

## CHAPTER X

### AGRICULTURAL LAND

*"Ye lords, I say, that live like loiterers, look well to your office; the plough is your office and charge. If you live idle and loiter, you do not your duty, you follow not your vocation; let your plough therefore be going, and not cease, that the ground may bring forth fruit."*—HUGH LATIMER, *Sermon of the Plough* (at St. Paul's, London, January 18th, 1548).

*"The tree of the field shall yield its fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke, and have delivered them out of the hand of those that made bondmen of them."*—EZEKIEL, xxxiv 27 (R.V.)

*"People don't realize what the French war meant. In 1812 wheat at Liverpool was 20s. (?) the imperial bushel of 65 lbs. (?) Think of that, when you bring it into figures of the cost of a loaf. And that was the time when Eaton, Eastnor and other great palaces were built by the landlords out of the high rents which the war and war prices enabled them to exact."*—W. E. GLADSTONE (to JOHN MORLEY), *Morley's Life of Gladstone* (first edition), III, 471, under date December 24th, 1891.<sup>1</sup>

At a time of universal depression, the workers in two great primary industries—agriculture and mining—are among the most distressed classes in our Nation. Unlike the miners, the field-workers are not entitled to the benefit of the "dole" when completely unemployed; they suffer a good deal more from seasonal unemployment; and they have not such a large and well-organized Federation, as the miners have. Their employers, the farmers, are well organized, and much more vocal, and have, besides, a general support for their demands from powerful landlord organizations. Two political parties, anxious to wrest the parliamentary representation of the rural districts from the Tories, are always under the temptation to court the farmers' vote, if not by giving them all they want, at least by not alienating their support by measures which however good for their customers—the consumers of food—appear to the farmers to be prejudicial to their personal interests.

<sup>1</sup> Morley was not sure of the figures quoted by W. E. G. In August, 1812, the price of the quartern loaf was 1s. 9½d.

So the Liberal *Finance Act* of 1909-10 exempted agricultural land values almost completely from the Lloyd-Georgian Land Duties, though *all* land was to be valued.

The Labour *Finance Act*, 1931, exempted agricultural land from taxation on its "cultivation value," which included farm buildings and agricultural cottages. If it had any greater value than for agriculture (*e.g.*, as building land) it was to be taxed only on the difference.

Conservative Governments have exempted agricultural land from local taxation and have sought to increase the price of the farmers' products against the public by imposing tariffs and quotas upon foodstuffs and by creating monopolies under marketing schemes, or have fleeced the taxpayers to pay them subsidies.

The Liberal leaders, apparently still imbued, in spite of Adam Smith,<sup>1</sup> with the mistaken idea that "site value" only pertains to "building land," which they are quite willing to tax and rate on its value, maintain, in their latest statement of policy,<sup>2</sup> that "agricultural land must be dealt with on other lines," but do not explain why this "must" be so. They propose to subject the unfortunate tiller of the soil to a new Bureaucracy ("powerful new authorities in every county"), with "wider powers of acquiring land," the price of which "could be met by the issue of bonds to the sellers at the current rate of interest on Government securities."

The Labour leaders produced, in 1926, an elaborate Agricultural Policy which proposed to subject the agriculturist to so many controlling Committees, etc., that it was doubtful whether he would have any time left, after he had filled up their "forms" and studied their circulars, to give to his proper business of producing food. This policy was criticized in detail by the present writer.<sup>3</sup>

The latest Labour Programme for the countryside is a

<sup>1</sup> See chapter VI, par. (3).

<sup>2</sup> *Liberal Policy; The Liberal Party's Address to the Nation* (Liberal Publication Department, March, 1934) and *The Liberal Way* (National Liberal Federation, 1934).

