

of these valuations made in the present abnormal circumstances were absolutely useless for any permanent purpose.

"CLASS INTERESTS."

The EARL OF CROMER said the Government were impressing upon individuals to practise economy; but what were they doing themselves? They appointed a Retrenchment Committee, and the first order that Committee received was that they were not to deal with war expenditure. That Order was a great mistake. It was based upon the idea that because we were at war we ought to be extravagant, whereas economy and efficiency in war went hand in hand. (Hear, hear.) The Retrenchment Committee were also told that to enter upon an investigation of the Land Valuation Department involved the discussion of class interests. That simply meant that in order to stop the mouths of a small and violent section of the House of Commons, a sop must be given to them. The House of Commons had abrogated its most important function, the checking of expenditure, and had constantly pressed the Chancellor of the Exchequer to spend more than he had desired.

THE GOVERNMENT REPLY.

The MARQUESS OF CREWE said that practically all the speeches had made it clear that the question of land valuation was liable to awaken the sleeping party dogs. For his own part he was particularly anxious to avoid raising any party issue, and therefore would refrain from discussing the principle of land valuation and the purpose for which that valuation had been instituted. He would therefore merely say in regard to the general question, that he did not think the comparison which Lord Middleton had made between the amount expended upon the institution and the value of the revenue produced was really fair. The setting up of the institution would naturally cost more than its future maintenance. But he thought it important to point out that an attack levelled at the institution would arouse a profound feeling in the minds of many people. Not only land-taxers and land nationalists, but the Liberal Party and the Labour Party would regard an attack upon the principle of the valuation of land for the purpose of special taxation as a definite breach of the party truce, and would refuse to believe that it was inspired by a desire for economy or the necessity of obtaining more men for the Army. The fact remained that a proportion of the people of this country who favoured land valuation felt that the debate was not inspired by a desire for economy or for recruits, but was inspired by a desire to drive a wedge into the principle of valuing land for the purpose of taxation. The figures applicable to the Department were these—the permanent staff of the office included 349 men, of whom 118 were serving with the fighting forces, which left 231. From these the Department hoped to spare 80 more, which would leave 151. The Government wished the Department to be treated on precisely similar terms as other Departments, and that it should be cut down to a scale compatible with its services, but the Government were not prepared to abolish the Department altogether during the war. So far as agricultural land was concerned he was not aware there would be any pressing difficulty in valuing it fairly, all valuations of course being subject to fluctuation in the future. There was no rule forbidding the transfer of officials from one State Department to another.

The MARQUESS OF SALISBURY said the leader of the House would not be surprised to learn that his reply was not considered satisfactory. The country did not care two straws about party policy. All the party innuendoes of the noble marquess belonged to years gone by and were utterly out of place in the present state of things. Did the noble marquess mean by his warning to noble lords that to agitate this question might excite retaliation in regard to the money enjoyed by the Church, that he thought they were so mean that in order to save institutions which they cared about they would abstain from telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about those institutions in order to make some party point? The noble marquess would realise to-morrow that his speech was quite unworthy of him and of the position which he occupies. The matter could not be allowed to rest where it was. If the Government were to suspend the operations of the Department the act would be accepted by the country as proof of their earnestness in urging the great importance of economy, public and private.

## COMPULSORY LAND CULTIVATION IN FRANCE

M. Meline, the French Minister of Agriculture, has brought before the Chamber of Deputies a "measure for putting into cultivation abandoned land and for the organisation of agriculture during the war." The Bill is prefaced by a long memorandum pointing out that the area sown with autumn cereals in 1915 was less by 739,000 hectares (1,830,000 acres) than that of 1914, a falling off of 10 per cent., and that the situation which is already serious will become still more critical after the war is over, "because the countries released from war will throw themselves *en masse* upon all the markets of the world and will create a famine of food provisions." The text of the Bill, for which we are indebted to JUSTICE (March 9th) is as follows:—

The President of the French Republic. Decree:

The project of law, of which the tenour follows, will be presented to the Chamber of Deputies by the Minister of Agriculture and by the Home Secretary (Ministre de l'Intérieur), who are charged to expound the motives and to support the debate thereon.

### ARTICLE 1.

Within fifteen days from the promulgation of this law, the mayor of each commune, assisted by two municipal councillors, shall invite, by registered letter, the owner or the usual tenant of lands not cultivated to put these lands in cultivation. If within fifteen days from this notice the "exploitant" does not give sufficient reasons to justify the abandonment of his land, the mayor will have the right to requisition those lands, and he can hand them over, to be put in cultivation, to the communal committee of agriculture constituted by decree.

For execution of the works, the mayor will have the right of requisition as regards agricultural implements, animal traction, and disposable premises in the commune.

Prefectorial by-laws, submitted to the approval of the Minister of Agriculture, will determine the forms and the limits within which municipalities can operate these requisitions, as well as the mode of regulating these indemnities.

### ARTICLE 2.

The expenses incurred, the advances to be made for the execution of these works, will be guaranteed by the commune. In case of insufficient resources the latter will be authorised, by virtue of the first article of the law of November 5th, 1894, to borrow the necessary sum from the nearest "caisse de Credit agricole."

### ARTICLE 3.

The municipality, or the agricultural committee, will superintend, at the risks and perils of the owner or of the "exploitant," the execution of the works up to the complete carrying of the harvest, which will be sold by its direction. The product of this sale will be divided among the right owners after deduction of

1. Taxes if occasion requires.

2. Proportionately to the expenses effected on each piece of land, out of the sums advanced by the commune, plus interest. The excess will be remitted in full to the "exploitants," if the latter have not themselves sown and cultivated for a cause resulting from the state of war and independent of their will.

The third of this excess will be retained from the "exploitants" who cannot justify the plea of "force majeure," and paid over to the municipal funds.

### ARTICLE 4.

The statement of expenses, of receipts, and of the repartition shall be submitted to the Municipal Council and ratified by it as in matters of the communal budget.

### ARTICLE 5.

The present law, if it is not prorogued, is only applicable as long as mobilisation lasts.