

in a paper read to the Surveyors' Institution in February 1912, that the Institution "appoint a strong committee to investigate the principles of the taxation of land values, take evidence from persons with specialised knowledge, and produce an objective report."

John Watson observes, "This apparent *volte face* by the vice-chairman of a militant body at which, so recently, the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values had been hurling abuse, must have astonished his hearers. An indignant reader of the Land Agents' Record wrote sarcastically that Mr. Savill had 'described the schemes of the committee with a long name for confiscating the entire value of the bare land in a beautiful spirit of toleration.'"

If Edwin Savill had lived to see the results of the

1947 Town & Country Planning Act, the Land Commission, the Development Land Tax and the Community Land Act, we feel it would have taken little persuasion to convert him to L.V.T., if only in sheer desperation. If the land question is ever to be dealt with, this is the only way. The alternatives of wholesale nationalisation of urban and agricultural land hangs like the sword of Damocles over those who have resisted the practical and ethical proposals of Henry George for so long.

There is much more in this excellent book but of a less political nature. The author describes it thus: "It is in no sense a history book, still less a tapestry. I prefer to describe it as an irregular patchwork with the story of the Savills threaded through it and holding the bits together."

Turning Lemons into Grapefruit

SYDNEY BALL

WELL before American independence, many thousands of Europeans left their native heaths seeking freedom and opportunity in a continent populated largely by a few Indian tribesmen and an abundance of wild life; but above all, free land from one horizon to the next in all directions beckoned the adventurous and the persecuted.

During the early days of settlement, the main obstacles faced by the pioneering colonizers of America were a hostile environment and primitive communications. It says much for them that hardy men and women were prepared to suffer great deprivation and physical hardship in settling a wild and unknown territory, frequently having to contend with a great deal of disappointment from unfulfilled expectations. That many succeeded has resulted in modern America—a large, rich and powerful nation, dedicated to freedom and democracy.

The record of progress from independence in 1776 to the present day has not been unblemished. Americans have not always seen their legitimate interests served through the operation of natural justice; the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have not prevented the twin evils of land monopoly and industrial protection from flourishing—to the detriment of millions of its landless and property-less citizens. The growth of privilege has been

accompanied by widespread corruption, which has undermined many people's faith and confidence in the virtues of a market economy and the rule of law. During the development of modern America, it is arguable which has been the cause of more injustice and distress—the U.S. tariff or the maldistribution of "free" land. The late Thorold Rogers thought the tariff the cause of the greater mischief; while Henry George saw in the land question the fundamental villain. It is not my purpose here to enter into that particular argument. I happen to think that both have contributed to undermining the American dream of "the pursuit of happiness" in a land of equal opportunity and individual liberty.

The history of land ownership in America is, in itself, a fascinating study of how that country developed from a relatively uninhabited continent to the world's greatest industrial and largest democratic nation in less than 200 years—most of this industrial development taking place during the second half of its bi-centenary. Quite naturally, the first settlers wanted, above all else, land. Without land they had no more security than they had enjoyed in "the old country." If the problem had been limited to having access to any old piece of land, there would have been no problem at all—certainly not in Henry George's day. Even today, there is, without

doubt, available derelict land waiting to be claimed. The trouble is, life below the margin can often be a grim affair—even for freeholders. No one appreciated this important fact more than America's land barons and land speculators. Their *modus operandi* in seeking out the potentially rich land could not be better put than it is by Dana L. Thomas, who describes the process in his recent book, *Lords of the Land**, a history of American landlordism.

"There was no difficulty in finding land," says Thomas. "The trick was to select property that was *strategically located*. The astute speculator bought property for a song on the outskirts of a town, estimating that it lay squarely in the direction the community would grow. If he guessed right and the village became a metropolis, its acreage wound up in the heart of the city, and by subdividing it into lots, he or his heirs became multi-millionaires. Sometimes this happened within the lifetime of the original land buyer."

Timing is all. The trick is to be well ahead of the crowd, and then to wait patiently for the crowd to turn up. It is *people* that give land its value; lots of people, lots of land value! You could build the most magnificent city in the world; if the location was unacceptable, and no one came to inhabit it, it would remain a ghost-town, its land value, to all intents and purposes, nil.

America's land barons and real estate operators are as colourful a collection of rogues, adventurers

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and creative entrepreneurs as one could wish to find in fact or fiction. The history of land speculation, property development and real estate fortunes is at the heart of urban America; as is the growth of the railways and the exploitation of natural resources, such as oil and mining. Land values were the attraction.