<sup>3</sup> Article in the *Middleton Guardian*, reprinted in the *Clarion* and (in part) in *Land & Liberty*, April, 1926.

much less wordy document.<sup>1</sup> It proposed to "bring all agricultural land under National ownership," rapidly, with "fair compensation." The writer of the pamphlet probably had as little idea as the labourers for whose votes he is angling of the difficulties that beset such a proposal: to start with, the difficulty that besets every attempt to divide land into categories, such as stultified Mr Lloyd George's "undeveloped land" proposal. How is agricultural land to be defined as apart from other land? It can hardly be defined by districts, for "agricultural" land occurs in urban districts, and parts of districts called "rural" are often industrialized. There are nearly two and a half million acres of land "rated as agricultural" in our Cities, Boroughs and Urban Districts. Is this land to be bought out, and, if so, what "compensation" would be considered "fair"—agricultural value or building value? Land that is being used for agricultural purposes to-day may be urgently needed to-morrow, or even to-day, for housing purposes. The prospect of being bought out by the State will give the speculator another reason for holding back this (de-rated) land from the builder. Does the Labour Party not know that the value of agricultural land is being increased by the Tory policy of making food dear, and that to buy it with public money is to capitalize for the landlords' benefit the injury inflicted on the public by "Protection"? What about cultivable land now devoted to "Sport"? What is "fair compensation" for sporting rights that have been lessening or preventing the production of food? And, in any case, all past experience shows that the people are always swindled when land is bought with public funds: every Labour Councillor knows this by experience.

"Estate management" is to be transferred to a wonderful hierarchy of public authorities. The Minister of Agriculture, at the head of a National Agricultural Board, will control the management of the publicly-owned agricultural lands through County Agricultural Committees; will control great schemes of Drainage and Water Supply through the Catchment Area Boards; will control Production and Marketing of Commodities, with "a deliberate

<sup>1</sup> *How Labour will save Agriculture* (March, 1934).

control of Prices," through Home Producers' Boards, National Commodity Boards and by Regulation of Imports; and a National Wages Board, "on which Farm Workers will be represented," acting through County Wages Committees, will "have full power to fix Wages."

Mr. G. T. Hutchinson has stated<sup>1</sup> that "owner-occupiers . . . own a third of the agricultural land of England and Wales. . . . Many of these have already learnt to regret the day they purchased their farms with borrowed money on a falling market." So the Labour policy offers to the farmers who have been drained of their working capital by rent, or by purchase price (often paid at the top of a boom) or mortgage interest, "ample supplies of credit for capital equipment (buildings, machinery, etc.) and for working capital, under State control," if they are prepared to carry out the State's requirements. Out of all this the labourer is promised better wages, better housing, improved amenities of country life, good cottages with gardens, small holdings, allotments, and the possibility (for some of them) of a job on one of the "large-scale State-owned farms."

There is no apparent reason why any agricultural landlord should not joyfully accept this Labour programme, especially as it is obviously offered as the Party's alternative to the taxation of agricultural land values. It will be pleasanter to draw gilt-edged dividends on a new National Debt than to make his just contribution to the National Exchequer.

Apparently, no serious thought has been given by the authors of this policy to the question of its cost; a question in which even people who do not live and work in an agricultural district are likely to be keenly interested. There is, however, this amazing sentence (on p. 21) :—

If anyone should be found to say that these measures—land nationalization, control of prices, wages, etc.—cannot be carried out, let him tell us how it is that complicated schemes of control were carried through during the War without hitch, and at negligible cost to the community.

The writer, who has the hardihood to tell this story to the agricultural voters, must have felt very sure that none of his readers have read the series of blistering Reports, issued in

<sup>1</sup> Special article in *Times*, March 19th, 1934.

1917 and 1918, by the Select Committee on National Expenditure, on the appalling errors of judgment and the monstrous waste of public money by the State "Controllers" of lands during the War. There are some instructive quotations from these Reports in the pamphlet named in a footnote to p. 72 above.

It appears, then, that all three Parties propose to "free" the agriculturist from the tyranny of the landlord by handing him over to the tender mercies of a new and necessarily very costly Bureaucracy.

The farming class, encouraged to believe that its interests are bound up rather with those of the landlords than with those of the labourers, who help them to produce their crops, has long been "barking up the wrong tree." The farmers turned to the Conservative Party. They greedily swallowed the bait offered to them in the *Agricultural Rates Act*, 1896, which relieved them, at the cost of their fellow-citizens, of one-half of the rates on their land: a relief, ostensibly in favour of agriculture, but described by its Radical critics as "landlord relief." Further de-rating in 1923 was followed by the complete remission of rates in 1929. Experience seems to have failed to teach the farmers a truth which was confessed in the House of Commons, on February 20th, 1929, by the Lord Advocate in the Conservative Government which passed the Act of 1929, that "the benefit [of de-rating] ultimately comes to the landlord" in increased rent or in the withholding of necessary reductions of rent.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the farm-houses are not relieved of the rates, which discourage extension or improvement, and the complete de-rating of agricultural land makes it easier than ever to hold it out of use and so keep up the price of land by creating an artificial scarcity of it in the market.

