

2a

G4939

THE LAND, THE PEOPLE,

AND

THE COMING STRUGGLE.

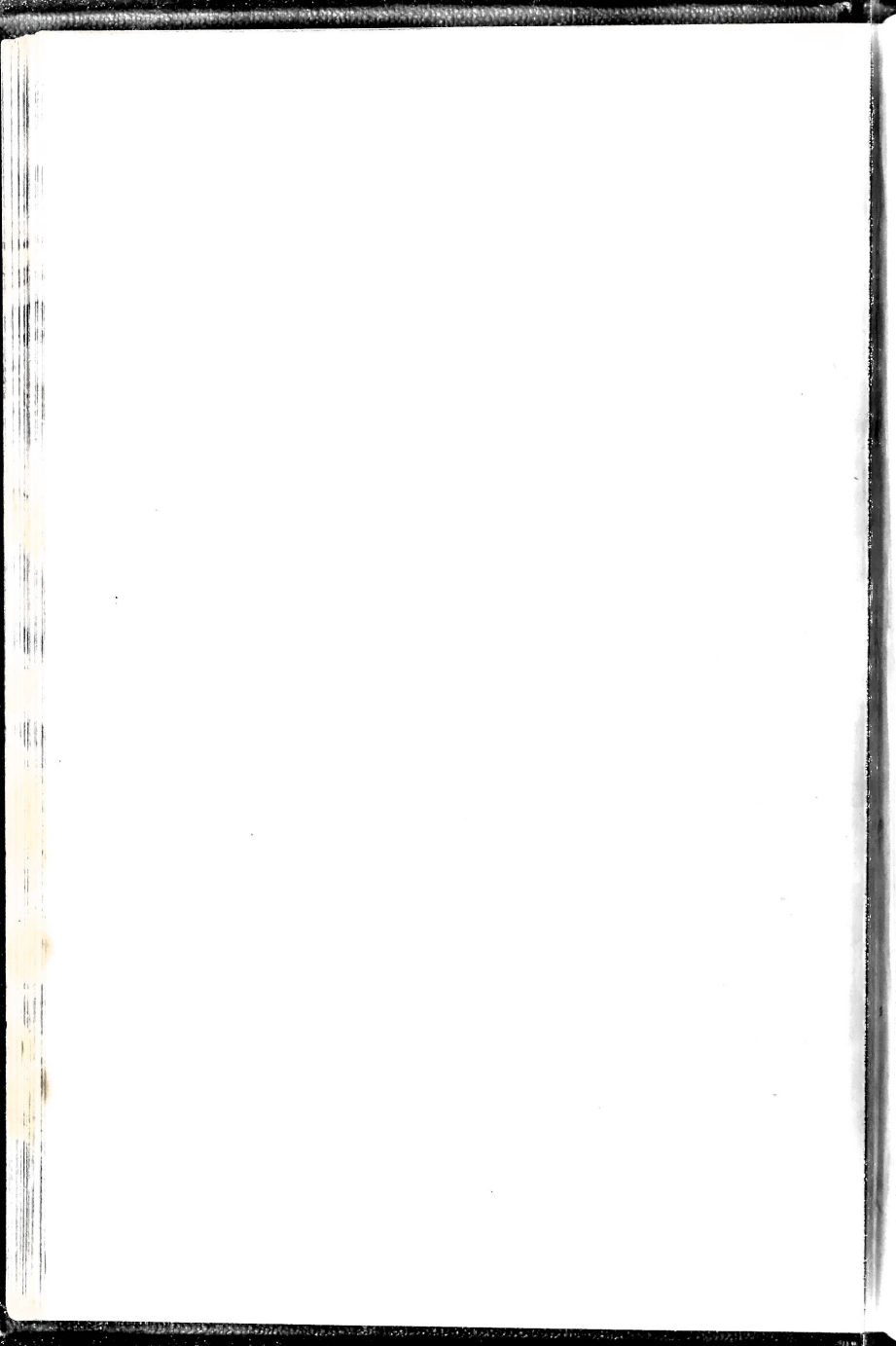
BY

CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

LONDON:

AUSTIN & Co., 17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.

