

*Annals.*

o

MISCELLANIES;

CHIEFLY  
ACADEMIC.

BY

FRANCIS W. NEWMAN,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,

ONCE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD,

HONORARY FELLOW OF WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

M. R. ASIATIC S.

5  
VOL. V,

<sup>c</sup>  
x  
LONDON:

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.

1891.

Pol. Econ. - G. Brit.  
& Land.

ON THE RELATION OF THE SUPPLY OF FOOD  
TO THE LAWS OF LANDED TENURE.

[FROM THE MANCHESTER ATHENAEUM, 1876.]

The following ought to have been in Volume IV. (Economies), but having been published by the Manchester Reform Union, it was out of sight. Being earlier than the Parliamentary Debates of 1881, the writer did not then dare to imagine that Parliament would accept a *Land Court* to fix rents, over the head of those who claimed to be Land Owners. This fact cannot be confined to Ireland, and immensely facilitates our vast Problem.

I APPROACH my present subject with a sense of responsibility which is almost painful. I am entirely convinced that the subject of Landed Tenure must become a vital one for the next generation. In barbarism, tribe has fought with tribe, and in a later stage, nation has fought with nation, for the possession of land; no decider of the strife has been found but force. In the advanced stage of many nations the poor have fought for the land of the rich, and such civil war is deplorably ruthless. That England cannot long acquiesce in her present system of Landed Tenure is to me certain; first, because it is in contrast with that of India, that of the United States, that of the greater English colonies, and I may say of all Europe. Next, because our pauperism is chronic; a fatal blot on our institutions. We are running in the track which wrecked France in a horrible revolution. With a contrary policy, Prussia gave to her landless peasants a sure tenure of the soil. The Diet of Hungary showed the same wisdom. The Austrian dynasty followed a like course. And, after the Crimean war, when the Emperor Alexander emancipated the serfs of Russia, he did not convert them into landless peasants, but imparted to them definite rights in the soil. In an opposite extreme of human life, when, after the late American civil war, the red men (so called) of the Indian territory set free their slaves in imitation of President Lincoln, they voluntarily re-divided their fields and gave to the freedmen an equal portion. In sharp contrast to this generous wisdom, the English Parliament which voted *first* fifteen millions as a loan to

the planters of the West Indies and the Mauritius, and *next* converted the loan into a free gift of twenty millions, never thought of giving to the emancipated slaves any right in the land whatsoever. Hence misery and conflict in Jamaica to this day. [The notions on land traditional with English landholders are in sharp collision with those of the vast bulk of the human race, yet they are maintained by our landed aristocracy, and even by many who wish to be political economists, with simplicity of conviction, like a national creed. It is of extreme importance that the contest, which will have to be carried on against our modern English system, should be a war of peaceful argument, a remonstrance of friendly citizens, not a deadly struggle of force; and for this it is essential that the townfolk be the leaders of the movement, and thoroughly understand how vital to their interests is a right and wise reform.]—a reform thorough and bold, yet as little as possible damaging to those who have blamelessly inherited a false position. [I have selected for my topic the relation of *food supply* to landed tenure, because the immediate market strikes all minds at once, and brings quick conviction. Yet this does not at all exhaust the subject. The towns have two other urgent arguments. They must insist that the rural neighbourhood shall maintain its own new births, and not make the towns sinks of misery by pouring into them perpetual streams of needy rustics. Nay, every large town must have a right of largely colonizing the rustic parts, and establishing upon every town area a law of maximum population, which shall not be exceeded. Pure air and pure water are a primary right of every community, earlier and more pressing than any landlord's right. Land is not only *as* necessary to life as air and water, but when men are deprived of all control of the land, pure water and air cannot be had. So much I remark that I may warn you how imperfect is my present treatment of this great subject. I do but open one side of it.]

Now, in the first place, I claim and insist that the principles on which land shall be held must be debated in a Court of Morals before they can be justly settled by the votes of a Parliament. A Parliament *may*, no doubt, debate them in a moral and just spirit, may indeed make morality and natural justice paramount. But when the argument used is as follows: "Such and such rights have been granted by a former Parliament, therefore they are a sacred possession of individuals which must not be contested,"—I vehemently disown it. Just so, it was argued elsewhere, "The law has sanctioned slavery, therefore slaves are a rightful