The farmers demand tariffs and subsidies to enable them to compete with foreign agriculturists. Their ideal would be, of course, to raise the price of all that they produce and to have free trade in everything they have to buy: which, as Euclid says, is absurd. The arable farmer wants a tariff on what he produces. But his wheat is, in large

<sup>1</sup> The remission of Tithes, recently the subject of much agitation, would, under present conditions, simply be a gift to the landlords.

quantities, the food of the poultry farmer's birds: the "offals" of the miller, the oats, oil cakes, cotton cakes, maize, etc., and the roots of the arable farmer—all agricultural products—are needed by the dairy farmer to feed his cattle and to produce his beef, milk, butter and cheese.<sup>1</sup> Farm machinery is increased in price by a tariff on steel; and so on.

The farmers will not listen to the followers of Henry George who warn them of the consequences of such raids upon other people's pockets. Yet even the *Conservative Times*,<sup>2</sup> writing about the bounty on beet-sugar, and emphasizing a point which the beet-growers apparently overlook, says: "The consequences of the encouragement of the production of sugar at home by a heavy subsidy are well known. . . . [It] gives a remunerative price to British producers at enormous cost to British taxpayers." It might also have added that it enables the landlords of lands suitable for beet-growing to charge a "remunerative" rent. In 1931-33 the subsidy on wheat has, at an expense of nearly £145 per acre, increased the area under wheat by 463,689 acres, while the area under barley and oats has decreased by nearly the same figure (435,362 acres); the total amount of arable land has decreased by 332,528 acres, and the number of arable workers by 1,057.<sup>3</sup> The growers of oats then get an increased "protective" duty imposed on foreign oats; and dairy farmers, and pig and poultry keepers, who claim to be far more numerous and important than the arable and grain-growing farmers, complain that they can no longer "afford to pay the prohibitive price for the feeding of their stocks."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for further details, ARTHUR HOLGATE (one of the largest farmers in the North of England), *British Agriculture and Free Trade* (Liberal Publication Department, 1930); Capt. A. R. MCDUGAL, *Agriculture and Protection* (Address at Glasgow Free Trade Conference, November 21st, 1930; published by Walker & Son, Ltd., Galashiels).

<sup>2</sup> In a leading article, January 8th, 1934.

<sup>3</sup> The figures for 1933 were given by the Minister of Agriculture in the House of Commons on November 27th, 1933; those for the two previous years are from an earlier Government Return. See *Land & Liberty*, January, 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Secretary of the Liverpool Corn Trade Association, *Times*, February 9th, 1934.

The Potato Marketing Scheme makes one inclined to say, as said the man who saw a giraffe for the first time, "I don't believe it!" It creates a sort of close corporation of licensed potato growers, and another of potato merchants, and treats the devotion of more land to the growth of these tubers as a kind of crime, punishable by fine; and apparently it is possible for a man who grows on his small holding more potatoes than his family can eat, to be prohibited from selling his surplus to a shopkeeper or a friend. Even at a time when hundreds of thousands of our fellow-citizens are not getting sufficient food, the man who makes two potatoes grow where only one grew before is no longer to be treated as a benefactor.

All this, and much more of the same sort of thing, necessitates the creation of a new bureaucracy to harry the farmer.

The lessons of war-time are forgotten. Potatoes had become scarce and dear, and house-wives stood in queues in the hope of getting a scanty ration. The Government fixed a *maximum* price for potatoes, and the greengrocers' placards said "NO potatoes." The Government issued an Order which opened up patches of unused land, much of it apparently unsuitable for cultivation, for allotments. The allotment holders produced such an abundant supply of potatoes that they became cheaper even than in pre-war days, until the Government, by another Order, fixed a *minimum* price. So completely had even a limited access to land relieved the potato famine. Freedom to produce is the remedy for scarcity, and freedom to produce comes of freedom of access to land.

