

CHAPTER XIX
LAND SETTLEMENTS IN OTHER
COUNTRIES

Ireland.

Under the Land Purchase Act of 1903 the British Government bought up 9,000,000 acres of land, which were subdivided into small farms, on which were provided the necessary houses and equipment. These ready-made farms were sold chiefly to former tenants at an average price of \$50 an acre, with a period of nearly seventy years to pay for the farm and improvements, the interest rate being $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on deferred payments. Farm advisers were provided by the government for the various farm districts. Personal loans were also made by the treasury to the individual farmer to cover the cost of stock and implements, also payable in small annual instalments at a low rate of interest. As a result, "within a decade

the wretched farm-tenant has been converted into an industrious, progressive and law-abiding landed proprietor."

Since 1903 the government has expended \$550,000,000 in the purchase, subdivision and settlement of large estates. A discontented, poverty-stricken peasantry is being converted into a nation of contented home-owners. It is expected that by 1920 farm-tenantry will have practically ceased to exist. The great benefits to Ireland have not cost the empire of Great Britain a dollar, as the system is self-supporting. The money expended for land and improvements is being repaid with interest.

Germany.

Since 1886 the German Government has actively promoted land colonization, in spite of the vigorous opposition of the large landholders. The policy was conducted under two different authorities, (1) the Home Colonization Commission, created to increase the number of small independent farmers in East Prussia and Poland, and (2) a combination of local and state authorities to promote land

subdivision and settlement all over the country. Officials of local government agencies and rural credit banks are among the local members of these organizations. The state has provided \$214,000,000, mostly since 1909, for the Home Colonization Commission, which has subdivided lands and financed settlers on more than a million acres of land in five provinces. Colonization under the second organization is of very recent development, but much has already been done, especially in the way of providing homes for farm-laborers. At first rather poor and inaccessible land was bought, but since 1909 the purchases have been chiefly of highly improved estates. "The tendency now seems to be to continue this until tenant-farming in Germany is practically abolished and also until all estates of any size have been subdivided." The Home Colonization Commission does not sell an estate until two years after it has purchased it, the intervening time being used to carry out such improvements as can be made best before settlement—like drainage works, manuring, seeding, macadamized roads, etc. The land is then in a condition in which it will be profitable to the settler.

The farms sold by the commission vary from 12 to 65 acres, and homes for farm-laborers from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 acres. Where large groups of buildings exist on the original estates these are turned into a sort of civic centre, housing stores, blacksmiths' shops, schools, and churches for the colony. Expert advisers are provided for the settlers. The settler, under this system, is not required to make any cash payment but has the farm for fifty years with an annual payment of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. interest on the total cost. At the end of this period the payments on the land begin. Meantime the farmer is compelled to meet the requirements of the state regarding cultivation and the keeping up of improvements.

The Colonization Commission exercises watch and supervision over the purchaser, who is bound to work the farm himself. He may not sublet it. He must insure his buildings and standing crops. The farm must be maintained in good condition. It must be kept supplied with necessary buildings, cattle, and implements. The holding cannot be divided, alienated or any portion of it separated without government authorization. The

Colonization Commission has the right to repurchase the property at a fixed price.

Provision is also made by law as to inheritance. It was seen that the continued subdivision of small holdings would defeat the purpose of the act. It would subject the settlers to the risk of losing their position as independent farmers. At the same time to transfer their holding to a single heir at the market price, and subject to claims of other heirs would force the new proprietor into debt.

Therefore, in the law of 1896, when a holding is transferred to a single heir rather than to all of the claimants, special banking facilities are provided to make loans for the payment of the interests of the other heirs.

The funds of the commission have been increased several times. They were raised to 200,000,000 marks in 1898, 350,000,000 marks in 1902, and 535,000,000 marks in 1908. All told, the Home Colonization Commission has 650,000,000 marks as working capital.

