the painful inconvenience of labor who is not stimulated by the prospect of the remuneration and enjoyment which the fruit of his labor will return him.

Whoever, then, has voluntarily subjected himself to the painful operations of labor has, in strict justice, a right of property in the product or result of that labor; that is to say, he, and he alone, has a right to all the advantages, the enjoyments, the pleasures and the comforts that are derivable from the results of his labor. Others cannot complain of having been excluded from the enjoyment of a thing whose production cost them nothing; which he was not bound to produce for their use, and which, were it not for his efforts, would not have existed at all. *Use* and *exclusion* are, therefore, the two essential peculiarities of the enjoyment of a right of property. The power to dispose of legitimate property is almost absolute. Property may be devoted by its owner to any purpose he pleases that is not inconsistent with the public good and does not interfere with the rights of others. He may keep it for his own use and enjoyment if he wishes, or he may exchange it by barter or sale for an equivalent in value of the property of others; he may alienate it by free gift when living, or bequeath it to anyone he pleases, as a voluntary legacy, when dying. He might even destroy it and do no wrong to anyone. If Michael Angelo, in that delirium of artistic frenzy in which he called on his celebrated statue of Moses "to speak," had dealt it a blow of his mallet, which would have created not merely a rent in its knee, but had actually shattered it into atoms, the world might indeed deplore the destruction of this immortal work as an irreparable loss, but it could not complain that he did it an injustice or a wrong. Michael Angelo was master of his own free actions, and he was not bound to spend years of labor and toil in producing that incomparable statue to delight and please the world, and, even after he had produced it, he was not bound to preserve it for its enjoyment. "He might do what he liked with his own."

Every individual whose labor produces an article of property makes a substantial addition to the wealth of the nation; and a nation's general prosperity and happiness, and the degree and abundance in which it possesses all the comforts, the enjoyments, the luxuries and pleasures of life, depend entirely on the numbers engaged in industrial productiveness, and on the skill and efficiency or their labor. Every man, no doubt, works for his own self-interest, for his own benefit and happiness, but whether

he wishes it or not, he works, too, for the increased enjoyments and prosperity of others. No man consumes all that his labor produces, and the benefit of the superfluous products of his labor, if not enjoyed by himself, is sure to be enjoyed by some one to whom he has transferred it. If a bootmaker does not himself wear all the boots he produces, somebody else is sure to wear them for him. It is, therefore, highly in the interest of the community, as well as of individuals, to encourage the production, the multiplication and accumulation of objects of wealth; and, therefore, to stimulate the activity and energy of the labor necessary for their production the laws of all nations, as well as the law of nature, have regarded as sacred and inviolable the right of property which a man enjoys in what he produces.

#### **Necessity of Labor Proves the Common Right to Land.**

Although the earth, even in its present deteriorated state, is a splendid inheritance provided by the liberality of God for the maintenance of man, it is, nevertheless, an inheritance which places him under the necessity of patient, laborious toil in its cultivation and improvement, to extract from it the means necessary for his subsistence.

The human race cannot live on the earth if they refuse to submit to the inevitable law of labor. No man can fairly emancipate himself from that universal decree which has made it a necessity for every one "to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow." Now, the land of every country is to the people of that country or nation what the earth is to the whole human race—that is to say, the land of every country is the gift of its Creator to the people of that country; it is the patrimony and inheritance bequeathed to them by their common Father, out of which they can by continuous labor and toil provide themselves with everything they require for their maintenance and support, for their material comfort and enjoyment. God was perfectly free in the act by which He created us; but, having created us, He bound himself by that act to provide us with the means necessary for our subsistence. The land is the only means of this kind now known to us.

#### **The Land of Every Country the Common Property of its People.**

The land, therefore, of every country is the common property of the people of that country, because its real owner, the Creator who made it, has transferred it as a voluntary gift to them. "*Terram autem dedit filiis hominum.*" Now, as every individual in that country is a creature and child of God, and as all His creatures are equal in His sight, any settlement of the land of a country that would exclude the humblest man in that country from his share of the common inheritance would be not only an

injustice and a wrong to that man, but, moreover, would be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of his Creator.

#### **Individuals May Rightfully Collect Rent for Improvements in Land, but to Permit Them to Collect Rent for Land Itself a Wanton Injustice.**

The tracts of country known in England as the Bedford Level, and in Flanders as the Pays des waes, were, not so very long ago, as sterile, as barren, and even more useless than the bogs of our own country at this moment. By an enormous expenditure, however, of capital and labor they have been drained, reclaimed and fertilized, till they have at last become among the most productive lands in Europe. That productiveness is entirely the result of human labor and industry, for nature did hardly anything for these lands. If the question, then, was asked: Who has a right to charge or demand a rent for the use of the soil of these lands for agricultural or industrial uses? the answer undoubtedly would be, the person who by his labor and capital had created all their productiveness, who had imparted to them all the value they possess. In charging, therefore, a rent for the use of what he has produced, he is only demanding a most just and equitable return for his capital—a fair and honest remuneration for his labor. His right to demand this could not possibly be disputed.