Tariffs, marketing schemes, quotas and the like will fail either to feed the hungry or to satisfy the farmer. If they give him the high prices he longs for, the rent and the selling price of the land he needs will go up. It is a grave crime against the mass of the people to pass laws which compel them to pay a higher price for a smaller amount of food: and it is quite unnecessary to do so, even in the interest of the farmers, who are seeking to make themselves prosperous, not by better methods of cultivation, but partly by fleecing the public and partly by reducing the number or the wages (or both) of their work-folk. Fifty

years ago an acute and practical observer<sup>1</sup> recorded what was happening in Buckinghamshire, when Joseph Arch succeeded in getting the labourers' wages raised from 12s. to 15s. a week.

"A farmer, employing 10 men, knocked off 4, and that saved 48s. a week on his labour bill. To the remaining 6 men he gave the extra wage of 3s., or an increase of 18s. on his weekly labour bill. The net gain to the farmer *in money* was thus 30s., and his net loss *in men* was 4 labourers. *But the money was in his pocket and the men were out of sight.* . . . [The land] was starved for lack of labour. Then came the wet years, when more than ever labour was needed. But the labour was not now to be had. It had been driven out of the country."

Very few of the farmers seem to have any thought of striking a blow for their own freedom: freedom from the domination of the landlord and the bureaucrat. When Mr Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture, says and implies that wages are the real burden upon the farmer, Captain McDougal retorts that "throughout the last century rent has mostly exceeded the amount paid in wages," and gives a typical case in which "rent to one man merely for permission to farm exceeded the total wages of 17 people (for a 10-hour day and a 6-day week) and was little less than wages and farmer's profits combined."<sup>2</sup> None of the nostrums offered by the three political parties set the farmer or the labourer free. The first step to their economic freedom is the taxation and rating of land values.<sup>3</sup>

Why should the working agriculturist be denied the benefits which would flow from such a change in our fiscal system? In Queensland, since 1890, agricultural land has been taxed on its value. In New South Wales, the reform began in the Shires (1905-06), and its success in the country districts led to the extension of its benefits, first to the Boroughs and finally to the Metropolitan City of Sydney (1916). In Denmark, the demand for Taxation and Rating of Land Values was persistently voiced for a decade by the

<sup>1</sup> Rev C. W. STUBBS (afterwards Bishop of Truro), *The Land and the Labourer* (1884), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Quo vadis.* (*The Countryman*, January, 1934.)

<sup>3</sup> See *Agriculture and Land Value Taxation*, published by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values.



organized Peasant Proprietors and the reform was introduced by a Government of Social Democrats, supported by Radicals and Liberals, in 1924. We have frequently been exhorted to follow the example of these very successful cultivators who, on a soil and in a climate much inferior to ours, produce such a superabundance of excellent bacon, poultry, butter and eggs that it is deemed necessary to prevent them from sending "too much" food to this country. To attribute their success to "co-operation" is to tell only a small part of the truth. It is not without significance that, in their Peasants' High Schools, economic teaching is based on Henry George's works, and that a copy of *Progress and Poverty* is to be found in many a Danish peasant's home.

There are not wanting, in this country, advocates of our Reform even among those who may justly claim practical knowledge of agricultural conditions and possibilities. The late James Long, Professor of Agriculture at University College, Reading, strongly advocated it. He tells us of "the [nearly] thirteen million acres of rough grazing land, which potentially represent the wealth of a new nation," which is "capable of considerable improvement," though, or because, "90 per cent of it has received no attention at the hand of man." He tells how a Scottish landholder, Mr R. H. Elliot, D.L., of Roxburgh, applied to some such land—poor, exhausted, stony and hilly, subject to frequent droughts—a method of culture, without manure, which yielded a crop of barley and so heavy a crop of excellent grass that, in spite of unfavourable weather and twelve weeks' grazing in Spring and Autumn, two tons of hay were cut to the acre. The effect was to increase the rental value of the land from 5s. to 15s. an acre.<sup>1</sup> Mr Hunter, one of the ablest of British seedsmen, has declared that there are thousands of acres of poor hill pasture and downland which, for an outlay of £3 an acre on cultivation and suitable seeds, might be converted within a single year into profitable pastures of treble their present value.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LONG, *Making the Most of the Land*, pp. ix, 197, 272.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. ix.