PRICE TWOPENCE.



PART I.—THE LAND.

It will be on the Land Question that that large section of the English aristocracy which regards the preservation of territorial rights and privileges as essential to good government, will shortly have to encounter a stronger force, and to cope with a wider movement than has been manifested in England during the last 200 years. It is in connection with the Land Question that thoughtful working men are commencing to look for a speedy solution of some of the most difficult problems as to the more striking evils of modern society. At the present moment it is credibly stated—

1. That the bulk of the land in Great Britain and Ireland is in the hands of extremely few holders, and that the number of landed proprietors decreases daily. The *Westminster Review* for October, in a thoroughly honest article on this question, declares that 180 years ago there were no less than 180,000 families owning freehold estates; and that now less than 160 persons own half England and three-fourths of Scotland.

2. That these landholders treat their freehold rights as of infinitely more importance than the happiness of the peasantry of the neighbourhood. Ancient footpaths are closed, common rights denied, game preserving and rabbit breeding carried on to the point of crop annihilation, county members nominated and returned as if the title to the freehold carried with it monopoly of political right; and a most contemptuous indifference is shown as to the condition of the tiller of the toil, or, what is even worse, a mockery of charity to remedy in small part the evil which the very charitable gentry have themselves created.

3. That for the last 156 years this landed aristocracy has been the real governing class, superseding the Crown and controlling the people—certainly ever since, to use the words of Earl Grey, they adopted the “highly beneficial custom” of excluding the Sovereign from the meetings of the Cabinet, in consequence of George I.’s ignorance of the English language.

4. That during this time—viz., from 1714—the standing army has been built up, the National Debt—now amounting to more than £800,000,000 in England, and to nearly £120,000,000 in India—has been almost entirely created, the pension list swollen to exorbitant dimensions; while imperial taxation and the rent rolls of the few privileged ones have enormously increased—most of the burdens of imperial and local taxation having been shifted from the shoulders of the landholder on to those of the labourer. For since, with the accession of the Brunswick family to the English throne, the monarch, excluded even from the political councils of the nation—at first because he could not speak the language of his subjects, as in the case of George I.; then because of his indifference, as in that of George II.; and then because of his oft-recurring insanity, as in that of George III.—has been practically reduced to a mere costly show puppet; it is impossible for the student of our history not to remark how the landed aristocracy have utilised their possession of political power for the transference from their own shoulders of the bulk of the local and imperial taxation.

5. That pauperism has become more permanent and more widespread—and that consequently certain classes of crime and misery have more prevailed—as the land monopoly has become more complete.

6. That the agricultural labourers of many English counties, and notably of Dorset, Wilts, Gloucester, Norfolk, Suffolk, have from bad and insufficient food and shelter degenerated, so that their state is a disgrace to any civilised country in the world. The *Westminster Review* urges, on the evidence of Mr. Simon, Medical Inspector, that rather more than one-half our southern agricultural population are so badly fed, that a class of starvation diseases, and a general deterioration of mind must result. That in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Somersetshire, insufficiency of nitrogenous food is the average.

7. That landowners in the large majority of instances, and

this whether the proprietor be Whig or Tory, regard their tenants as bound to follow the politics of their freeholder, and as fairly liable to ejection when malcontent.

Mr. Latham, a magistrate of Cheshire, before the House of Commons Committee, said that "it was the evil of property that a man considers that he owns not only the property itself, but that he owns the souls of the tenants also."

The Duke of Buccleuch, not content with the influence which his vast holdings in Scotland give him, has actually taken to the practice of manufacturing false and fraudulent voters, by granting to certain of his dependents pretended feu rents or freehold rent charges, so as to qualify them for county voters, and this to such a glaring extent as to excite popular indignation. This fabrication, however immoral, is held to be legal, although, since the grant of the rent charges, his Grace has actually sold to a railway company a considerable portion of the property charged. This Duke of Buccleuch, in his Wanlockhead mining works, in Dumfriesshire, employs a number of wretched lead miners, who sometimes do not see five pounds in actual money from year's end to year's end, being constantly in debt to the overseer's shop. They are badly paid and tyrannically dealt with.

