

Robbery of Britons Revealed

By Lancaster M. Greene

American landlords frequently complain that our method of assessing the principal value of land, for taxation purposes, is wrong. They point to England as a model of what they would like. While the English landlord pays a tax on his income, as do American landlords, there is however practically no tax on the value of his land-holdings, and therefore no impairment of this value. To diminish income is one thing; to destroy the source of the income is a more serious matter. An English landlord speaks of his income rather than of the capital value of his holdings. Indeed, the capital value of the land of England is an unknown quantity, since there is no machinery for assessing land values.

Land tenure in England was originally based on definite services rendered to the superior. All lands were, and still are, held of the Crown. This central theory of English law has never been changed. For so many barbed arrows, for attending the king in time of war, for taking charge of the king's mistresses, for holding the sea-sick king's head, for herring pies, for providing the king with a servant or a soldier, for supplying straw for the king's bed, for a pound of pepper, for one white rose when visited by the king—for such things and services the king gave his vassals tenure to the land of England. The practice is retained in many instances to the present day. The land was not sold or owned; the "homage" was the rent paid by the holder to the king for permission to hold.

For more than 150 years after the Norman Conquest the whole cost of local and national government in Britain was borne by the landholders. This was the condition upon which they held, and the performance by them of specific services—providing armies, keeping up roads and bridges, education, etc.—was the rent paid to the community for permission to hold the common property. Gradually, however, the landlords rid themselves of these obligations by means of local and national taxation. National taxation dates from 1660, when Parliament, in control of the landlords, voted an excise duty to provide

funds for Charles II. Thus, they divested themselves of the obligation to pay rent for the land, but held on to the land.

The several attempts to assess land values in England were frustrated by the landlords. An ancient, vague and, of course, inaccurate valuation does exist. But the English monopolist is too wise to let the English worker know exactly how he is robbed. All that counts to the landlord is his annual income. If he has to pay taxes he is willing to pay on this income, knowing full well that no government would deprive him of all of it. But to publish the capitalized value of this income may suggest the fact that this source of revenue is public property. Since lands do not frequently change hands—why sell land when the rent from it furnishes a continuous income for you and your family?—the value of their island remains more or less a mystery to Englishmen.

However, sometimes light is shed on this mystery by the sale of a piece of land. Recently the Marquess of Bute—sometimes referred to as the "King of South Wales"—sold half the City of Cardiff. The purchase price was not announced; it is not necessary in a country where land values are not the basis of taxation. Newspapers, however, report: "it is understood that the value of the properties is about \$100,000,000." The transaction involved city docks, 20,000 houses, 1,000 shops, 250 saloons, extensive agricultural lands and a number of villages. The family dates

back to Robert III, fourteenth century Scottish King. For hundreds of years the members of this family have been living on the labor of the people of Cardiff. Now the people will work for another landlord. The name of the new owner has not been announced. Why?

"The Great Land Robbery," by J. W. Graham Peace, published in 1933, gives interesting information on the land graft of the Marquess of Bute. His holdings embraced eight estates, consisting of 116,668 acres. The gross annual income therefrom was 231,421 pounds, over \$1,000,000. This was exclusive of \$12,500 for minerals in Ayrshire. In 1919 Lord Bute admitted before a coal commission that his six years' average of royalties was about \$500,000 in addition to \$30,000 a year for "wayleaves"—just for letting miners go to work. This does not include his income from surface rents.

Lord Bute did not divest himself of all this power to extract wealth from labor. It is not disclosed how much of his 13,628 acres of municipal land he disposed of; it is known that he retained two of his Welsh estates, and his royalty-producing land was not involved. He claims an extensive area in Canada, and in Tangier, which served as a base for the Barbary pirates. Lord Bute is reported to be one of the largest landlords.

But, Americans, this lord is a "piker." We have landlords in this country whose holdings and whose income from rent (which, we, of course, pay) put him to shame.