

HENRY GEORGE'S SPANISH PREDECESSOR.

(To the Editor *N.Y. Freeman's Journal*.)

DEAR SIR.—Some of the articles in the *Freeman's Journal* on Michael Davitt's land nationalisation project, and Mr. Henry George's book, struck me as so strong and suggestive, that I have been nerved to address this communication to you. It has been brewing in my brain for some time. I trust you may find room for it, though you may think that I need a little correction.

In the early part of the present century a work was published by a Spanish author named Florez Estrada, entitled "A Course of Political Economy" ("Curso Eclectico de Economia Politico," etc.), 2 vols. quarto. The object of the author was to show that the land we tread, like the water we drink or the air we breathe, should be the property of every one in general and no one in particular. He says:—

"When man was first placed on this earth, destitute of all wealth except what his labour furnished, he must have perished if the Being who gave him wants had not likewise given him the means of satisfying them. When, however, a limited number of his fellow-men monopolised the land, which of all the gifts is the most precious, since everything really valuable comes out of the soil (*cereris sunt omnia munus*), where were the disinherited members of society—stript of their birthright—to find a field for their labour? From that moment the subsistence of the outcasts was attended with uncertainty—their bread became precarious—because they could labour only when the so-called proprietor gave them leave to toil, or if they did work, at their own risk, they could have no certainty of remuneration. One portion of this recompense was most absurdly given to him who had appropriated what was wholly unseizable of just appropriation—which, not being the result of human labour, equally belonged to all. The most lamentable results sprang from this innovation. It endowed idleness and enriched sloth," etc.

"It is obvious from this extract that the author's views are identical with those of Henry George in his "Progress and Poverty." Henry George says:—

"Property in land springs merely from appropriation. Property in things which are the result of labour springs from production and rests upon the right of the man to the benefit of his own productions; the house that he builds, the crop that he grows, the cattle he raises, are rightfully the property of the man whose labour has gone to produce them. But where is the man that has produced the earth or any part of it?"

Mr. George, like Senor Estrada, seems to forget that there are two kinds of land; land barren, fruitless, and pestiferous—land in a state of nature—breathing fever and ague—pestilence and miasma, and land blooming with fertility, floating with golden grain and teeming with all the necessities of rural life—land congenial to existence. The first of these two sorts of land is to the second what the stones of a building are to a habitable house—what the wool of the sheep is to the coat on your back; with this difference, that the labour involved in the reclamation and fertilisation of land is vastly superior to masonry or weaving. For with the exception of mining no labour is so toilsome, irksome and painful as agriculture,—particularly in new countries. Now, if building a house entitles the builder to ownership, assuredly the reclamation of land originates a similar title. I can see no difference—except that the early colonists run greater risks in making "war on the wilderness."

To drain the pestiferous swamp, to uproot the appalling forest exposed to the scorching rays of summer and the freezing storms of winter—the fight for life in the depths of the wilderness, haunted by ferocious animals and prowling savages—is so dreadful and onerous a task, that if property was ever sacred, assuredly it is landed property. What does the Bible tell us speaking of land?

"In sorrow shalt thou eat of it; thistles and thorns shall it bring forth to thee, and in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread."

The price of land is sometimes labour. Our first settlers, the early colonists of this country, who paid this price, took a title to land for which the Indians did not care—a title perfectly undeniable, which the whole human race have recognised. The Indians valued the buffalo. They disdained the land as nearly valueless. Hence they parted with hundreds of acres for trinkets or mirrors. "Labour," says Adam Smith, "was the first price—the original purchase money that was paid for all things," and land among the rest. The early settlers paid this price. If some foolish theorist had told them, as Mr. George or Senor Estrada would do, that land, like air must not be appropriated by individuals, if they had believed him the arable land of this country would not be reclaimed from the forest, and made to flourish amid surrounding desolation. They were persuaded, on the contrary, that landed property is quite as artificial as houses; that their risk of life and labour of body, their pains and anxieties, furnished a title entirely distinct from and much more exalted than mere appropriation.

Were it not for this persuasion the land would never be reclaimed. It would be still rank and foul, undrained and pestilential, mantled with luxuriant weeds, choked with tangled jungle, the swamp festering below, the sun broiling overhead.

It was because they believed the land would be their own, and the possession of their offspring for ages after their decease, to dispose of it as they chose, to let it or sell it, or give it away, that they laboured so hard to render it what it is, to mantle it with profitable vegetation, and make it blossom like a rose garden. They originally found it hostile to man, with "the primal, eldest curse upon it." It received them with reluctance, frowned on their approach, and scarcely tolerated them. It swarmed with wolves and bears and buffalo, and was alive with cold and venomous reptiles. Even the virgin prairie, when broken by the plough or spade for the first time, gave out emanations prejudicial to human life, which debilitated the body and wrinkled the face, and generated fever and ague. The early settlers, armed with the musket, the axe and the spade,

cleared away the *fauna* and *flora* which were destructive to humanity. Their property in their land originated in labour—labour for which the entire republic is indebted to them.