Lord Bledisloe (late Governor-General of New Zealand) is a Conservative Peer, a landlord, an enlightened cultivator, and has been the head of the oldest Agricultural College in England, President of the Central Landowners' Association and Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture. He wrote to the *Times* on October 20th, 1923 (and in the same week to the *Spectator* in much the same strain):—

"The mode of taxing real property is a serious deterrent to agricultural enterprise and increased output. There are, for instance, thousands of acres of seriously neglected grassland in the West of England and in Wales which, by the application of phosphatic fertilizers, might be made to yield three times the amount of meat or of milk that they are now yielding; but the farmers will not apply these dressings, because they know that the assessable value of their land (and perhaps consequently its rent) will be raised.<sup>1</sup> The same applies to the installation of labour-saving machinery or of plant for the conversion of farm products into marketable commodities. *The exact converse is the case in Denmark, where taxation is imposed upon the land itself, to the exoneration of its improvements.*"

If testimony from the tenant farmer's point of view is needed, the numerous speeches, articles and pamphlets of Captain Arthur R. McDougal, J.P., of Blythe, Lauder, Berwickshire, state, with clearness and force, the case for the Taxation and Rating of Agricultural Land Values, the De-rating of Agricultural Buildings and Improvements, and Free Trade. He introduced himself to the Glasgow Free Trade Conference (November, 1930) thus: "I speak as a plain, practical tenant farmer of 30 years' experience, and as the son of generations of farmers. I farm about 1,000 acres of poor, high, mixed arable land and a considerable acreage of hill grazings." To this may be added that a large part of the land was reclaimed from heather, bog and birch by his father. The Captain was for twelve years a member of the executive of the Scottish National Farmers' Union and was for some years one of its Vice-Presidents. He has contributed the results of his experiments in grass cultivation to the *Journal of the Scottish Board of Agriculture* and has read a paper at Rothamsted. His practical experience

<sup>1</sup> But surely his lordship was putting the cart before the horse, for the raising of the assessment usually follows the increase of rent. Anyway, the complete de-rating of agricultural land, since Lord Bledisloe wrote, makes the raising of the rent even more certain

as a tenant farmer makes him a formidable critic of current political schemes for Agriculture. As the *Daily Herald* wrote, at the head of one of his articles: "He wants neither Tariffs nor State Aid—all he asks is Protection from Landlordism."

It used to be said, by Lord Winchelsea and others, that there are "three classes interested in Agriculture: landlord, farmer and labourer"; and it was assumed that their interests were the same. We all know, in a rough-and-ready way, what are the functions of the farmer and of the men whom he employs in what is, to a far greater degree than the townsman usually realizes, a highly skilled occupation. What service does the landlord render to the industry?

A former Prime Minister, who used sometimes to read the Lessons in Church, once said:<sup>1</sup> "The landlord furnishes the land," and was not prosecuted under the Blasphemy Laws. However else we came by the land, it is quite certain that the landlord did not make it. He simply claims to own it. That, in itself, does not give him the right to share in the produce of the labour of his two "partners." If the landlord himself farms "his" land, or if he builds a farmhouse and other necessary buildings or makes any kind of improvements on it, for the use of a farmer, he is clearly entitled to the rewards of his labour and expenditure. But the agent of a great London landlord told the Town Holdings Select Committee, many years ago, that "no wise landlord makes any improvements." He just takes, at the end of a lease, the improvements made by his tenants. The one function which quite clearly distinguishes the landlord, as such, from the rest of the community, is that of land-rent-collecting; a quite useful function, if he passed on his collections to the Treasury of the King from whom he holds his lands.

Lord Bledisloe told the British Association,<sup>2</sup> to the great annoyance of the Land Union, that most landlords had been, for the last two generations, mere rent-receivers, without either the knowledge or the inclination personally to administer their own estates, still less to cultivate them:

<sup>1</sup> LORD SALISBURY, on the *British Agricultural Association Bill* (1885).

<sup>2</sup> At Hull, September 11th, 1922.

the landlord had regarded the land as an amenity, and had lived a life detached from the industry. It is clear, therefore, that the landlord, as such, is not a sharer in agricultural industry: he is merely a burden upon it. He "farms the farmers." Like the dodder on the corn, he fastens himself on the industry and sucks the life out of it. Captain A. R. McDougal tells the same story. The present system can only be justified by a superstitious belief that the farmer cannot grow food for himself and us unless there is a landlord to collect rent from him, to impose, at his will or whim, all sorts of restrictions upon his activities, and to raise his rent upon his improvements, if he is rash enough to make any. The way in which the system organizes the life of a country parish may be illustrated by the case of Stanton St. Bernard in Wiltshire.

