

The Landlord's Eternal Life

Some weeks ago the Duke of Bedford, as all men must, passed away. He was a good man and a good landlord. He was president of the Zoological Society of London, he financed many scientific expeditions, promoted cancer research, wrote a book on natural history, and was very charitable indeed.

The Duke's indulgence of his social conscience was made possible by his inheritance of an estate which dates back to the reign of Henry VIII. This wife-murdering monarch took a liking to a Jack Russell, called him Lord Russell, and, what is of continuing economic importance, bestowed on him immense tracts of land. Much of this land was confiscated from the Catholic Church in 1540; certain lands used by the abbots of Westminster as burial grounds were likewise peremptorily deeded to the king's favorite. The present very valuable piece of London's surface known as Covent (corruption of "Convent") Garden was part of this grant.

Edward VI invented the title of Earl of Bedford, and Charles II made the fifth earl a duke. All of which is immaterial; without the vast estates the late Duke of Bedford would have been just a Russell. Science, alas, might have lost a great benefactor.

Among the lands handed down by Jack to the ensuing dukes was a parcel of about nineteen acres in the heart of London. Twenty-six streets wound through this area, many with names commemorating the Russell family history. Covent Garden Market is included, and from every basket of produce that was bought or sold in it the Duke received a toll; the total of this poundage theft was \$125,000 annually. Rents from the vicinity doubled his income. These rents were a drain on such enterprises as the Royal Covent Garden Opera House, Drury Lane Theatre, Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych and Strand Theaters, Bow Street Police Court. That was before 1918, when the

Duke sold for seventeen and a half million dollars this privilege of collecting rent on the land. He still had 41,596 acres to use for a similar purpose.

The Duke was smart. (Also he was a good soldier, a pillar of the Church and a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire.) He built modern cottages for his tenants, he subsidized a swimming pool for their enjoyment and distributed tons of venison among them at Christmas tide. Thus he gained the loyalty of his rent-contributors, who cheered His Grace's independence of character when he refused to furnish to the London County Council an accounting of his rents from Covent Garden.

Yes, he was a great landlord and a good man. His tenants will miss him. But, maybe not so much. For he was wise enough to leave a son to carry on the noble tradition of rent-collecting. "My landlord is dead—long live the landlord."

Which calls to mind, in view of Britain's present difficulties, a remark made by Richard R. Stokes, M.P., at a recent session of the Parliament, about "this is the land we are fighting for."

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