possession." } But a law is wrongful which gives away the rights of many in order to pamper the wealth of a few. Now as regards moveable property (which ought to be esteemed the only *real* property), the mass of it being practically infinite, and most of it incorporated with human labor, which makes it a private possession, one man seldom can injure another by possessing it even to a huge amount. If indeed an article be *unique*, as an ancient MS., a picture, a statue, or some other relic of antiquity, the State may claim a right to buy it up for general advantage. Again, if from any cause either water or some necessary food is dangerously scarce, the State may take possession of the supplies, indemnifying the individuals. These are exceptional cases in regard to *moveable* property; and even so, they set no limit to the amount of exchangeable valuables which one man may hold. But in regard to land the circumstances are widely different, and the moral argument different. In every nation which has passed out of barbarism, and does not live on the edge of a vast unoccupied region, land is sensibly scarce; and its just distribution to a community is a delicate problem of ethics. I do not mean that abstract morals can prescribe some one definite mode; several different ways may be all equitable enough to satisfy nations which have inherited them. But *some* modes of distribution are palpably *unjust*; and these cannot be made just by the vote of a legislature, especially if the legislature has consisted of landholders who were voting for their own private gain to the serious damage of the community.

It is here requisite to look straight into the face of facts. When a nation even very rude, or what we call *savage*, like the modern North American Indians or the ancient Germans, deliberates in general folk-mote on any question of property, whether it consists in moveables or in land, their decision is generally sagacious and just. They are not biassed by theories nor warped by avarice, nor has a rich man any influence by his riches. Justice is the chief common good, and sound common-sense has, perhaps, a better chance with them than with us; as we see in the case of the red Indians re-dividing their fields to give land to their liberated slaves. But when one rude people conquers another, and despoils it of its land—imposing tribute, services, and general vassalage in the mere insolence of superior force—then the laws which the conqueror enacts in his military council or parliament for upholding his domination over the conquered are sure to be essentially wrongful, and are almost always cruelly so. Even if time soften their hardest features,

the essential injustice inheres in them until some great reversal takes place, either peaceful or insurrectionary; and however much we may grieve over the evils or horrors of such a revolution, yet in the retrospect it will be pronounced beneficial and salutary. France is an eminent illustration of this. From the cruel iniquity of her land-laws and of her taxation, the mass of the people were miserable in the extreme. No redress was possible, until the Government became bankrupt through the failure of taxes, and the army was thoroughly pervaded with the popular discontent. Then came a great overturn in politics, and a general burning of the country-seats of the nobility; in short, a fierce and violent seizing of the land by the long-oppressed peasantry. Dreadful as was that transition, we now at nearly a hundred years distance rejoice in it, as a most necessary reconquest by the peasants of men's natural rights. The longer that we English postpone a fundamental reform of our landed tenure by calm, equitable, and gradual change, the closer we shall run to the dangers of a violent explosion which no wisdom can direct or moderate. Our duty is to insist on the discussion of the subject from a moral basis, and utterly to disallow the pretence that the landed rights now legal are therefore sacred, as if natural equity to a whole nation were not more sacred, than any privileges of a separate order of men. All these pretended rights originated in conquest, during the slavery or vassalage of the conquered; or, further, in the votes of great councils or parliaments, from which all but landholders were long studiously excluded. Moreover, the modern squires and noblemen claim and exercise power which no feudal baron possessed—of emptying their estates of men, with enormous damage both to the public defence and the supply of our food.

Before I intended to introduce the topic, I have all at once alighted on the most forcible illustration how direfully a bad landed tenure may damage our food-supply. It is not an imaginary or fantastical occurrence. It is not the ingenious invention of a novelist. It is not a matter of which we read in history, as of a Spanish monarch who orders all the vines in Mexico to be rooted up, or a Norman conqueror who burns villages by the hundred in Hampshire to make for himself a hunting ground; but it stands before us as first practised in Scotland early in this century, and since repeated frequently down to last year—the dispeopling of wide areas, the artificial creation of wildernesses, either to please the taste or to swell the rent-roll of some great proprietor. When complaint is made,