In Wales, because at the last general election the advantage was "won by the Liberals, through the votes of the freeholders and leaseholders of cottages, the landlords," says the *Westminster Review*, "enraged at their defeat, proceeded to wreak their vengeance upon those of their tenants who had presumed to vote in accordance with their convictions." Mr. Harris, a gentleman of independent means in Cardiganshire, "believed that as many as 200 notices to quit had been served in Cardiganshire alone, at Lady Day after the election. He was himself aware of from thirty to thirty-five served upon tenant farmers, in some cases where the families had been 200 years upon the estates; in others where considerable sums had been laid out by the farmers in improving their farms, which, as the law now stands in England, they have no means of recovering."

In Ireland you have a landlord—perhaps like the late Most Noble the Marquis of Hertford—constantly residing out of the country, having no sympathy or connection with his property, except that of sucking it as dry of vitality as

the law permits him. At election times, "his lieutenant, the agent, armed with notices to quit, and backed by the police, is sufficiently formidable. Threats of eviction (and more than half a million evictions have taken place in Ireland during the last thirty years), distresses, and demands for immediate payment of rent, large arrears of which are usually due," assail the voter. "It has long been the practice in Ireland for the landlords to collect together their tenants who are voters, to place them upon cars, and send them in a body under the agent to record their votes at the polling-booth. These parties of voters are frequently escorted by detachments of police and military, on the alleged ground that there is fear of their being prevented by violence from going to the polling place. It is observable that these escorts are always asked for by the landlords or their agents, never by the voters themselves." General MacMurdo, who commanded a brigade in Ireland at the last election, admitted, before the House of Commons Committee, in answer to Mr. Gathorne Hardy, that these voters are practically prisoners, one of whom would not be allowed to go away, even if he desired, until he had been escorted to the polling-booth.

Consider the first and second points as to the property in the possession of the great landowners in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Under the feudal system in England, bad as it was, there were no seigniorial rights without a declaration of corresponding duties—the vassals gave their services, and in return the lord apportioned them land, and gave them some sort of protection; but now the lord claims the land as his own freehold, without any admission of obligation accompanying the ownership, and regarding himself as unduly taxed if any fiscal imposition touch his pocket. In many cases, in order to relieve themselves from the burdens of supporting the poor, the great proprietors have ordered the wretched cottages of the labourers working on their lands to be destroyed. The tillers of the soil cleared out from a noble landowner's domains get shelter how they can, in hovels in bad condition and dearly priced, where they are huddled together, as the following picture, taken from the Parliamentary Blue Book, shows:—"Modesty must be an unknown virtue, decency an unimaginable thing, where, in one small chamber, with the beds lying as thickly as they can be packed, father, mother, young men,

lads, grown and growing up girls—two and sometimes three generations—are herded promiscuously, where every operation of the toilette and of nature—dressing, undressing, births and deaths—is performed by each within the sight or hearing of all; where children of both sexes, to as high an age as twelve or fourteen, or even more, occupy the same bed; where the whole atmosphere is sensual, and human nature is degraded into something below the level of the swine. It is a hideous picture, and the picture is drawn from life.”

In Scotland, even under the old semi-barbarous, but patriarchal, system of clanship, we believe we are correct in stating that the land was treated as the property of the entire clan—so much so, at any rate, that the chief of the clan had no power, under penalty of death, to alienate any portion of the land without formal authority of the clan given in solemn assembly, and the meanest member had privileges in connection with the cultivation of the soil.

In Ireland the old Brehon laws as to the land are more clear and distinct than on most other topics. Each member of the local society or tribe had a life interest in the land of the society, and when he lost it by death, or by quitting the tribe, a new partition of lands was made, so as to prevent too large a portion falling into the hands of any one holder. And yet, after generations of progress, we find that the land is now practically in the hands of a few large families, who consider that they are entitled to hold the soil without any sort of consequent liability to provide for the lives or to ensure the happiness of the inhabitants.

