

THE CROFTERISATION OF SCOTLAND

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Lord Rosebery, in referring to the Small Landholders Act as an attempt at the "crofterisation of Scotland," got himself into considerable disrepute among the "faithful."

Unfortunately, Lord Rosebery's fears have remained unfulfilled: The Small Landholders Act so far has shown very miserable results—the new crofts its machinery has created could easily be counted on the fingers and toes of the men for whom the Act provides thumping salaries.

In Lord Rosebery's view the Land Act was a most fearsome engine—a sort of giant destructor, which was to break up the fair farms of Scotland—after first gouging their "eyes" out—crush them into mincemeat, and, generally, make an end of all things. But unfortunately, we say, the sight of "lazy crofters" leaning, hands in pockets, at gable-ends in support of their miserable hovels, is a sight which, despite the Land Act, does not yet disfigure the landscape as viewed from the windows of Dalmeny or any other Lothian castle.

The fearsome engine has indeed consumed a lot of "petrol," as Mr. Lloyd George has aptly termed the money which is supposed to give it the motive power, but what between landlords' compensation, lawyers' fees, and officials' salaries, most of it has been consumed without much real work being accomplished. Certainly, having regard to the amount of petrol consumed, the results, as we have said, are miserable indeed. Mr. Lloyd George a few years since suggested more petrol: Let's have no more petrol wasted on this cumbrous engine, whose efficiency is a minus quantity.

Scotland would be none the worse of a little more "crofterisation," but for all that Lord Rosebery expressed a general sentiment when he decried this as a worthy ideal for Scottish reformers to set up. There may be much to be said on behalf of establishing a nation of small farmers, with the soil checked off as evenly as a Rob Roy Tartan, and apportioned out among privileged occupants, but as the people of Scotland are built to-day they have no love of the thing.

The Birthright

An increase in the number of small holdings they could stand; they are indeed convinced that that is advisable. They want to stay rural depopulation, and to re-awaken and re-establish country life, but a nation of small farmers is not to-day the Scottish ideal.

There is indeed a land problem, but the solution is not to be found in the crofterisation of Scotland. What land reformers see is that rural depopulation, the crowding of the country people into the towns, the low wages, the poverty, the slums, the disease, the vice, are due to one and the same cause—an iniquitous land system.

These troubles that assail are the natural and inevitable consequence of the first great transgression, which robs the people of what is in the most real and literal sense their birthright—access to the land. Of that the bulk of opinion in Scotland to-day is firmly convinced; and, after the war (there are already unmistakable signs of the coming storm) the demand will not be for so many crofts, and so many land colonies, and so many co-operative banks, and the loan of so much capital at so much per cent., but a peremptory demand for the restoration of the people's birth-right—it will be a demand for access to the land.

Truly, when the boys come home we do not intend that our war-worn heroes shall be driven to swell the unemployed and further congest the slums; neither do we wish to drive them to seek in other climes the subsistence which "the land they have defended" denies them. There is land for all and work for all in the country of their birth

for those who choose to stay, and we intend to see to it that they will not be driven forth who wish to make their native land their home.

But that doesn't mean that we must set up "farm colonies," or get the State to "subsidise agriculture,"—as the paying of blackmail to the landlord to allow the land to be used is euphoniously styled. After all, hasn't a war-worn soldier as good a claim on the State to set him up in a hairdressing establishment, or a shooting gallery, or a cinema palace, or a photographer's studio, or a butcher's shop (we trust we have used the correct "trade" substantives) as on a croft? Is the soldier to be helped to grow potatoes because the State thinks it is a good thing to have potatoes grown, or is the State's assistance intended as an acknowledgment of the man's right to grow potatoes if he wants to? If the latter, then similar assistance must be given to all disbanded soldiers, and, indeed to all citizens, whatever occupation they may choose to follow.

Peddling Schemes

All sorts of peddling schemes are already afoot to "settle soldiers on the land," and so solve the "land problem." For the most part the authors, or foster parents, have no idea of what the land question really is, much less how to seek its solution.

With most of them solving the land question means something in the way of the "crofterisation" of Scotland or of England—meaning by "crofterisation" putting people on to patches of land and placing hoes and spades in their hands. And it is all to be very prettily arranged—quite in the German fashion: the patients, or pupils, or prisoners, or victims, or whatever they ought to be called, are to be treated on an economic basis; they are to be given really good hoes and rakes, and sheep and pigs of the very best breed; and they are to receive capital on the very best co-operative terms; and they are to buy their seeds on the same principle; and their pass-books are to be kept for them very neatly and correctly by paid accountants, showing a man at a glance how much he owes; and they are to have schools for their children, and picture-houses to go after the day's hoeing is done; and their hours of rising and lying down are to be printed and nicely framed; and in short everything is to be arranged that they may become healthy and wealthy and wise, and so may lead disciplined lives and be able to pay their interest and their rent, and perhaps capital instalments, regularly and in full to the day of their death.

But that style of thing is not solving the land question in any real sense. The land question is not a mere matter of cultivating the land. It interests directly the townsman as well as the rural dweller; it affects the shopkeeper, the factories, and the mines. People don't want to be further disciplined and regimented; we want no more of the ideal of "efficiency" achieved through "organisation." This is a path which leads straight to destruction—of which truth Germany is a sad example. What we do want, and want badly, and will fight for till we get it or die, is a larger freedom.

Mr. Young's Proposals

Mr. William Young, the Liberal Member for East Perthshire, has invited the Scottish Liberal Members to discuss one of those pettifogging schemes. He hopes for a settlement of the land question "by agreement." The thing is a delusion. There can be no agreement, except those who deny access to the land agree to remove their toll-gates.