that the vast private estates of dukes are a legacy of ancient military spoliation, we get the calm reply that, though the system began in mere violence, it now conduces to the universal good by promoting secure cultivation. But, unhappily, this is just what it does *not* do. The open fact is, that the law enables a landlord at his own will simply to *forbid* cultivation, to eject the cultivators and all human population except a few gamekeepers or shepherds; this very thing is actually done, and with impunity. Will it be pretended that the sheep or rabbits or deer, which multiply over the area vacated by man, afford us by their carcasses food equivalent to the lost crops? When the soil is very thin or sandy, of course we do not wish to drive out the animals. They have their own natural and reasonable sites. But where the soil can bear good crops of human food, it cannot be made out that sheep produce as much food for us, much less deer or rabbits. Some members of a recent Parliamentary Committee, which sat on the Game Laws, were disposed to believe that there are ninety million wild rabbits in the United Kingdom, and to boast of them as an important supply of meat to the market; but the damage to crops by animals, which bite off the tender shoots, is immensely out of proportion to the bulk of their carcasses. Wild rabbits are an exceedingly wasteful crop of food. As for the deer, few indeed of the public ever taste his flesh, and, if in a severe season he migrates into sown fields, Scottish farmers are painfully aware how costly is his appetite. At present, I simply lay before you two considerations: *First*, that the primary use of the national land, according to natural equity, is to maintain the national existence; *secondly*, as the law now stands, landholders may and do forbid the raising of food. They study their taste, their sport, or their rent, not the national sustenance.

I am not competent to go into details of farming; but a few notorious facts satisfy *me*, and, I think, may satisfy *you*. So long ago as 1827 the evidence given before a Parliamentary Committee became the basis of an elaborate article in the *Quarterly Review*, which much excited squires and noblemen. The quantity of produce raised by spade-cultivation, and by such tending as peasants give to their own crop, was attested beyond dispute to be immensely greater than anything that farmers can raise, who have to pay wages. Out of this came a movement for allowing to laborers small allotments, to which they might give their vacant hours. When in 1828 I called the attention of an able economist to this fact (a gentleman who soon after was Professor of Political Economy in the University of Oxford), he replied:

“Well! if the things attested are true, it would seem that Goldsmith, in his ‘Deserted Village,’ was a wiser economist than any of us.” For the doctrine was then rising into strength, that small farms must be exterminated, and large farmers with large capital be established everywhere. But observe how meanly unjust was the treatment of the poor peasants after the new discovery. When it was ascertained that on small plots of land they could raise enormous crops,—then, instead of laying upon them rent proportioned to what a farmer would pay, they were charged three or even four times a farmer’s rent. This still goes on; and now it is objected to such allotments, that they can only repay the cultivator when they are very near to a town-market. Possibly enough that is true, while so high a rent is exacted, and while the laborer is liable to be ejected at short notice, with loss of his crop, as happened lately with some, whose allotments I could see from my windows at home. But that they do pay these high rents is a notorious fact; and it proves beyond reasonable dispute, that such cultivation produces immensely more food for the towns than farmers can raise from the same area. Some pretend that small holders will exhaust the land, and never can afford to manure it: but I see, day by day, the masses of manure which they employ on crop after crop in the same year, and this without any security of tenure. Who then can wonder at the exuberant produce which the peasants of Belgium, France, and the Channel Islands raise, in all of which places the cultivator is remunerated in proportion to his own diligence, and his position is secure?

[Among political economists the late Mr. John Stuart Mill deserved chief honor for going back into the footsteps of Adam Smith, the true founder of the science, and vindicating small independent culture. He also did the great service of calling our attention to the stupendous change which our legislating landlords have brought about, by converting a feudal rent of custom into a commercial rent of competition.] On this subject I must touch again. But at present I must dwell a little on *small culture*. With the exception of allotments which are intended to occupy only odd hours of the cultivator, which also have no security, the thing hardly exists in Great Britain. A farm of 50 acres is called *small*: but no farmer can raise crops from 50 acres by his own hands, even with the help of his sons. He must hire laborers and pay them wages. Farmers who have capital are not fond of working hard as laborers, and from little farmers the laborers cannot expect much generosity. Even so,