This history is not without its drama and humour, as well as much ingenious skulduggery. Some of its characters have become legendary. Whatever their misdeemeanours, it seems hard to blame them. They took enormous risks, and if crooked politicians were susceptible to bribes in smoothing the way, the guilty party was the political set-up which allowed it.

If the Astors, Jay Cooke, Rockefeller, Marshall Field, etc. made great fortunes from land speculation, the system allowed it. Politicians who should have been concerned to protect the public interest, too often were more concerned in collecting a share of the boodle. As long as the revenue from land flows into private pockets, so long will land speculation continue to attract fortune hunters and hangers on.

One latter-day land speculator and property developer, William Zeckendorf, explained his basic philosophy succinctly, saying: "I make grapefruit out of lemons." We can be grateful that such people exist, as long as we recog-

nise to whom the lemons belong. Too often the grapefruit turn out to be pithy, the juice having been squeezed out by the rent collector and the speculator's profit.

The land question in America got off to an unsatisfactory start when the founding fathers adopted an ambivalent attitude as to what the land tenure policy of the new State should be. Thomas describes it as being "from the very beginning a gargantuan land speculation." "The Government," he says, "was split in its attitude towards property ownership, especially as it pertained to the public lands. . . . One faction of Congress wanted it sold to the wealthy, who could afford to pay the fancy prices and thereby work off the national debt generated by the recent war. A second faction argued that the land should be distributed on the most liberal terms to anyone who wished to settle on it." Subsequent history shows that the choicest acres went to those with the knowledge and energy to cajole and bribe those politicians placed to hand out the favours.

Compared to South America, land ownership in the United States is widely dispersed. For that blessing many Americans may feel grateful. For many landless Americans the existing arrangement leaves a lot to be desired. Welfare systems are a poor remedy for a landless proletariat dependent upon relief and charity.

land, and is demonstrably different in many objective and measurable characteristics. One finds it exceedingly difficult to fault this work as a Sassenach's guide to the Northern Kingdom.

Yet diversity does not imply political and economic separation. People of disparate cultures and even languages have existed together happily for centuries in (for example) Switzerland. The reader who still fails to perceive why the difference between England and Scotland should require the disruption of the Union may seize a crucial passage from James Scotland's essay on the educational system:-

"The political situation is likely to be determined for some time yet by the universal and imperative call by the ordinary people for a louder voice in decisions affecting their lives. This is the demand that calls for referenda, provides support for the Scottish National Party . . . and inspires general mistrust of authority. . . ."

The root of Scottish separatism surely lies here, in the growing centralisation of control throughout the United Kingdom. If we allow something like 50 or 60 per cent of the G.N.P. to pass into control of public officials, then nothing is more certain than that people at the geographical periphery will resent it even earlier and more keenly than people living near the centre. Scottish separatism is the product of a controlled economy in which more and more power passes to the centre.

A sovereign Parliament at Edinburgh will not solve this problem. At the next phase, people in the Highlands and Islands will appeal to their even more disparate traditions to break free from Edinburgh. No doubt Wales and the remoter parts of England will in time make similar demands of the English Government. Whether Scottish nationalism, in some form or other, is now imperative, is a matter in which Scots must decide. What is surely clear is that the long-term solution to nationalist questions throughout the world is not political but economic. The organs of government must steadily withdraw their control from the life of the citizen, and the abrasive effect of their interference will gradually disappear.

Stands Scotland Where it Did?

ROY DOUGLAS

NO political commentator would be very surprised to see the Scottish National Party after the next election with twenty or thirty seats in Scotland, and perhaps holding the balance of power at Westminster. Be that as it may, there is a very substantial chance that at some time in the next ten years the affairs of Scotland will acquire the sort of primacy in United Kingdom politics which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was afforded to the business of Ireland. It therefore behoves us to learn something about Scotland.

The Nevis Institute has pro-

duced a book of essays, under the editorship of its Director, Robert Underwood.* The essayists survey, in brief compass but at considerable depth, a large number of different aspects of Scotland's past, present and future: political, artistic, economic, educational, social, and on a considerable range of other matters. The conclusions are too diverse to summarise briefly. Suffice to say that in every aspect studied, it is absolutely clear that Scotland is not just a northern projection of England, but a country which undeniably sees itself as different from Eng-

**The future of Scotland*, ed. Robert Underwood, Croom Helm, £5.95.