The village and parish of Stanton St. Bernard, in East Wilts, is the property of the Rt. Hon. George Robert Charles Herbert, J.P., Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery and Baron Herbert of Cardiff. . . . His lordship is lord of the manor, sole (absentee) land "owner," patron of the living, receiver of rent and tithe. Of the nearly 2,000 acres of land in the parish, about 40 are glebe. The noble owner lets the rest, together with all the cottages, to two farmers. The two farmers, besides controlling the cultivation of all the land in the parish and the tenancy of practically all the cottages, are the churchwardens, the overseers of the poor and the school managers. One of them has charge of the rate-book. The labourer who wants to work in the parish must obtain employment on the Earl of Pembroke's land under one of the Earl of Pembroke's two farmers, who will house him in one of the Earl's cottages, deducting the rent from his weekly wages. He sends his children to the "national" school (managed by the Earl of Pembroke's farmers) and "goes on Sunday to the Church" where, under the eyes of the two churchwardens (Lord P.'s farmers again), he "sits under" the clergyman appointed to the parish (by the Earl of Pembroke). When he gets too old to work, or is reduced to hopeless poverty by misfortune, he must apply for poor-law relief to the same two farmers. If, in spite of all these arrangements for his comfort, he is still discontented with his lot, there is no building—not even the school-room, which is largely subsidized out of the taxes—in which he can meet to take counsel with his fellows, unless he first obtains the permission of the Earl of Pembroke's farmers. If the parish of Stanton St. Bernard were a slave estate, owned by the Earl of Pembroke, and managed by two overseers on the Earl's behalf, the condition of the inhabitants could hardly be more completely one of slavery than it is to-day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Land Restoration League, *Red Van Report*, 1893.

This description was written before the passing of the *Parish Councils Act* (1894). It is doubtful whether, in villages so organized, the Act has made much difference; for the same system, in essentials, persists. The Duke of Beaufort "owns" the village of Stoke Gifford in Gloucestershire (about 5 miles from Bristol) and has one of his houses there. He is Lord of the Manor. The only industry is agriculture, and, as the Duke "owns" all the land, every man, woman and child in the parish is absolutely at his mercy. The election of the Parish Council in 1895 was by a show of hands in a Parish Meeting, at which the Duke was in the chair. Three of the Duke's farmers and one labourer were elected by a show of hands to represent the villagers, who numbered 361 at the Census of 1891. The Council naturally chose the Duke as its chairman, and the Vicar (presented to the living by his "patron," the Duke) was sent to the Rural District Council. The parishioners elected as their Churchwarden Admiral Close, a local Tory, to whom the Duke objected, apparently on the ground of some difference of opinion about the restoration of the parish church. His Grace thereupon *gave all his tenants notice to quit*, which he withdrew only when Admiral Close, to save the helpless tenants from eviction, undertook not to act as Churchwarden, appointed a deputy, and promised not to attend any Parish Meetings called in reference to anything to do with the Church.

Even to this day, any Radical or Labour candidate for a rural area will know that, with the loss of their rights in the soil, the country work-folk have lost, not only their economic freedom, but also their political and sometimes their religious liberty. Long ago, Dr Hunter reported that "landlords and farmers work hand in hand. A few acres to the cottage would make the labourers too independent."<sup>1</sup> It is exactly what the Rev C. W. Stubbs discovered by experience when he promoted allotments in his Midland parish: but he would have omitted the qualifying "too."

What, then, would the taxation of land values do for the farmer? He is always complaining of his "burdens," but he seldom includes in the list of them the rent he has

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by MARX, *Capital*, I, 748.

to pay. Under the pressure of land monopoly, he is obliged to submit to the increase of rent in respect of his own improvements. A London printer, born on a Somerset farm which his father cultivated by the best known method, told how, at the end of a 21-years' lease, the rent was raised avowedly on account of the greatly improved condition of the farm. The farmer submitted for the sake of his two infant sons. Twenty-one years later, the same thing happened again, and Mr K. saw that his son's prospects were hopeless. He encouraged them to go to London. The West Country lost two good farmers, whom it badly needed, and a new printing firm was established in London, where printers were not exactly scarce.