in several respects, our little farmers supply the town-markets better than do large capitalist farmers. The wives and daughters of the rich have more refined and ladylike employments than the care of fowls, eggs, and butter. We may be told that these articles are provided for us on a great scale by the large farmers; but it is an evident fact that they are not supplied in the proportion that they used to be before high farming was known, nor on a scale at all commensurate to the wants of the present population, even with our enormous foreign importation. In my memory a fowl used to cost eighteenpence, which now may sell for three shillings or three shillings and sixpence; butter now claims a shilling and tenpence a pound, of a quality which I remember to have cost only ninepence or tenpence. [Keen competition for farms raises rent, and farmers who have to pay high rent cannot sell their produce so cheap; yet, the political economists who have abandoned Adam Smith's doctrine of rent, insist that rent does not and cannot raise prices; a doctrine of which they never have been able to persuade me. I insist that the landholder's enormous legal power vests in him a virtual monopoly. The farmer counts on the rent as a first and unavoidable payment, just as if it were a Government tax, and then adjusts his wages and his prices so as to enable him to bear the burden.\* When farmers prosper, the majority of them have quickly to pay more rent in consequence, and their superfluity does not overflow to the benefit of the wage-receiver. No doubt there are two exceptions: a fraction of the whole have long leases, and the rent is slower in rising upon these. A second fraction of them are hereditary on the estates of wealthy landlords, and, as tenants-at-will, pay a moderate rent, which is not raised so long as they are obedient and dutiful clients. They are bought into political slavery by the compact well understood between them and the bailiff: and their subservient votes and interest are a strong support of the existing landed system. Except in these two classes, the wealth of the farmers is a sponge for the landlords to squeeze. The tendency of rents is upwards (1875); and, as I think, is decidedly to the damage of the town markets. Quantity is lessened and price is raised.

---

\* I must not be understood to mean that the farmers can get what prices they please. If they strive to depress rent, to raise prices, and depress wages, *they find the first of these three tasks by far the hardest*, by reason of the legal power of landlords, and the great competition for farms. Therefore, in the present state of things, they submit to the rent dictated to them, and exert themselves only to beat down wages and hoist up prices.

Let us look in contrast to some other neighbouring countries. The food sent to us from France is something wonderful. I seem to remember that in 1825, Mr. Huskisson said that we received from France *every year* six millions of hens' eggs; but I believe that now six millions in *one week* is a computation nearer to truth. The importation of fowls, grain, and of various dried fruits has also increased prodigiously. What an idea this gives us of the activity of French agriculture! [Our economists of the school of Macculloch pretend that the small culture of France is a deplorable failure. Of course, I am not concerned to defend French testamentary laws; but the French economists, men of immense knowledge, insist that the little properties, take them for all in all, are no failure at all, but a vast success.] Nay, do we not all know how Louis Napoleon got millions of francs out of the peasants, and made himself independent of the great money-lenders? Still more recently, we have seen how quickly France has re-established her financial position, after the vast expenses and desolations of her German war, and the huge fine which she had to pay for her aggression. No one can plausibly explain this, but by the sound condition of her agriculture. I read that the French Government has had the good sense to teach the peasants many secrets of cultivation, especially in fruit-culture. When will our landlord parliament be equally wise? The climate of France, as a whole, is doubtless superior to that of England; but how vast has been our improvement already in vegetables and fruit! And of what sort were the French markets in the last century, before the system of small independent proprietors was established? At that time general deficiency was the normal state; a dearth often approaching to famine. Universal wretchedness was a fair general description then; but now, in spite of wars and revolutions and taxation, the actual cultivators of the soil stand far higher in comfort, content, wealth, and security than the mass of the English peasants. They not only feed themselves and lay-by money, but their food overflows for our English markets. With all this, and with the supposed superiority of English high farming, our prices are most unsatisfactorily high.

If any of you say to me, "Do you forget the large supply from the new gold fields—California and Australia?" I reply: I do not forget it, but I am slow to believe that this is the cause of the high prices. I do not pay more now, but rather less, than I paid fifty years ago for a coat or a shirt, or a table or a chair, or a bed or a book, or a hat or a carpet, nor for a cab or an omnibus.

These and numberless other things, in which price has not risen, are as continually in the market as is food; and there has been abundant time, since the new gold fields were open, for the superfluous gold to be equally distributed among all things purchased. Nay; but as trade-unions have forced up prices in some articles, so the greatest of all trade-unions, that of landlord legislators, has forced up some other prices, as to me it seems. Supply and demand are the only agencies which force prices up or down, whether the supply of gold be increased or lessened. A man who finds gold tries to buy something with it. If that for which he seeks is unique, as Italian pictures, he forces the price up, perhaps permanently; but if he demand something which can be supplied without limit, as porter or brandy, or hams and champagne, the rise of price is only local and momentary, and ceases as soon as the production of the article is commensurate to the demand. If all other things in the market are increased as fast as the new gold, the gold cannot raise price. Other considerations, which may be urged on this side, I here omit. [Thus I believe that the true, the only real cause why coal and flesh-meat and butter and many other things are dearer, is because they are not produced in proportion to the demand; and, in the case of food, our laws of landed tenure are visibly the cause.]

