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BACK TO NATURE.

For The Public.

O Mother, with a Thousand Breasts;
Thy helpless children, hungry and wild-eyed,
Crowd together on the barren pavement
Begging food!

Call them to thy spacious hills of plenty;
Lead them out upon the throbbing mounds.
Where, pressing and caressing with their eager hands,
They shall find sweet nourishment and rest.

EVANGELINE LEWIS CLOSE.



LLOYD GEORGE'S SIXTH BUDGET

J. St. George Heath, Secretary of the Land Enquiry Committee, in *The (London) Daily News* of May 6.

It may safely be predicted that this Budget will be known in future years as "The Ratepayers' Budget."

The Budget has unjustly been called obscure, but that is because the true functions of a Budget have been misunderstood. It lays down, clearly and precisely, the amount of money which is needed for the relief of local taxation, and the way in which it is to be raised. But the actual way in which local authorities are to be helped has been left purposely vague, because it will be dealt with in a series of further Bills—a Rating Bill, a Revenue Bill, and probably an Education and Public Health Bill as well. It may be that some of these Bills are not yet completely drafted, and, in any case, the only business of a Chancellor of the Exchequer in introducing a Budget is to decide how much money is needed and the method of raising it, while leaving administrative details to be worked out by the Departments concerned, and introduced in special Bills at a later date.

Three dangers have to be faced in granting large sums of money to local authorities, namely: (1) That the money should not go to relieve owners of land as such. (2) That it should not go to relieve districts which do not deserve relief. (3) That the money should not be wasted or badly spent by local authorities.

(1) Fears have often been entertained that any relief of rates would mean that landowners would take advantage of it to charge higher rents. To meet this both the Land Enquiry Report and the Minority Report of the Departmental Committee of this year suggested that a new rate upon site values should be levied, to be paid by the owners of site values. Though the Chancellor has

definitely promised this for the future, it is clear that it cannot be introduced until the valuations are absolutely complete; hence, not as an alternative, but as an addition to the rating of site values, he has put forward an extremely ingenious and simple suggestion. Let us assume that in any locality A. and B. both have been paying £50 in rates, but that out of this sum A. has paid £40 a year upon the value of his site, and £10 a year upon the value of his improvements, buildings, etc.; while B. has paid £40 upon his improvements, buildings, etc., and £10 upon his site. Whatever relief is given will be given to the improvements, buildings, etc.; hence A. will get very little relief, and B. a great deal. In this way, not only will those who have made improvements obtain a greater relief than those who have not, but seeing that sites, as such, do not obtain any relief at all, owners of sites will not be able to charge a higher rent.

(2) In order to give relief where it is needed two conditions have been laid down by the Chancellor. In the first place, it will go especially to relieve districts where the services, such as poor law, education, etc., are costly, not because of extravagance, but because of the high standard of efficiency reached. In the second place, those poor areas will be relieved where the rateable value is small, and where the needs are great. For the details of this we must await a further Bill to be introduced, but in order to ascertain the real rateable value, we must also have a uniform and fair system of valuation, the need for which can be seen clearly by reference to the Land Report, Volume II., pages 637-672. It is important to notice that the Chancellor has promised that in a future rating Bill the whole question of valuation will be tackled.

(3) The last, and perhaps the most important, need is to see that the money is well spent. This means the abolition of the system of assigned revenues. Assigned revenues meant that each local authority was allowed such portions of the product of certain duties (licenses, etc.) raised in its own area. The Central Department had no control whatever over the expenditure, and was powerless if it was badly spent. In future, grants-in-aid are to be given from the Central Authority, but they are to be conditional upon the local authority carrying out efficiently such services as education, public health, housing, small holdings, etc. In the past, if the local authority refused to carry out these services the only method was to apply for mandamus. In future, if they fail to carry out these services, a portion or the whole of the grant can be withdrawn. This method is already in existence with regard to such services as education, and it is undoubtedly only fair that if the public gives any local authority money it should be able to ensure that such money is wisely and economically spent.