Now, the artificial productiveness of these tracts of country hardly equals, and certainly does not surpass, the natural fertility of large districts of rich, luxuriant, arable and pasture lands in the county Meath, in this diocese. If it were asked then who has a right to charge a rent for the use of the soil of these highly favored districts in Meath for agricultural or industrial purposes, the answer should be that if human industry or labor had imparted to these lands a real and substantial amount of artificial productiveness, by the cultivation and permanent improvement of the soil, then the person who created that productiveness had a perfect right to demand a rent for the use of it. But who, it may be further asked, has a right to demand a rent for the natural fertility of these lands "which no man made," and which, in fact, is not the result of human industry and labor at all? The answer here, also, should be, he who had produced it. But who produced it? God. If God, then, demanded a rent for the use of these lands, He would undoubtedly be entitled to it. But God does not sell His gifts or charge a rent for the use of anything he has produced. He does not sell; but He gives, or bestows, and in bestowing His gifts He shows no respect of persons. If, then, all God's creatures are in a condition of perfect equality relatively to this gift of the land, no one can have an exceptional right to claim more than a fair share of what was intended equally for all, and what is,

indeed, directly or indirectly, a necessary of life for each of them. When, all, therefore, relatively to this gift, are perfectly equal, and nobody has any real claim to it; when all equally need the liberality and generosity, of God in it, and no one can afford, or is willing, to part with his share in it—to alienate it from any or all of them would be to do them a wanton injustice and grievous wrong, and would be a direct disappointment to the intentions of the donor besides.

#### **The Whole People the True Owners of the Land.**

When, therefore, a privileged class arrogantly claim a right of private property in the land of a country, that claim is simply unintelligible, except on the broad principle that the land of the country is not a free gift at all, but solely a family inheritance; that it is not a free gift which God has bestowed on His creatures; but an inheritance which He has left to His children; that they, therefore, being God's eldest sons, inherit this property by right of succession; that the rest of the world have no share or claim to it, on the ground that their origin is tainted with the stain of illegitimacy. The world, however, will hardly submit to this shameful imputation of its own degradation, especially when it is not sustained by even a shadow of reason.

I infer, therefore, that no individual or class of individuals can hold a right of private property in the land of a country; that the people of that country, in their public corporate capacity, are, and always must be, the real owners of the land of their country—holding an indisputable title to it, in the fact that they received it as a free gift from its creator, and as a necessary means of preserving and enjoying the life He has bestowed upon them.

#### **Distinction Between the Right of the Individual and the Right of the Community.**

Usufruct, therefore, is the highest form of property that individuals can hold in land. On the other hand, I have shown that the cultivator's right of property in the produce of the land, in the improvements he has made in the productiveness of the land, and in its undisturbed occupation, as long as he continues to improve it—that these various rights are all founded on the strictest principles of justice, and that their recognition and protection by the state will secure for the land the highest culture and improvement it is capable of receiving, and will draw from it, without fail, the largest returns of human food it is capable of yielding. On these immutable principles of justice and right, the order, progress and welfare of society depend. They allow free scope and hold out the highest encouragement to the fullest development of the energy and activity of human industry and enterprise, by securing to everyone the full fruits of his

labor, and recognizing in him a right of property to all that his hands produce. They guarantee to him immunity and protection from disturbance as long as he devotes himself with earnestness and zeal to his industrial pursuits. On the other hand, if a man, through indolence or incompetence, allows his land to run wild, to return to its primitive sterility and barrenness, so as to produce nothing at all, or, at all events, much less than it is capable of yielding, it is no hardship to that man if these principles call on him to surrender a trust which he held from society, and which, to the great detriment of society he has so grievously abused. Finally, it is no injustice to refuse the remuneration of labor to those who have not labored at all. This usufruct, therefore, is a right of property in land which is held mainly for the benefit of the public and for the advancement of the general interests of the community.