[It is contrary to common sense to imagine that a wealthy farmer, who has to deal with 500 or 1,500 acres, will as scrupulously turn every acre and half-acre to profit, as will a laborer whose acre is his all. Alike against common sense it is to expect that a peasant, who is paid by time and gains nothing by extra diligence, will elicit from the soil crops as good as one who is to get the benefit himself.] Of workmen paid by the day one who is superfluously active seems unfair to all his fellows, so that a conventional languor of work tends to become normal. Farmers complain, sometimes bitterly, of the indolence of the rustics. Says one: "If I have a horse that walks well, their first business is to break him into sluggishness, because they are too lazy to walk up to him." Says another: "If a cart pass in the lane, a whole gang of laborers turn round and stare at it from the first moment it is heard, until it is out of hearing. Anything for an excuse to be indolent." [I am not here to accuse, nor yet to defend, the peasants: but we well know that in all human probability special vices will spring up out of special circumstances. Give a class of men tyrannical power, and a majority of them become proud and tyrannical. Impose on another class slavery,

and it becomes cunning and untruthful. We cannot count on conscientious diligence from workmen who do not identify their employer's prosperity with their own, and are paid by the time, not by the job. Therefore I am disposed to believe the farmer's complaints of the idleness of the peasants: but it is not the farmer only who suffers from this: the markets also suffer, and *we* suffer. The mischief springs—I may say legitimately, normally—from the existing system of landed tenure. With us there is no real deficiency of land, but the people are not allowed to get at the land: the rich buy up the small freeholds, where they exist.

If any one think that the smallness of our English area is the cardinal difficulty, let him look to the Channel Islands. I think that Mr. J. Stuart Mill directed attention to these, but his friend, Mr. Thornton, brought out the details instructively in a special treatise. I have it not at hand to quote; but I remember the general result as follows: Guernsey and Jersey are more thickly peopled than any part of Great Britain, and have no natural advantage in soil. The cultivating population is a much greater fraction of the community than with us. After feeding themselves, they send to market more produce by far, acre by acre, than comes from our wealthiest high-class farmers. The reason of this is on the surface. Every peasant there, by ancient custom, has a definite right in the crop, which it is his interest to make as profitable as possible. Though they cannot all possess freehold land, their active thought, ingenuity, and diligence are freely exerted to make the produce abound. It may well be believed that weeding, which to an English farmer is so expensive, costs nothing there. Surely this is more than a hint, how noxious to our town-markets are our existing laws of landed tenure.

Indeed, I must ask you to allow me to dwell a little more on the Channel Islands. From a paper written in the present year,\* I extract the following summary:—Guernsey has only 10,000 cultivable acres, a small estate for a duke. She has no ducal landlord, but nearly 2,000 small proprietors, with five acres apiece on the average. The population is twice as dense as in England, yet there are no paupers. They have been spending £16,000 on a covered market, and £10,000 for a new road to the harbour. Their quays have cost £285,000, of which they have paid up £65,000, and clear off the debt at the rate of £1,500 a

---

\* Article on Channel Islands, by W. Gibson Ward, in *National Agricultural Laborers' Chronicle*, Jan. 22, 1876. A learned and very useful writer.

year. They have excellent markets of vegetables, fruit, and poultry; and in the year 1878 (as one specimen), they sent to London fifty tons of grapes grown under glass. Jersey also sent to London in the same year £300,000 worth of early potatoes. Instead of this, the island would soon be full of paupers, if you gave them to a Duke of Sutherland, or a Sir James Matheson. I mean, turned into game preserves, or into a dozen big farms, they would not raise a third part of their present food. In fact, no such population could then exist on the area.—And why are these islands so different from us? Because, like Norway, *they have not been conquered*. Their feudal lord conquered us.

A most notable instance of pauperism, induced by ordinary farms, and removed by very small culture, is attested in the small parish of Cholesbury, near Tring, in Buckinghamshire. The details are too long to read. But the clergyman of the place, the Rev. H. P. Jeston, in 1887 or thereabouts clearly narrated the facts.\* The parish contained 112 cultivated acres and 44 of unenclosed common. The population was 189, and the cultivated ground was divided between two farmers. Fifty-six acres apiece seems really small. But the poor rates ate the farmers up. The total rates at last became 80s. to the pound. The tenants threw up their farms and the landlord lost his rent. The gates were taken down, and the fences left in unrepair, to evade rating. The parish minister for years had no income. But the Agricultural Employment Institution purchased fifty acres (thirty-six of arable, and fourteen of woodland), and allotted the thirty-six acres to eight or ten married men, at a rent of 28s. per acre. The tenants immediately prospered, and paid both rent and rates punctually. Previously 119 out of the 189 were paupers; but at the end of four years the number of paupers had run down from 119 to five, these five being aged or disabled. Some of the allottees kept cows, some had a horse or oxen. Such was the efficacy of small culture to extirpate pauperism. It could not do so, if it did not get more out of the soil.