The land is constantly increasing in value, or at any rate, a higher rental is exacted by the freeholder, and yet there is no corresponding contribution from the landowner towards the imperial burdens; on the contrary, the landowner shifts the fiscal burdens on to the labourer.

In illustration of this, the territorial incomes for England and Wales alone amounted, in 1800, to £22,500,000; in 1810 they had increased seven millions; in 1850 they had swollen to £41,118,329; in 1861 they had grown to £54,678,412; to-day they exceed £65,000,000; while the land-tax, which in 1800 was about £2,000,000 per annum, is now reduced by redemption to about one-half that amount.

Since the date of the usurpation of power by the terri-

torial aristocracy—viz., since the accession to the throne of the House of Brunswick—land has, according to the *Westminster Review*, increased in value in Great Britain to a startling extent. Our taxation is constantly and fearfully on the increase; in 1849 it was under 57 millions; in 1869 it was nearly 74 millions—an increase of 17 millions in twenty years.

Out of this taxation in this country, less than one-seventieth portion of the burden falls on land. In France land bears one-sixth of all imperial burdens; in India nearly one half. To make the contrast more striking, we may point out that twenty-five years before the accession of the House of Brunswick land paid nearly two-thirds of all the imperial taxes, the rents received by the aristocracy being then only the seventh part of what they are to-day. And these rents, which have grown sevenfold in two hundreds years, for what are they paid? For the natural fecundity of the soil which the owner seldom or never aids. It is for the use of air, moisture, heat, for the varied natural forces, that the cultivator pays, and the receiver talks of the rights of property. We shall have for the future to talk in this country of the rights of life—rights which must be recognised even if the recognition involves the utter abolition of the present landed aristocracy. The great rent-takers have been the opponents of progress, they have hindered reform, they kept the taxes on knowledge, they passed combination laws, they enacted long parliaments, they made the machinery of parliamentary election costly and complicated so as to bar out the people. They have prevented education, and then sneered at the masses for their ignorance. All progress in the producing power of labour has added to the value of land, and yet the landowner, who has stood worse than idly by while the land has increased in value, now talks of the labourer as of the lower stratum to be checked and restrained. As Louis Blanc says, "The general wealth and population are susceptible of an almost indefinite increase, and, in fact, never do cease increasing; commerce demands for its operations a territorial basis wider and wider; towns are enlarged, and new one built; the construction of a railway suddenly gives to this suburb, to that district, an artificial value of some importance. All this combines in a manner to raise the value of land."

These land monopolists too are ever grasping; they

swallow common lands and enclose wastes, relying on their long purses, the cost of legal proceedings, and the apathy of a peasantry ignorant of their rights and unable to perform their duties.

The *Westminster Review* says that no less than 7,000,000 acres of commons have gone to increase the already large estates of adjoining proprietors during the last 200 years—all, be it remembered, since the landed aristocracy have, under the dissipated Guelph family, wielded full parliamentary power, all taken during the time that the imperial national debt has risen from about £52,000,000 to £801,000,000 in England, and £120,000,000 in India. Side by side with this increased taxation, and upon these huge estates, we find an unimproved—if not an absolutely deteriorated—farm population. The parliamentary blue-books describe the population round Mayhill as seeming “to lie entirely out of the pale of civilisation; type after type of social life degraded almost to the level of barbarism.” In Yorkshire we are told of the “immorality and degradation arising from the crowded and neglected state of the dwellings of the poor.”

In Northamptonshire some of the cottages “are disgraceful, necessarily unhealthy, and a disgrace to civilisation.” In a Bedfordshire parish “one-third of the entire population were receiving pauper relief, and it seemed altogether to puzzle the relieving officer to account for the manner in which one-half the remainder lived.” In Bucks the labourer has to “pay exorbitant rent for a house in which the ordinary decencies of life become a dead letter.” So we may go through all the eastern, southern, south-western, and most of the midland rural districts, until the repetition grows as nauseous as it is hideous.

