

## LABOUR CONDITIONS IN THE WEST INDIES

Review of the Official Report by G. St. J. ORDE BROWNE, O.B.E., published by the Colonial Office. Cmd. 6070 ; price 3s. 6d.

MAJOR ORDE BROWNE has visited practically every island in every group of the British West Indies, and has never seen one where land values or the withholding of land or methods of taxation have any social effects. In 215 pages every other aspect of life is discussed at length. He frequently advocates peasant proprietorship of a few "owned" acres, with no hint of where their cost is to come from ; similarly with higher wages for traders to be organized into Unions ; and improved health and school services (p. 18). There are some hints of Imperial loans or even cash grants. "An undeveloped land tax such as exists in other colonies" is one egregious proposal—what colonies, when and where? (p. 32).

"Space is valuable and ground highly priced" in the slum areas of Port of Spain, *Trinidad* (p. 118). This was not observed by the Riots Commission.

In the Windward Islands share cropping is criticised, "as the landlord in most cases renders no service to justify his sharing the produce." No conclusion is drawn from this fact, on p. 140.

The writer observes on p. 143 that in *Grenada* an occupant will devote more money and care to a house built on land which he owns rather than to one which may possibly have to be demolished and re-erected elsewhere. He sees also that a man may be so impoverished by buying such land at a monopoly price that the appearance and material of the house are bad.

It is noted that in British Guiana a population of home owners would form a more reliable and cheaper supply of labour than the present hired population,

who have to be paid in slack time at a loss, or leave.

Georgetown, the capital, is crippled by inequitably assessed charges on rates for a costly and necessary drainage system : the workers are cruelly burdened by excessive rent and rates. There appears to be a small tax based on land valuation which "scarcely affects the majority of manual workers" (p. 174/5). Again no conclusion is drawn.

Many suggestions have been made to settle Jewish refugees and others on the vast, fertile and healthy wastes of British Honduras. The obstacle is revealed on p. 189, in the large land concessions which have been made—as the Belize Estate and Produce Company, with 1,062,959 acres—"without much consideration of further requirements." The Maya Indians have held to their village holdings and subsistence agriculture, forming an exception to unemployment problems.

British Honduras is noted (p. 204) as specially suited for a small man who can supplement the produce of his holding by occasional wage-employment.

The whole work is full of interest as a close study of law-made pauperism and chronic starvation in an earthly Paradise. It would give a totally false impression if the writer were thought of as knowing no better. He obviously is absolutely well informed on economic principles, but is subject to the censorship that such an official document, no doubt, has to undergo, especially in matters of policy : though the physiocratic education under Sir Horace Bryatt in Tanganyika can never be fully crushed, in shrewd and wise asides.

M. J. S.

## HEINRICH HEINE ON THE MOSAIC LAW

(Extract from Heine's *Confessions*, taken from Everyman's Edition of selections from his Prose and Poetry.)

OF ISRAEL's love of liberty, at a time when not only in its immediate vicinity, but also among all the nations of antiquity, even among the philosophical Greeks, the practice of slavery was justified and in full sway—of this I will not speak for fear of compromising the Bible in the eyes of the powers that be. No Socialist\* was more of a terrorist than our Lord and Saviour. Even Moses was such a Socialist ; although, like a practical man, he attempted only to reform existing usages concerning property. Instead of striving to effect the impossible, and rashly decreeing the abolition of private property, he only sought for its moralisation by bringing the rights of property into harmony with the laws of morality and reason.

This he accomplished by instituting the jubilee, at which period every alienated heritage, which among an agricultural people always consisted of land, would revert to the original owner, no matter in what manner it had been alienated. This institution offers the most marked contrast to the Roman statute of limitations, by which, after the expiration of a certain period the actual holder of an estate could no longer be compelled to restore the estate to the true owner, unless the latter should be able to show that within the prescribed time he had, with all the prescribed formalities, demanded restitution. This last condition opened wide the door for chicanery, particularly in a state where despotism and jurisprudence were at their zenith, and where the

unjust possessor had at command all means of intimidation, especially against the poor who might be unable to defray the expense of litigation.

The Roman was both soldier and lawyer, and that which he conquered with the strong arm he knew how to defend by the tricks of law. Only a nation of robbers and casuists could have invented the law of prescription, the statute of limitations, and consecrated it in that detestable book which may be called the bible of the Devil—I mean the codex of Roman civil law, which, unfortunately, still holds sway.

I have spoken of the affinity which exists between the Jews and the Germans, whom I once designated as the two pre-eminently moral nations. While on this subject I desire to direct attention to the ethical disapprobation with which the ancient German law stigmatizes the statute of limitations : this I consider a noteworthy fact. To this very day the Saxon peasant uses the beautiful and touching aphorism : "A hundred years of wrong do not make a single year of right."

The Mosaic law, through the institution of the jubilee year, protests still more decidedly. Moses did not seek to abolish the right of property ; on the contrary, it was his wish that everyone should possess property, so that no one might be tempted by poverty to become a bondsman and thus acquire slavish propensities. Liberty was always the great emancipator's leading thought, and it breathes and glows in all his statutes concerning pauperism.

\* It will be allowed that Heine used this term to mean social reformer.—EDITOR, *Land and Liberty*.