Perhaps you will allow me now to explain more closely the important revolution in rent, at which Mr. J. Stuart Mill pointed. We are generally disposed to think of the feudal system as one of unmixed tyranny. No doubt there was plenty of tyranny. The armed hand was apt to deal at pleasure with the person and goods of the unarmed. There was no sufficient limiting either

\* Letter of Rev. H. P. Jeston, to Mr. Farden, a Quaker. It appeared in a book called "Remedies for the Perils of the Nation," London: Seely & Co. Second edition. 1844.

of the king's power or of the baron's. The king's court and the baron's court recovered the rights or customs of the king or of the baron, and probably did justice between equals in rank; but they did not avail to withstand oppressions by the powerful. The only appeal against the baron was to the king, and the result (if attempted) was very doubtful. Nevertheless, in the feudal system, as with the Ottoman Turks, the general principles, when fairly acted on, were equitable and beneficial. The king was chief of the barons, who were called his peers, that is, his equals, I suppose; as in Homer's *Iliad*, all the chief heroes, though subject to Agamemnon, are entitled "kings nurtured by Jupiter." As a baron, the king held large crown-estates, from which the ordinary expenses of his government were defrayed. They were not his private property, but were attached to his office, as the phrase *crown-estates* denotes. So too the barons held estates, not as private men, but as high political officers. The whole theory was fundamentally military. The baron in person owed military service to the king, and was bound to maintain a trained population, a small army of retainers, to swell the king's army when called for. He was also responsible for the peace of the district, "the king's peace" as it was called. Hence difficulties arose when the baron was aged, or if he died when his son was a minor, or if he left only a daughter as his heiress. The king then knew how to remunerate himself. Such cases were well provided for; but the cardinal matter is, that the baron's revenues were strictly his political salary paid to him in his official character, and in remuneration for presumed public services. Custom regulated and restricted his claims. The idea of driving the human population off any part of his estate in order to promote his private gains, could not then arise. No law was needed against it, for the act was unimaginable. William the Norman, among his tyrannical violences, did make a wilderness in Hampshire for the pleasure of hunting, but his memory was execrated for it. Every baron was honoured by the king, and was safe against the king, in proportion to the number of his retainers, that is, the military retinue, at the head of which he could appear at the great council, or afterwards in parliament. The military tenure had at least this good, that it made a human population valuable in the eyes of the barons. They were not then accounted a warren of paupers. Estates were esteemed by the number of fighting men upon them; moreover, the customary payments which we now call *rent* were, to speak roughly, in about the same proportion; and the larger the crops of food, the

better all were pleased. But when the political power of the barons was nearly crushed under Henry the Seventh, and gold and silver began to ooze in from the newly-discovered world of America, our great lords turned from politics to trade, and began to study, not how to keep their retainers, but how to augment their rents. So far as I can learn, it was in Henry the Eighth's reign that they first claimed to eject farmers, through a mere wish to consolidate many small holdings into great sheep-walks, because the exportation of wool had become profitable. A long series of local agrarian wars hence arose. Colonel Ouvery, on deputation from the Land Tenure Reform Association, of which Mr. J. Stuart Mill was president, spoke an elaborate and important speech in Bristol, on this subject, a few years back; and summed up in the phrase, that as England had been conquered by her King William the Norman, so was she conquered a second time by her landholding lords under Henry the Eighth. Chronic pauperism has ever since been the unfailing result. Whether it can be proved that Parliament ever passed a statute to justify the change of *rent by custom* into *rent by competition*—a change which converted the landlord into a landowner—I do not know; and it is morally of little importance: for the landlords were omnipotent in Parliament. Moreover, we know that in Charles the Second's reign, they voted themselves free from nearly all the remaining feudal duties and feudal burdens; a deed which (in a moral estimate) was to abdicate their right to their estates and rents, which ought thereby to have reverted to the Crown for public uses. The fraud on the nation has been enormous: and, though the injustice to later purchasers would be cruel, if we insisted that the rents now belong to the State, and not to the noblemen, baronets, and squires, still the grievous historical iniquity fully justifies a determination not to allow a continuance of things as they are. Into what the feudal system ought to have developed, *we see in the Channel Islands*; instead of that, the feudal lords have made themselves into commercial landowners. Unhappily Mr. J. Stuart Mill's death seems to have killed the Land Tenure Reform Association, which was supported by many M.P.s, apparently only from their esteem of his talents. He held a peculiar doctrine, which few people regarded as practical, of claiming for the State, *as a small fraction of its right*, "the future unearned increment of Rent." No one now steps into his place, nor presses his scheme—a scheme which to me appeared perfectly just in theory, but too difficult to carry out justly. For myself, I confess I have always looked for a remedy in a different