With a National Tax upon all land values, and the adoption of the value of all land, apart from improvements, as the basis of Local Rating, the relations between the agricultural landlord and his tenants would be radically altered. For the pressure of the new tax and rate would be felt at once by the holders of unused or under-used land of every kind. The artificial market-scarcity, due to the withholding of land from use, would be relieved, and land for farming or market-gardening or fruit-growing or small holding or allotments, or any other useful purpose would become available to a much larger extent and at a lower price or rent. The farmer would have an alternative open to him if and when his landlord should try to penalize his good cultivation by an increase of rent, or to impose unfair conditions upon him.

Taxation upon land values would not be a tax upon agriculture or upon the working farmer. It would be a tax on, and by so much a deduction from, the rent which he pays for the use of land. Had Mr Snowden's Act of 1931 come into force, and had it applied to *all* land, the farmer, having paid the land value tax, would have had the right to deduct it from the rent he paid to his landlord (Section 20). As the land value tax would reduce other taxes by its own amount, the farmer would profit, in common with other citizens.

When land value is made the basis of local taxation, he will no longer be rated on his farmhouse, and he will be able to improve it, to extend it, or to replace it by a better one,

without being fined for doing so by increased assessment and rating.

The country districts, like the "East Ends" of the towns, will benefit by the redistribution of the burdens of taxation not only between class and class, but between district and district, between "town" and "country." For the land value tax will be levied, not only on farm-land, but on every sort of land that has any value at all, whether well-used or under-used, and even if it is not used at all. The farmer who has bought his farm, and must himself pay the taxes and rates on it, will benefit by a more just distribution of the expenses of government. He lives and works in a Parish, which is part of a Rural District, which is, in its turn, part of a County. He is liable to pay his share of rates for Parish, District and County purposes. The County contains also Urban Districts and Boroughs, all more densely populated and with very much higher land values than those of the agricultural villages. When the County Rate is partly or wholly levied on land values, all users of land, whether it is used for building, industry, mining or agriculture, will have their rates relieved at the expense of the land monopolists, especially of those who have kept valuable land idle. The high land values of the cities and towns will help to lighten the burdens of the agricultural population, which has helped to create them.

As Lord Bledisloe has testified, the taxation of land values will not hurt the enlightened and improving landlord who farms his own land, but it will give his merely rent-receiving neighbours an incentive to follow his example, and, under the gentle pressure of the tax, either to use the land themselves or to give place to those who will use it. With taxes and rates falling heavily on the high land values of their city lands, great landlords would promptly reconsider their policy of refusing to let their country lands for small holdings or other agricultural use, as some of them do now. If the Duke of Norfolk had to pay taxes and rates, not only on his agricultural lands but also on his enormously valuable estates in London and Sheffield, the labourers round Arundel could hope for access to land.

The rural labourer would also benefit. There is no known way of using land for productive purposes other

than the application of labour to it. The opening up of land, not now in full use, will be, in effect, a great call for labour. Land will become cheaper, not only for the arable farmer, the dairy farmer, the pig-breeder, the fruit-grower and the market-gardener, cultivating on a large scale, but also for the small man seeking a Small Holding, an Allotment, or a Cottage Garden. There need be no unemployment in the rural districts, and opportunities will be wide open for the return to the villages of many who have left them in comparatively recent times. Just as the competition of the landlords for tenants will reduce rents, the competition of the farmers for workers will raise the wages of labourers, and the revived activities on the farms will ensure plenty of business for the village tradesmen and shopkeepers, and the manufacturing and distributive industries of the towns will find new demands for their goods. Building land and building materials being cheapened, and rates reduced, the sanitary cottage, at a rent which the labourer can afford to pay, will come into the picture.

The Empire Development and Settlement Research Committee published on February 13th, 1934, a scheme for the redistribution of the population of the Empire under a Chartered Company, backed by the British Government's financial guarantee. It proposed to establish 40,000 settlers with their families (say 160,000 in all) in Canada and Australia at a cost of £1,000 a family in Canada. The talk is of millions idle in this country and huge areas of unoccupied land in the Empire. It would be interesting to know how many shareholders in the Canadian Pacific Railway, which holds immense areas of land in Canada, are interested in this proposal, and why there is no suggestion of finding work for the unemployed on the unused land in their own country. It could be done, without expatriating them at a cost of £50,000,000 as the Committee proposes, and without any Government guarantee, by taxing and rating land values.

Though the "closer settlement" of our own rural districts, which would restore life to our depopulated and debilitated villages, may appear to be mainly the concern of the country rather than of the town, it has been dealt with at some length here because of the writer's long-



standing conviction<sup>1</sup> that the collapse of our agricultural economy is a matter of very grave import to the towns.