In 1908 the Home Colonization Commission was granted the right to expropriate land for the purpose of subdivision. This provision was added because of the difficulty of acquiring

land required for development work. Expropriation is only authorized for a total area of 175,000 acres, and it is only to be used in case of impossibility of acquiring sufficient land by other means.

The commission is managed by a committee under the government. In 1911 the staff of the commission included 30 superior officers and about 500 employees. There are three general departments. One for the temporary administration of landed estates; another for the Home Colonization, and the third for technical engineering, surveying work, and the building of buildings and improvements.

The commission selects the estates suitable for settlement. It surveys them, improves them, puts them in shape for cultivation in small lots, subdivides them, places settlers upon them, and watches over the maintenance of the new settlements after their formation.

From 1886 to 1911 the commission expended 379,000,000 marks on the purchase of 394,000 hectares, about 1,000,000 acres of land.

The following quotation from an official report gives the reasons for this new land policy:

“ . . . While every other country exerted itself to the utmost to strengthen and augment its agricultural resources by increasing and elevating its rural population, it cannot be considered encouraging that in eastern Germany there are vast territories almost wholly in the hands of a few landed proprietors. The existence of such large landed estates not only hinders the natural progress of the peasant class, but, greatest evil of all, it is the principal cause of the diminished population of many territories because the working-classes, finding no chances of moral or economic improvement, are driven to emigrate to the great cities and manufacturing districts. Scientific researches also prove that small farms nowadays are more profitable than large; above all, small live-stock improved farms, the importance of which for the nutriment of the people is constantly increasing.”

In 1913 the German Government, to check rising land prices and to promote the more rapid subdivision and closer settlement of large farms, provided for the compulsory purchase of 70,000 acres of land. Regarding the areas which were subdivided, it was stated:

“Where formerly there had been at one end of the social scale a few rich landowners, often non-residents and exercising undue political influence, and at the other end a large number

of poverty-stricken and discontented peasants and farm-laborers, there is now a great middle-class society devoted to the empire for what it has done for its members."

A report issued in 1915 stated that the empire land settlement policy was the chief factor in enabling Germany to meet the situation created by cutting off food-supplies by the blockade:

"It kept thousands of farmers in Germany who would otherwise have become valuable citizens of the United States."

Russia.

Between 1906 and 1910 the Peasants' Land Bank, subsidized by the government at the rate of \$2,575,000 a year, bought, subdivided, and sold to settlers 4,041,789 acres of land, a larger amount than has been settled under a similar system in any other country. The average selling price was \$23 an acre, the maximum size of a farm 57 acres. The farmer may secure a loan covering 90 per cent. of the value of the land, with interest at 4 per cent., through the money and credit facilities supplied by the government. Also, millions of acres of

land in Siberia have passed into the possession of small farmers.

From this it is apparent that the farm-colony idea is not an experiment. It is a recognized policy of the governments of Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Denmark, and Australia. In all of these countries the evils of landlordism, of tenancy, of decaying agriculture, and, far more important, decaying people, have been recognized. And all of these nations have adopted substantially the same procedure for recreating a healthy agricultural life. None of them, it is true, have completely abandoned the old isolated farming, and created a farm community equipped with the comforts and amenities of town life. Denmark and Australia come nearest to the ideal. In Denmark the village is still in large measure the centre of the farm life of the country. Australia has introduced many of the features of the colony idea, as has California. But the essential features in all of these developments are the same. These features are: (1) state promotion; (2) the purchase of large tracts of land; (3) their subdivision into farms of the proper size; (4) cheap credit advanced by the state; (5)

supervision by experts; and (6) control of the title, for a limited period at least, by the community.

It remains for America to free its constructive imagination and synthesize the ideas of other countries and develop the farm colony, not alone as a means of producing food or of keeping men on the land, but as a means of creating an opportunity for a free, comfortable, and alluring life, not for the returning soldier alone, but for other land-hungry people as well.