direction.] Very old abuses so entangle themselves with just claims that even if, after the manner of a little Greek city, we were to set up some sage as a plenipotentiary lawgiver, no single settlement could bring things right. [To avoid violent treatment of the case we must have a long series of enactments, all moving in one direction, and all consistent, for which we need not a law of Parliament, but a solemn vote, enunciating the policy which is henceforth to guide legislation.] This is called *unpractical* by men who love intrigue and shuffling—men who dread legislation that rests on principle, and is guided (as all law ought to be guided) by impartial and noble morality: but to me nothing appears so practical. A vote of the House of Commons (for the concurrence of the Lords is not needed) has no effect in a court of law; it alters no man's immediate rights, though prospectively it has great moral force. [If, after solemn debate, such a vote were to deplore the unjust legislation of a past age, and to lay down the direction which legislation ought to take in future, stating the objects to be aimed at steadily, with a general outline of measures to be contemplated and evils to be redressed, the nation would eagerly discuss all the points, and opinion would ripen for successive enactments, which, by being gradual and foreseen, would press as lightly as may be on existing interests. The main principles which I should like to see foremost are these:—1. In order to promote the supply of food, to aid us towards independence of foreign accident for our first necessities, and to do justice to the laborer: the cultivator ought to have an interest in the crop, and, as far as possible, security of his position. 2. It is against the public welfare that any individual should control more than a thousand acres of cultivable land, or more than one acre of town land. 3. Every large town ought, as soon as possible, to buy up the entire town land, and the building land around it, at the price now obtaining, to be settled by a jury. 4. The State ought steadily to aim at recovering its control of country land, partly by purchase, and partly by a legacy tax, taking the tax not in money but in land. 5. In order to exterminate the pauperism and laziness of the rustics, which ensues when the laborer is divorced from the soil, the State ought actively to aid in re-establishing small culture. One obvious method is, to carve large portions of the crown lands into farms of from six to ten acres, with copyhold rights to the tenants, and a guarantee that the rent should never be raised on an individual by reason of his prosperity, but, if ever, only by a vote of Parliament affecting all tenants of the crown lands alike, as in general taxation.]

Time allows me only brief comment on these cardinal principles. According to natural equity, no man has a right in land except by dwelling on it or cultivating it; and when he ceases to do either, his right ceases, except that if he have improved it, he has a right to sell his improvements, if he can, before abandoning the cultivation or habitation. When the State set up a Lord of the land (that is, a chief person), he was a political officer, not a proprietor; that was intelligible, and not at all unreasonable. The modern commercial idea of land is essentially unreasonable, and is pernicious unless jealously limited in the extent of possession. Land being the surface on which we live, to make any man the owner of large tracts is to vest in him a power very inequitable over a whole population. Such power can hardly be made responsible. It is in some sense more than royal power, although in theory the baron, as the king's delegate, could have only at most the same power as the king. A king might as well call himself *owner* of England, and warn us off his land, as a baron clear people off his estate. No small possessor would set up game-preserves or deer-forests, destructive to the food of the nation. A thousand acres allows as much of beauty and of privacy as any man ought to desire; and in the present developments of industry large fortunes may be variously invested in great concerns, or lent on solid guarantee; hence, to restrict possession of land (which is naturally scarce) does not restrict private fortunes. If once Parliament set a public ban on estates larger than a defined limit (I say a thousand acres, to fix ideas), we should soon have laws to tax exceptionally all estates above that limit. The tax might increase with time, and be especially heavy upon bequests exceeding the limit. Thus in two generations a great change might take place. Indeed, another law would soon give to healthy towns a right of purchasing land for public purposes and colonizing the countries. Instead of emigrating into distant lands and sending our capital abroad, we ought to people our own empty fields and many a Scotch wilderness. If cultivators multiplied on the soil and had a safe tenure, we should soon have an enormous increase in the supply of food. Our fruit would not equal that of France, nor would our wheat ripen so surely; but wheat is not the only grain, and we should in one sort or other vastly increase and improve our supply of food, if the peasantry had security and early teaching. In recent centuries we have scarcely known properties on the scale of Belgian or French farms; yet there is amply sufficient testimony