The wages of this wretched agricultural class vary from 7s. to 15s. per week, wage of 10s. to 12s. per week being the most common, out of which a man has to pay rent, and feed, clothe, and educate himself and his family. Children are sent into the fields to work sometimes before they are seven years old, often before eight years, and nearly always about that age. And with education thus rendered practically impossible, we find the organs of “blood and culture” taunting the masses with their ignorance. We allege that the mischief is caused by those who exact so much for rent, and waste so much good land for pleasure, that no fair

opportunity for happy life is left to the tiller of the soil. While the condition of the agricultural population is as thus stated, it cannot be pretended that sufficient compensation is found in the general prosperity of the artisan classes. Probably there are at this moment in England and Wales more than half-a-million able-bodied paupers, that is, men able to work who cannot get work in a country where millions of acres of land fit for cultivation lie untilled.

In Plymouth, a few weeks since, one out of every fifteen persons was in receipt of pauper relief, and we fear that throughout England and Wales it would be found that, at the very least, one in every twenty is in the same position, while in addition many thousands struggle on in a sort of semi-starvation misery. At Cardiff the most fearful revelations have been made before the Parliamentary Commissioners, as to the state resulting from the folly or criminality of some of the large capitalists. In this part of Wales, by paying wages at long intervals, men, who were sometimes justices of the peace and large landowners, in 1870 compelled their labourers to ask advances as a favour when they were really entitled to payment as of right. Then by a dexterous evasion of the Truck Act the men were forced to a "tommy shop," where the advance was made in goods instead of cash. Men swore before the Commissioners that it was with the greatest difficulty they could get a few shillings of ready money, and that to obtain it, they were often compelled to re-sell the goods forced on them at a loss. The shop being sure of its customers, the women have been kept waiting for nine hours for their turn, and assemble two, and sometimes four, hours before the opening of the shop, this even in the winter weather, and have, in two or three cases, been known to wait outside all night, and this through rain and storm, to secure a good place when business should commence, so that they might get the food they were unable to obtain elsewhere, and without which the breakfast meal could not be got. We wonder what kind of homes they can possess which can be left for nine hours, and what is done with the young children! The cruelty inflicted upon the women themselves by such a necessity is scarcely credible. One woman had not "seen money for twelve years," being constantly in debt to the shop. The same woman on oath said: "I went once when my son-in-law was ill, and I wanted only two or three shillings, and I begged and cried

or it, but do you think I could get it? No!" Nay, it was proved that when a collection was made for a funeral, as the bulk of the workers were without money, the cashier entered the amount subscribed by each man in a book. Five per cent. was charged for cashing the list, then any amount due from the deceased's family to the shop was taken out, and even then part of the balance had to be taken in goods. Deductions were made week by week for the doctor, who was paid by bill at the end of the twelve months, and the men had no means of knowing how much.

Nor is the state of things just described confined to Wales. In Scotland a companion picture may be traced. In the lead mines belonging to his grace the Duke of Buccleuch, near Elvanfoot, in Lanarkshire, the miners have been treated more like serfs than free labourers. Young men of from eighteen to twenty are stated to be now working for 10d. per day, and while the nominal wages are 14s. to 16s. per week, or £36 8s. to £41 12s. per annum, for the ordinary working men, the Duke's manager has—by a fraudulently clever system of infrequent payments, occasional advances, a "tommy shop," and a complicated system of accounts—so entangled the men that their pay for the year is said to range from £25 to £35. The Duke of Buccleuch is more careful of his game and his salmon than he is of his lead miners. About twelve months ago, not far from Hawick, a poor woman, with a child at the breast, was sent to gaol for being in possession of a salmon for which she could not account. The child died whilst its mother was in gaol, but the Duke of Buccleuch's interest in the salmon fisheries was maintained.

In the *Liverpool Mercury* it is alleged that the wickedly-fraudulent truck system—here, too, cunningly disguised to evade the Truck Act—also prevails in the Wednesbury district. And yet the noble lords and high-minded gentlemen who thus grind down the poor, and who, by cheating their labourers, demoralise honest labourers into cheats—will preside at pious gatherings, and talk about saving the souls of those whose lives they are damning. Or these born legislators will denounce trades' union outrages—these high-minded men who draw scores of thousands out of the muscle and heart of their wretched workpeople, and then endow a church, and listen to a laudatory sermon preached by the local Bishop.