And yet the general interests of the community are hardly distinguishable from the private interests of the usufructuary. The larger the amount of permanent improvements made in the soil and the richer and the more abundant returns it will yield, the better will it be for both interests. An usufructuary or farmer who labors might and main for his own self-interests, labors with the same amount of earnestness and zeal for the interests of the public as well. But it is the consideration of the public interests that will determine the continuity of his occupancy. The continuity of his occupancy entirely depends on the continuity of its real, practical effectiveness for the advancement of the interests of the public. The moment it ceases to be useful and beneficial to the public welfare, that moment it ceases to have a right to exist any longer. If individuals could have a right of private property in land, that right would not be fettered by these responsibilities; in fact it would not be liable to any responsibility at all.

The distinction, therefore, between the two rights of property in land is essential and fundamental, and it is absolutely necessary to apprehend it clearly and to bear it distinctly in mind. Now, there is nothing novel or startling in the common and inalienable right of property which I have shown every people possesses in the land of its country. I know of no writer on political economy who disputes it, although I am familiar with the works of many of the most eminent of them.

#### **That the Rent of Land Should go to the Community a Design of the Divine Providence.**

Bastiat, the great defender of the property classes in France, certainly does not dispute it; on the contrary, he assumes it as a settled principle of justice throughout his entire treatise.

The late Mr. Cairnes, though by far the ablest and most eloquent of all the modern

advocates of landlords' rights and privileges, as far as I know, at least does not controvert it either. The facts and the principles he sets forth in some of the most powerful and best written passages of his works prove the manifest injustice of allowing to any one, except to the people, a right of private property in the land of their country.

Mr. Mill, in his great work on political economy, after having accepted the universally received definition of *property* exactly as I have given it, says: "The essential principle of property being to assure to all persons what they have produced by their labor and accumulated by their abstinence; this principle cannot apply to what is not the produce of labor, the raw material of the earth." And again: "When the sacredness of property is talked of, it should always be remembered that any such sacredness does not belong in the same degree to landed property. No man made the land: it is the inheritance of the whole species."

In the remainder of this chapter Mr. Mill lectures the proprietors of land on their obligations and responsibilities to society in the management of it, and consequently he must be addressing himself to owners who have only the right of usufruct in their lands. Such admonitions, if addressed to men who had an absolute right of private property in land would be simply an impertinence, as they would not be obliged to account to him or to any one else for "what they did with their own." A little further on Mr. Mill adds: "Those who think that the land of a country exists for the sake of a few thousand landowners, and that as long as rents are paid society and government have fulfilled their function, may see in this consummation a happy end to Irish difficulties. But this is not a time, nor is the human mind now in a condition in which such insolent pretensions can be maintained. The land of Ireland, the land of every country, belongs to the people of that country."

Mr. McDonnell, in his excellent work on the land question of England and Scotland, says that it became a trite and popular phrase to say "that the land was the property of the people."

Mr. Arthur Arnold, the sitting member of parliament for the borough of Salford, in his work on free land, published quite recently (1880), thus writes: "The land belongs to the nation, to the state, to the people. It is not possible to sever the interests of a beggar crouching at the gates of a park from that land. Infinitesimal they may be, but their existence cannot be denied." And he adds: "that there is no such thing as *private property in land* held by individuals known to English law, or the law of the land." He quotes the highest legal authority in proof of his statement.

Williams, on "The Law of Real Property," thus writes: "The first thing the student has to do is to get rid of the idea of absolute ownership. Such an idea is quite unknown to the English law. No man is in law the

absolute owner of lands. He can only hold an estate in them."

Even Mr. Froude, in an extract given by Arnold, although he does not give the reference, thus writes: "Seeing that men are born into the world without their own wills, and being in the world they must live upon the earth's surface, or they cannot live at all, no individual or set of individuals can hold overland that personal and irresponsible right which is allowed them in things of less universal necessity."

I think, therefore, that I may fairly infer, on the strength of authority as well as of reason, that the people are and always must be the real owners of the land of their country.

### The Price of Land a Monopoly Price.

But this privileged class not merely sells the use of God's gifts, but extorts for them a price which is most unjust and exorbitant; in fact, they hardly ever sell them at less than scarcity or famine prices. If a man wants to buy a suit of broadcloth, the price he will be required to pay for it will amount to very little more than what it cost to produce it—and yet that suit of clothes, may be a requirement of such necessity or utility to him that he would willingly pay three times the amount it actually cost rather than submit to the inconvenience of doing without it. On the other hand, the manufacturer would extort the last shilling he would be willing to give for it, only that he knows there are scores of other manufacturers ready to undersell him if he demanded much more than the cost of its production. The price, therefore, of commodities of all kinds that can be produced on a large scale, and to an indefinite extent, will depend on the cost required to produce them, or at least that part of them which is produced at the highest expense. But there is a limited class of commodities whose selling price has no relation or dependence at all on the cost at which they have been produced; for example, rare wines that grow only on soils of limited extent; paintings by old masters; statues of exquisite beauty and finish by celebrated sculptors; rare books; bronzes and medals, and provisions or articles of human food in cities during a siege, and more generally in times of scarcity and famine—these commodities are limited in quantity, and it is physically impossible in the circumstances existing to increase, multiply, or augment them further. The seller of these commodities, not being afraid of competition, can put any price he pleases on them short of the purchasers' extreme estimate of their necessity, utility, or advantage to themselves. Fabulous sums of money, therefore, have been expended in the purchase of such commodities—sometimes to indulge a taste for the fine arts; sometimes to satisfy a passion for the rare and the beautiful; and, sometimes, too, to gratify a feeling of vanity or ambition to be the *sole proprietors* of objects of antiquarian