Since 1851, when the population of England and Wales was almost equally divided between urban and rural, every succeeding Census has shown an increase of the "urban" population at the expense of the "rural." The great towns have grown far too rapidly. The number of persons "engaged in agriculture" has alarmingly decreased. The area of the County of London appears to be filled to "capacity," and has, of late, even decreased somewhat; but the real London, which is much larger than the Administrative County, has grown enormously on its outer edges. Dr. Ogle, the eminent statistician, a generation ago,<sup>2</sup> after a thorough investigation of the Census papers for the agricultural County of Huntingdon, showed that the evil lies, not so much in the number of those who leave the villages for the towns, great as that is, as in their character. "The cream of the rural population . . . the most stalwart of the natives of the country are dispatched annually to the towns and manufacturing districts, and swallowed up by them as by another Minotaur." The home market for the products of the industrial districts is depleted of their best customers, who come to the towns and manufacturing centres, where they become dangerous competitors in the labour market, especially for all jobs of laborious "unskilled" work; the more so as they come from places with a low standard of wages. The bearing of these facts upon the problem of unemployment in London is obvious.

Mr Ben Tillett told the House of Lords Committee on the Sweating System that "for every acre of land that goes into disuse, we get someone up here"—at the London Docks—competing at the Dock Gates for casual jobs of laborious work at a pay that was only raised to 6d. an hour as the result of a great strike. The Rev. Harold Rylett, an old friend of Henry George, told the Lords how the grievously sweated wages of the toilers in the chain and nail industries of Cradley Heath were the outcome of country landlordism.

<sup>1</sup> See a series of articles in the *Church Reformer*, January, 1891, to January, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, January, 1889.

Much later, at an official inquiry into railwaymen's wages, the representative of the railway companies claimed that the wages of the lower grades of workers on the lines should not greatly exceed those paid in the villages from which most of them came.

That this influx of countrymen into the towns, and especially into the East End of Greater London, has had its effect upon unemployment, wages, rents, overcrowding and health, goes without saying. The Royal Commission on Housing (1885), the Lords' Committee on Sweating (1888), the Royal Commission on Trade Depression (1885) and Charles Booth's Survey of *Life and Labour in East London*, about the same time, all bear witness to the facts.

In the *Final Report* (1886) of the Commission on Trade Depression, Mr Arthur O'Connor, M.P., made a *Separate Report*, tracing the depression in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing industries to landlordism.

The "expropriation of the peasant from the soil," as Marx would say, has had, and is having, tragic effects upon the mental health of large sections of the population. The villages have for long been robbed of the strongest and most enterprising of their youth: the weaker elements remain, and inter-marry more and more within the narrowing circle. For instance, Professor Cyril Burt has found that three surnames accounted for 70 per cent of the population of the Warwickshire village from which Shakespeare emerged.<sup>1</sup> Village life became more and more dull, more and more cut off from the main currents of our national life. This is especially true of the mountainous districts, whose physical conformation makes for the isolation of scattered communities. Long ago, after at least thirty years of rural depopulation, the Registrar-General called attention<sup>2</sup> to "the much greater comparative amount of idiocy and imbecility that exists among the natives of agricultural counties, and especially of such agricultural counties as are mountainous, than among the natives of manufacturing and mining counties." Meanwhile, the more stalwart of the peasantry, coming to the towns, add to the uncertainty of

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, October 26th, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Census of 1881*, Vol. IV (General Report), pp. 70-71; and see the Summary Tables in Vol. III, pp. xlv, xlvi.

employment and the stress of life, with consequences to which Professor D. H. Henderson has recently called attention in a special article contributed to the *Daily Herald* (March 7th, 1934). He tells us that the number of patients in mental institutions increased from 1880 to 1920 by 468·3 per cent; that the Board of Control for England and Wales, with 146,000 certified mental patients under its care, has to make provision for 2,000 extra beds every year, and that "the rate of mental deficiency is higher in the country, but the rate of insanity is higher in the towns."

No doubt the motor bus, the cinema and the wireless are now keeping many villages more in touch with the outer world, but the effect of the long continued drain of their population will be long with us.

These sad facts afford one more reason why even in their own interest as townsmen, the urban voters should press for the taxation and rating of land values in town and country alike.