We affirm the doctrine laid down by Mr Mill and other political economists, "that property in land is only valid, in so far as the proprietor of the land is its improver," and that "when private property in land is not expedient, it is unjust;" we contend that the possession of land involves and carries with it the duty of cultivating that land, and, in fact, individual proprietorship of soil is only defensible so long as the possessor can show improvement and cultivation of the land he holds. And yet there are, as Captain Maxse shows in his recent admirable essay in the *Fortnightly Review*, in Great Britain and Ireland, no less than about 29,000,000 acres of land in an uncultivated state, of which considerably over 11,000,000 acres could be profitably cultivated.

There are many thousands of labourers who might cultivate this land, labourers who are in a semi-starving condition, labourers who help to fill gaols and workhouses. To meet this let the legislature declare that leaving cultivable land in an uncultivated state is a misdemeanour, conviction for which gives the Government the right to take possession of such land, assessing it by its actual return for the last five years, and not by its real value, and handing to the proprietor the amount of, say, twenty years' purchase in Consolidated $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Stock, redeemable in a limited term of years. The land so taken should not be sold at all, but should be let out to persons willing to become cultivators, on sufficiently long terms of tenancy to fairly recoup for their labour and capital the cultivators, who should yearly pay into the National Treasury, in lieu of all other imperial taxes, a certain proportion of the value of the annual produce. This tenancy to be immediately determinable in the event of the improvement being insufficient, and extensible on evidence of *bona fide* improvement of more than average character.

All land capable of producing food, and misused for preserving game, should be treated as uncultivated land. The diversion of land in an old country from the purpose it should fulfil—that of providing life for the many—to the mere providing pleasure for a few, is a crime. The extent to which the preservation of game has been carried in some parts of England and Scotland shows a reckless disregard of human happiness on the part of the landed aristocracy, which bids fair to provoke a fearful retribution.

It is calculated that for the deer forests of Scotland alone nearly two million acres of land—some of it the choicest pasture, much of it valuable land—is entirely lost to the country. Two red deer mean the displacement of a family, and it is therefore scarcely wonderful that we should learn that much of the Duke of Sutherland's vast estate is a mere wilderness.

Country members who shun the House of Commons while estimates are voted, and go to dinner when emigration and pauperism are topics for discussion, crowd the benches of St. Stephen's when there is some new Act to be introduced for the better conviction of poachers without evidence, or for the protection of fat rabbits, which eat and spoil crops, against lean farm labourers, who, having not enough to eat, pine alike in physique and intellect.

The Game Laws are a disgrace to our civilisation, and could not stand twelve months were it not for the overwhelming influence of the landed aristocracy in the Legislature. The practice of game preserving is injurious in that, in addition to the land wasted for the preserve, it frequently prevents proper cultivation of surrounding lands, and demoralises and makes criminals of the agricultural labourers, creating for them a kind and degree of crime which would be otherwise unknown.

Poaching, so severely punished, is often actually fostered and encouraged by the agents of the very landholders who sit as Justices of the Peace to punish it. Pheasants' and partridges' eggs are bought to stock preserves; the gamekeepers who buy these eggs, shut their eyes to the mode in which they have been procured, although in most instances it is thoroughly certain how they have been obtained. The lad who was encouraged to procure the eggs, easily finds that shooting or catching pheasants gains a much higher pecuniary reward than leading the plough horse, trimming the hedge, or grubbing the plantation. Poaching is the natural consequence of rearing a large number of rabbits, hares, partridges, and pheasants, in the midst of an under-paid, under-fed, badly-housed, and deplorably ignorant mass of agricultural labourers. The brutal outrages on gamekeepers, of which we read so much, are the regrettable, but very natural, measures of retaliation for a system which takes a baby child to work in the fields, sometimes soon after six years of age, commonly before he is eight years old, which

trains all his worst propensities, and deadens or degrades his better faculties, which keeps him in constant wretchedness, and tantalises him with the sight of hundreds of acres on which game runs and flies well-fed, under his very nose, while he limps ill-fed along the muddy lane which skirts the preserve—game, which is at liberty to come out of its covert and eat and destroy the farmer's crop, but which is even then made sacred by the law, and fenced round by carefully-drawn covenants.