to the abundant crops which a single family will raise from six or even four acres. The Cumberland *statesmen* (as they were called) had farms ten or fifteen times as large, and needed laborers to help them. Those who object to small properties point to the decay of this Cumberland institution, in proof that small culture cannot succeed: but it proves nothing of the kind. As I understand, the proprietors have been simply *bought out* by the high prices which men, enriched by manufactories or by minerals, have offered them: not but that the bad habit of drinking has often aided the break-up. Yet, this experience is a warning to us that small freeholds will not stand while the holding of large estates is lawful. Rich men offer a fancy-price for land, and will generally succeed in buying it; and then they moan over getting only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or 2 per cent. in return for their money, as if it proved their great equity; perhaps too they plead this as a reason why their *burdens* should be lessened. When the State is the landlord, the farms cannot be sold and incorporated with the property of—what shall I call an insatiable land-buyer?—well: a *landshark* seems to me a fit name. But the prophet Isaiah cries out woe against him. “Woe unto them that join house to house, and lay field to field, that they may be themselves alone in the midst of the land.” Thus in Judæa we see, though the legal and sacred system was one of small hereditary freeholds, it was very difficult to prevent the rich from buying out the poor. In the Roman republic there is a history not wholly unlike our own. The official aristocracy was perpetually at work, with great success, to turn public land into private by playing into one another’s hands; and the people found no remedy until they carried a law to forbid any one from holding more than 500 Roman acres of the public land. That statute brought relief to the original citizens: but when Rome conquered all Italy, the same evil grew up on a far greater scale. The Gracchi saw it, tried to bring a remedy, but only became martyrs; and 200 years later Pliny wrote, in three words, an emphatic sentence: *Latifundia perdidere Italiam*—“Large estates have ruined Italy.” In the days of Cicero and Horace, Italy could not feed the city of Rome. The poet Horace complains that barren shade-trees and flowers and ponds of fish superseded orchards and crops of food; general cultivation was largely supplanted by grazing. Huge towns abounded in population: over the country, herds of cattle and a few graziers moved, except where some nobleman had his palace and ornamental grounds. Full towns and empty country characterize ancient Rome, modern Turkey, and England,

—this is a painfully ominous mark of decay. The political intelligence and freedom of our towns, with their vast wealth, give to us great advantage. If we now open our eyes to the danger, remedy does not come too late. Let not a defective and perverted political economy deceive us.

Unhappily, several leading economists seem to have forgotten that vice and bad law are of all things most wasteful, and from their zeal to repress population by artificial methods (an unnatural and oppressive aim), they have soothed the consciences and hardened the hearts of landlords, who empty their fields of men. But politics and morals, not political economy, must discuss and define men's *rights*. Land is not merely a surface destined to bear rent for a few grandees; it is the surface on which a nation must dwell, and from which a nation must have food. I do not complain or grieve, as some do, that we grow less *wheat* now than we used. In other lands wheat ripens more surely than with us, and there is reason in buying it with other products, provided that we raise other food on our own lands. On this we deliberately calculated in 1847. But when enormous fortunes are earned, some by commerce or manufactures, others by the demand for those minerals which wealthy communities need, the millionaires buy up land, *not* to get it cultivated for the nation's food, but to pamper pride and indulge fancies, or for the yet baser purpose of getting a high sporting-rent from another class of self-indulgent rich men. Our statesmen seem to be so accustomed to things as they are, as not to reflect that chronic pauperism is a disease which must at length kill any nation that neglects it. Cheap food is a matter of prime importance. When the necessaries of life are cheapest, all commodities which gratify higher tastes rise in value. When food becomes scarce, whatever refines and ennobles human life becomes depreciated. Therefore cheap food is even of first necessity to national wealth; but what is far more, it tends to keep down pauperism, vice, and rascality. Even corn has not been cheapened as it ought to have been when the Corn Laws were abolished. I am aware, we deplorably waste grain: that is a large, a very large, topic. Still, even with our existing bad habits, the market would soon abound with cheaper grain, fruits, roots, and all agricultural produce, with great relief to both town and country, if everyone who desired to work on the land could get a safe tenure, and the number of actual proprietors were greatly enlarged.