Like them, the monks of Mellera in Ireland are employed at this moment in reclaiming land so barren, stony and unprofitable that no ordinary farmer would take it as a gift. The monks of Melroes in Scotland and of Abingdon in England, of Tynemouth, Whitby and Glastonbury converted dismal bogs into flowery meadows. Indeed, one half of Europe has been reclaimed by religious Orders. During hundreds of years they were creating arable land, and during hundreds of subsequent years they were receiving rent for it.

At the "Reformation," however, a pious aristocracy, animated by "a pure form of faith," expelled them from their monasteries, confiscated their estates and let them at double rents to pauper tenants. This execrable example was followed by the French. But can any just man approve of such proceedings? Do they conform to that justice which is queen of all the virtues? It was this subversion of common honesty—this flagrant violation of moral rectitude—which has given origin to the doctrines of Communism, the principles of which are elucidated and recommended by Senor Estrada and Henry George. In England the aristocracy, in France the money-kings plundered the monastics; and the Communists in our day are taking a hint from their practices and threaten to plunder both the lords and the money-lenders.

The idea which Mr. George has borrowed from Estrada, and Estrada from the Chinese, is of great antiquity—at least three thousand years old. It has been realised and carried out in China from the foundation of the monarchy. "In that country the emperor is the universal and exclusive proprietor of the soil. He is not only the landlord; he is the first ploughman in a population of four hundred millions. Instead of paying rent to private individuals the occupants of farms pay a land-tax to the emperor. It consists partly of produce and partly of money, and amounts to one-tenth of the produce or profit after deducting the expenses of cultivation. Lands are carefully registered by the Government and their fertility estimated. Great precautions are used that neither the occupant be overcharged nor the Government defrauded, and when districts suffer from drought or inundation the emperor generally remits the rent. In a word, the Chinese have anticipated Henry George by at least three thousand years. They proclaimed without limitation that 'the land of natural right is the common property of the whole people.' Evidences of this will be found in the 'Lettres Edifiantes' written by the Jesuits, and the work of Du Halde, who was likewise a Jesuit. This antiquated nostrum has proved no panacea. It has not removed poverty, as our Chinese immigrants only too plainly demonstrate. Yet the Chinese did three thousand years ago what Mr. George recommends to-day. They converted all the occupiers of land into tenants of the State. In fact they were more Georgite than Henry George himself.

"The accounts of all travellers inconsistent in other respects," says Adam Smith, "agree on the low wages of labour, and the difficulty which a labourer finds in bringing up a family in China. If by digging the ground a whole day he can get what will purchase a small quantity of rice he is content. The condition of artificers is perhaps still worse. Instead of waiting indolently in their houses for the calls of their customers, as in Europe, they are continually running about the streets with the tools of their respective trades offering their services, and as it were begging for employment. The poverty of the lower classes far exceeds that of the most beggarly nations in Europe. Any carrion or carcass is welcome to them as the most wholesome food to the people of other countries."

This is what Mr. George's panacea seems to lead to—the abject poverty of the working classes—more squalid and miserable than any known in Europe, or, perhaps, any part of the world.

CAROLUS.

It transpires that the informer, whose story to the police has resulted in the arrest of eleven respectable men in County Clare on a charge of conspiracy to murder, is a man named John Tubridy, who at the Winter Assizes was sentenced to penal servitude for life for a "Moonlight" attack on Patrick Ford, of Cregg, on the 20th May, last year. Tubridy is a man about thirty years of age, and is a shoemaker by trade. He has a wife and five children living at present in Crusheen, in Clare, where he says the conspiracy was established to which he alleges the men in custody belonged. The magisterial investigation into the charge against the accused commenced in the county gaol in Ennis on Thursday week, before Mr. Purcell, R.M. Major Clifford Lloyd was also present. Tubridy was the only witness examined. His story was that a secret society called the Irish Republican Brotherhood existed in the Crusheen district, and that he was sworn in a member of this organisation on the 31st October, 1879. The prisoners, he said, also belonged to the society, and were amongst those who planned an attack on a man named Ned Kennedy, who was shot for taking a farm from which another had been evicted. The informer further alleged that in January, 1882, at a meeting held at Ennis, the society was transformed into an organisation "to do away with landlords, agents, bailiffs, and spies." Tubridy's examination had not closed on Thursday week, when the investigation was adjourned for eight days—*Nation*, April 21.

The landlords are about starting an agitation in Ireland on their own account. It would appear that they believe they have grievances which they are as anxious to remove as the tenants are to remove theirs. The burden which presses on their shoulders or rather on their purses, is the tithe rent-charge. This tax they desire to abolish. The first meeting of this revived movement—for some steps were taken, it seems, twelve months ago—was held in Cork on Saturday last. There were present on the occasion one Earl, he of Bandon, who presided, two baronets, three majors, two colonels, and six captains. Altogether there were about seventy persons in attendance. To Mr. R. U. Penrose Fitzgerald was committed the task of explaining the objects of the meeting.—*Nation*, March 31.