The land question, what it involves, and how alone it can be settled

George Henry
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Author: George Henry

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J. W. LOVELL COMPANY,
Publishers, 14 & 16 Vesey Street,
NEW YORK. 
THE

LAND QUESTION

WHAT IT INVOLVES, AND HOW ALONE IT CAN BE SETTLED

BY

HENRY GEORGE

AUTHOR OF "PROGRESS AND POVERTY," "SOCIAL PROBLEMS," ETC.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it."—DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY
14 AND 16 VESSEY STREET
PREFACE.

This book was written in the early part of 1881, and was first published under the title of "The Irish Land Question." Taking as a text the Irish Land Question, then attracting much attention, its object was to show the importance and true character of the land question everywhere, and especially in the United States, while urging upon the Land Leagues the clear enunciation of the only principle upon which their agitation could be logically based, and successfully carried on. Since that time the Irish movement has lost strength and spirit, its organization having fallen into the hands of men, led by a landlord, who have endeavored to substitute concessions to tenant-farmers, and increase in the number of landowners, for the great aim of "the land for the people." This, however, is only temporary. Not only do many earnest Irishmen, like Michael Davitt, remain true to the principle of equal rights in the soil; but, though the influence of the popular leaders and organization has been added to that of the landlords, in the effort to prevent its spread, it is steadily making way in Ireland. Elsewhere, and on both sides of the Atlantic, it is rapidly gaining ground, and the time is fast approaching when all over the civilized world the truths which in these pages I have endeavored to point out, will force their way into "practical politics." My purpose in this book was to call attention
to the great social question which I have elsewhere more fully discussed, in the hope that those who read it would pursue the investigation further. Its usefulness for this purpose has been amply proved, and while new editions have been called for here and in England, it has gone into several foreign languages. In preparing this cheaper edition, for which I hope a wider circulation than those that preceded it, I have changed the title so as to conform to foreign editions, and better indicate the subject.

Henry George.

New York, May 26, 1884.
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THE

LAND QUESTION.

CHAPTER I.

UNPALATABLE TRUTH.

In charging the Dublin jury in the Land League cases, Mr. Justice Fitzgerald told them that the land laws of Ireland were more favorable to the tenant than those of Great Britain, Belgium, or the United States.

As a matter of fact, Justice Fitzgerald is right. For in Ireland certain local customs and the provisions of the Bright Land Act mitigate somewhat the power of the landlord in his dealings with the tenant. In Great Britain, save by custom in a few localities, there are no such mitigations. In Belgium I believe there are none. There are certainly none in the United States.

This fact which Justice Fitzgerald cites will be re-echoed by the enemies of the Irish movement. And it is a fact well worth the consideration of its friends. For the Irish movement has passed its first stage, and it is time for a more definite understanding of what is needed and how it is to be got.

It is the fashion of Land League orators and sympathizing newspapers in this country to talk as if the distress and disquiet in Ireland were wholly due to political oppression, and our national House of Representatives recently passed, by unanimous vote, a resolution which censured England for her treatment of Ireland. But, while it is indeed true that Ireland has been deeply wronged and bitterly oppressed by England, it is not true that there is any economic oppression of Ireland
by England now. To whatever cause Irish distress may be due, it is certainly not due to the existence of laws which press on industry more heavily in Ireland than in any other part of the United Kingdom.

And, further than this, the Irish land system, which is so much talked of as though it were some peculiarly atrocious system, is essentially the same land system which prevails in all civilized countries, which we of the United States have accepted unquestioningly, and have extended over the whole temperate zone of a new continent—the same system which all over the civilized world men are accustomed to consider natural and just.

Justice Fitzgerald is unquestionably right.

As to England, it is well known that the English landlords exercise freely all the powers complained of in the Irish landlords, without even the slight restrictions imposed in Ireland.

As to Belgium, let me quote the high authority of the distinguished Belgian publicist, M. Émile de Laveleye, of the University of Liege. He says that the Belgian tenant farmers—for tenancy largely prevails even where the land is most minutely divided—are rack-rented with a mercilessness unknown in England or even in Ireland, and are compelled to vote as their landlords dictate!

And as to the United States, let me ask the men who to applauding audiences are nightly comparing the freedom of America with the oppression of Ireland—let me ask the Representatives who voted for the resolution of sympathy with Ireland, this simple question: What would the Irish landlords lose, what would the Irish tenants gain, if, to-morrow, Ireland were made a State in the American Union and American law substituted for English law?

I think it will puzzle them to reply. The truth is that the gain would be to the landlords, the loss to the tenants. The simple truth is, that, under our laws, the Irish landlords could rack-rent, distrain, evict, or absent themselves, as they pleased, and without any restriction from Ulster tenant-right or legal requirement of compensation for improvements. Under our laws they could, just as freely as they can now, impose whatever terms they pleased upon their tenants—whether as to cultivation, as to improvements, as to game, as to mar-