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

as if they were purely the products of their own labor and industry, and that they can exact in exchange for them famine or scarcity prices. Finally, that they enjoy the enviable privilege of appropriating the hard-earned property of others against their wills, and do them no wrong even if they charge them a rent for the use of what would really appear to be their own.

#### **Landlordism Robs all Classes.**

Hitherto we have confined ourselves almost exclusively to the consideration of the various forms of injustice, and the spoliation of private property which the existing system of land tenure enables the proprietors of the soil to inflict on the tenant farmers of Ireland. But the tenant farmers, though a numerous, an influential and an important section of the nation, are, after all, not the nation. Despite our cruel misgovernment in the past, some few of our national industries still survive, as well as the industry of the cultivation of the soil. Then there are, moreover, certain trades and professions whose services are indispensable to any nation that has any claims to be considered *civilized*.

But the Irish system of land tenure wrongs and impoverishes not only those who live by and on the land, but all other classes in the community as well. It robs not only the cultivators of the soil, but every man in the community, of a substantial portion of the hard-earned fruits of his labor, no matter what the trade or profession in which he may labor for his living. It is, therefore, not a local or a particular grievance, but a great national injustice, and that, I think, is its most objectionable peculiarity. I have already shown that the land of every country is the public property of the people of that country, and, consequently, that its exclusive appropriation by a class is a substantial injustice and wrong done to every man in that country, whom it robs of his fair share of the common inheritance. The injustice of this appropriation is enormously enhanced by the fact that it further enables the landlords, without any risk or trouble, and, in fact, makes it a matter of course for them, to appropriate a vast share of the earnings of the nation besides. They plundered the people first of God's gifts in the land, and that act of spoliation puts them under a sort of necessity of plundering them again of an enormous amount of their direct earnings and wages. The line of argument that leads directly to this conclusion seems abundantly clear.

#### **Land Values Intended by Providence for Public Purposes.**

It would seem as if Providence had destined the land to serve as a large economical reservoir, to catch, to collect and preserve the overflowing streams of wealth that are constantly escaping from the great public industrial works that are always going on

in communities that are progressive and prosperous. Besides the permanent improvements that are made in the land itself, and which increases its productiveness and value, there are other industrial works not carried out on the land itself, but on its surroundings and in its vicinity, and which enhance its value very considerably. A new road is made for the accommodation of a district; a new bridge is thrown across a river or a stream to made two important localities accessible to each other; a new railway passes close by and connects it with certain large and important centres of industry; a new factory or a new mill is erected, or a new town is built in the neighborhood. Industrial works like these add very materially to the value of all the land in their vicinity. It is a well known fact that a new railway has in several instances doubled the value of the land through which it passed, in consequence of the increased facilities it had afforded for the sale of its agricultural products. In every state of society, which is progressive and improving, such industrial works are continually going on, and hence the value of the land is rising also everywhere.

#### **The Great National Property Which Landlords are Permitted to appropriate.**

But now the great national property which Providence had destined for the support of the public burdens of society has been diverted from its original purpose to minister to the wants, the necessities, and perhaps the extravagance of a class. The explanation of this extraordinary act of national spoliation will be found in the fact that hitherto this class could do just as it pleased; the government of the country lay for centuries exclusively in its hands, and despite the combined influence of "English radicalism" and "Irish obstructionism" it is practically in its hands still.

The enormous value then thus superadded to the land from the two sources just indicated passes directly with the land itself into the hands of those who own it. Those who hold the ownership of the land hold also the ownership of all the accessions of value it receives from all quarters. This increase in the value of their property cost no sacrifice, demanded no painful effort of labor. Even while they slept their rent rolls went on increasing and multiplying.