An agricultural labourer (with a wife and family) whose weekly pittance gives him bare vitality in summer, and leaves him often cold and hungry in winter, in the midst of lands where game is preserved, needs little inducement to become a poacher. Detected, he resists violently, for his local judges are the game owners, and he well knows that before them he will get no mercy. Indicted, he goes to the county gaol, and his wife and children go to the union workhouse. Imprisonment makes the man worse, not better, and he is confirmed into the criminal class for the rest of his life, while his family, made into paupers, help to add still more to the general burdens of the country.

In the agricultural districts, offences in connection with the Game Laws are more numerous than those of any other class. Men suspected of inclination for poaching are easily sent to gaol, for cutting a twig or for nominal trespass, by magistrates who, owning land on which game is reared, regard it as most wicked sacrilege that hungry labourers should even look too longingly across the hedge.

In this land question the abolition of the Game Laws must be made a prominent feature.

The enormous estates of the few landed proprietors must not only be prevented from growing larger, they must be broken up. At their own instance and gradually, if they will meet us with even a semblance of fairness, for the poor and hungry cannot well afford to fight; but at our instance, and rapidly, if they obstinately refuse all legislation. If they will not commence inside the Houses of Parliament, then from the outside we must make them listen. If they claim that in this we are unfair, our answer is ready.

You have monopolised the land, and while you have got each year a wider and firmer grip, you have cast its burdens on others; you have made labour pay the taxes which land could more easily have borne. You now claim that the

rights of property in land should be respected, while you have too frequently by your settlements and entails kept your lands out of the possibility of fulfilling any of the obligations of property, and you have robbed your tradespeople and creditors, because your land was protected by cunningly contrived statutes and parchments against all duty, while it enjoyed all privilege. You have been intolerant in your power, driving your tenants to the poll like cattle, keeping your labourers ignorant and demoralised, and yet charging them with this very ignorance and degradation as an incapacity for the enjoyment of political right. For the last quarter of a century, by a short-sighted policy, and in order to diminish your poor-rates, you have demolished the cottages on your estates, compelling the wretched agricultural labourers, whose toil gave value to your land, to crowd into huts even more foul and dilapidated than those you destroyed. We no longer pray, we argue—we no longer entreat, we insist—that spade and plough, and sickle and scythe, shall have fair right to win life and happiness for our starving from the land which gave us birth. To you, Dukes of Athol, Devonshire, Sutherland, Buccleuch, Norfolk, Northumberland; to you, the Most Noble the Marquis of Westminster, of Breadalbane, of Bute—to you and your few *confrères* we speak now in solemn warning. Is it not monstrous that one of you should own land more than 100 miles long, another more than 90,000 acres in one county only, another a rent-roll of more than £1,000,000 a-year, while pauperism grows with fearful rapidity under the shadow of your town-houses, and semi-barbarism flourishes amongst the poor on your vast estates?

It is on the land question, my lords, that the people challenge you, at present in sorrow and shame. Take up the matter while you may, and do justice while yet you can. The world is wide for you to seek pleasure in, the poor can only seek life—where death finds them—at home. Give up your battues, your red deer, your black game, your pheasants, your partridges; and when you see each acre of land won by the fierce suasion of hardy toil to give life and hope to the tiller, in this you will find your recompense. Ye twelve who lock up in your iron safes the title-deeds of nearly all Scotland's broad acreage, I plead to you; forget pride and power, and be generous while you may, for the day is near when your pride may be humbled, and your power broken.

For you, lords of Erin's fertile soil—you who have wrought her shame and made her sin—you who have driven her children across the broad ocean to seek for life—even for you there is the moment to save yourselves, and do good to your kind. Thoughtful workmen will try to win your land by law, hungry paupers may wrest it from you in despair; you may yield it now on fair terms, and grow even richer in the yielding. Which it will be, who can say? All I know is, that England is growing hungry, that empty bellies act faster than heads reason, and that the Land Question cannot stand still.

THE END.