The value continually imparted to the land by the industrial exertions of the community, in the construction of harbors and bridges, in the making of new roads and railways, in the erection of new factories, mills and houses, etc., has all gone with the land, has all been confiscated and appropriated by the owners of the soil. Professor Cairnes feels sorely perplexed to account for some of the anomalous results of this appropriation. "A bale of cloth," he says, "a machine, a house, owes its value to the labor expended upon it, and belongs to the

person who expends or employs the labor; a piece of land owes its value, so far as its value is affected by the causes I am now considering, *not* to the labor expended on the land, but to that expended on something else—to the labor expended in making a railroad or in building houses in an adjoining town, and the value thus added to the land belongs not to the persons who have made the railroads or built the houses, but to someone who may not have been aware that these operations were being carried on—nay, who perhaps has exerted all his efforts to prevent their being carried on. How many landlords have their rent rolls doubled by railways made in their despite? It never occurred to Mr. Cairnes that he had here given, quite unconsciously to himself, an unanswerable argument, *ex absurdo*, to prove the injustice of the appropriation of the land. If the land had not been confiscated no such absurd or unjust result could have followed. The value imparted by labor to the land, exactly like "the bale of cloth, the house or the machine," would belong to the persons who expended or employed that labor, that is to say, *to the public, by whose industrial exertions it had been created.*

Lastly, the vast accessions of value which the land is constantly receiving from the proceeds of that "self-imposed tax" which the nation levies of itself in the high prices it pays for the "raw products of the soil," together with the increased productiveness of the soil itself, go all, as Mr. Cairnes is forced to confess, "neither to profits nor to wages nor to the public at large, but to swell a fund ever growing, even while its proprietors sleep—to the rent roll of the owner of the soil."

#### **Private Property in Land the Real Robber of Labor.**

Thus the appropriation of God's gifts in the land led naturally, and as a matter of course, to the appropriation of an enormous amount of the wages and earnings of the nation, which, in the designs of Providence, kept constantly dropping into the land, accumulating on the land, and adding to the value of the land; not for the enrichment of the landlords, but for the support of the public burdens of the state. Now a system of land tenure which thus despoils the people of a nation of a vast amount of their earnings, which transfers a valuable property which they have created by the patient, painful and self-denying efforts of their labor, to a class who do not labor at all, and make no sacrifices whatever, can, I think, be fairly characterized as a system of national spoliation. The hard-working, industrious masses of the nation are taxed *twice*, and for an enormous amount each time. They are taxed first for the benefit of the owners of the soil, to supply them with all the comforts, the enjoyments and the luxuries which they desire, and they are taxed again to the amount of eighty millions annually for the government and defence of the country. With two such

enormous drains on the productive industry and labor of the country, I cannot share in the astonishment which Mr. Cairnes feels at finding that, notwithstanding the increased productiveness of British industry, "the rate of wages, as measured by the real well-being of the laborer," has not improved to any material extent, while it may be doubted whether the rate of profit has advanced at all.

#### **The Only Hope for Labor—"Back to the Land."**

If the English operatives could only retain for their own use and benefit the vast sums which, under the existing system of land tenure, go on the one hand to the owners of the soil, and the sums that an economical system of taxation would save for them on the other, their material comforts and enjoyments would be multiplied a hundred fold. Under the existing state of things their condition is utterly incapable of any improvement in the future. Political economists can see no possible way in which English operatives can permanently improve their condition, except they have recourse to that revolting and unnatural expedient of voluntarily restraining and limiting their numbers. "This then," says Mr. Cairnes—the limitation of his numbers—"is the circumstance on which, in the last resort, any improvement at all of a permanent kind in the laborer's condition turns." If the self-commissioned apostles who preach this new doctrine only warned the people against the consequences of reckless and improvident marriages, I would join and go with them heartily. But when they advise them (as they seem to me to do) to increase and multiply according to the requirements of trade, and in such proportions as they may be wanted in, for the benefit of their *betters*; when they advise them to increase and multiply *only* when trade is prosperous, prices are high and commerce flourishes, I am heartily opposed to them. These teachings appear to me not only unchristian, but revolting and unnatural; and their wickedness is only surpassed by the astounding ignorance of human nature which they reveal in men who ought to be better informed. The British workman has no need to have recourse to such an unnatural expedient for the purpose of improving his condition. The chief, the fundamental obstacle he will have to overcome, will be found in the existing system of land tenure. British operatives and capitalists, of all men living, appear to me to have the largest and deepest interest in as thorough and radical reformation in the system of land tenure in our country as well as in their own. Trades unions, therefore, instead of wasting their energies and resources in a fruitless struggle with capitalists, would do well to turn their attention in this direction. They have made a wide field here for their efforts, and their labors here cannot possibly be fruitless. The rallying cry of capitalists and laborers ought then to be—"BACK TO THE LAND."