As regard the Land Act of 1911 Mr. Young admits its complete failure. That is satisfactory. We prophesied its failure on the day it passed on to the Statute Book. The causes of its failure are given by Mr. Young thus:—

(a) The cumbersome machinery by which an unwilling

landlord can delay and effectively stop the progress of any particular scheme of settlement by excessive claims for compensation; (b) the inadequacy of the annual monetary provision for the acquisition of land; (c) the absence of mandatory powers to organise credit banks and co-operative societies; (d) the inertia which has marked the administration of the Act.

He then pleads for special powers for the purchase of land to establish colonies, and an increased grant to carry out the necessary development. Land purchase is indeed the pivot of Mr. Young's scheme, but he fears the landlords may exact too high a price to make the holdings profitable concerns. We quite sympathise with him here—albeit in an amused sort of way. So he wants powers to compel the landlords to part with their land at a figure which the land would be likely to fetch in the open market. This is indeed charming in its simplicity. What we would like to know is whether it is the market price with the State as bidder. If so the market price will be more than the land is worth.

Mr. Young's scheme is a hopelessly sad affair to ask us to discuss at this time of day. His land reform scheme provides simply for the setting up of a number of crofts of small holdings. He wants to arrange for fixity of tenure and fair rent. But that is not enough. He goes further. To make the holdings a success certain principles must be observed:—

- (1) The most modern cultural methods must be employed.
- (2) A small holding must not be an isolated entity, but one of a community of small holders working together co-operatively.
- (3) An adequate supply of working capital must be made available to the holder to enable him, irrespective of seasonal necessities, to work his holding with a maximum of efficiency.

It is a pity that before appearing before the public as a land reformer, Mr. Young wouldn't sit down and study the elements of the question. It is futile to go and work out details as to the kind of shovels and hoes the smallholders are to use until you have first settled the first question—on what terms is access to the land to be given?

When you have settled that, if you have settled it properly, you will find that the other things have settled themselves.

We record with deep regret the death of 2nd Lieut. J. V. McLean, 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment, which took place at Endsleigh Palace Hospital, London, on July 17th, as the result of a wound received during the recent fighting in France. John McLean was a graduate of Glasgow University and was for a time a school teacher in Glasgow. He emigrated to Canada a few years ago and entered the Actuarial Department of the Sun Life of Canada Assurance Company, Montreal, where he was a general favourite both on account of his charming disposition and on account of his marked ability as a mathematician and as a business man. He enlisted as a private in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and after serving for a while in France obtained a commission in the British Army. He had laid the foundations of a good career, and, but for the unfortunate accident that cut his life short at an early age, would have been a powerful influence in promoting our movement in Eastern Canada. His wife, his father and mother, and our co-workers in Montreal, have the profoundest sympathy of his British friends in the loss of this good man.

BOOK REVIEWS

AGRICULTURE AFTER THE WAR*

Confident as we are in the enormous possibilities of greater production that would be let loose by the wider and better distribution of land, accompanied by the overthrow of land monopoly, we welcome Mr. A. D. Hall's frank recognition of conscious neglect and misuse of land on the part of those who now control it; that to us is the chief feature of the arguments he presents in this book. In proving that the existing conditions of agriculture are due to that neglect and misuse and to bad farming in every sense, he has sufficiently established a case which we can take out of his book and consider on its own merits apart from his strangely contradictory recommendations in favour of encouraging the cultivation of land by bounties and other expenditure of public funds.

The value of Mr. A. D. Hall's testimony is all the greater because he is an acknowledged authority not on the politics but on the business of agriculture, and he speaks as an expert to those men of "practical experience" who at aristocratic Farmers' Clubs and Chambers of Agriculture always warmly resent any suggestion that farm land in this country is, to any extent, culpably held idle. The landowner and the large farmer would represent the facts otherwise, if only to prevent more people having access to the soil, and in Mr. Hall's criticisms they have their answer. The student of the land question might usefully note these passages:—

"A given area of land will produce when under the plough, in addition to its usual yield of wheat and barley, just as much cattle food as the same area under grass. The number of men employed in agriculture has declined with the plough land; 100 acres of arable land will employ as many as four men, while 200 or 300 acres of grazing can be looked after by a single man. During the forty years under review three and a half million acres have passed from arable to grass, and 261 thousand men have left agriculture." (p. 24.)

"On the average farm the expert cannot say 'do this' or 'use that' and success will ensue: he sees instead a general low level both of knowledge and of management. In every district certain farms stand out, and if the neighbouring holdings, with the same class of land and the same opportunities, were only worked with equal intelligence and energy there would be no agricultural question to discuss. In many parts of the country it is clear that the farmer is occupying more land than he can properly manage with the capital at his disposal." (p. 27.)

"It is not too much to say that if the farming throughout Great Britain reached the standard, not of the best, but of the good farmers existing in every district, there would be an increased production of food of from 10 to 15 per cent. without any addition to the existing proportion of arable land." (p. 100.)

"We know that at the scale of prices prevailing during the years immediately preceding the war, with wheat about 35s. per quarter, arable farming was distinctly prosperous—so much so that it might with profit have been extended over at least as much land as had been under the plough in 1872." (p. 104.)

"It is not true that live stock can only be maintained upon grass land, or that an equal head of stock can be kept upon grass as upon the same land under the plough. All land is more productive under the plough and will maintain more cattle and sheep upon the crops that can be grown than upon the grass which is produced without cultivation." (p. 29.)

"The holdings in this country are very often too large for the occupier's capital, so that they are worked at a low productive level with a comparatively small expenditure on labour per acre. Not only is capital generally deficient, but in many cases where the occupier may be possessed of adequate means his standard of management is so low, his business organisation so imperfect, that he

* AGRICULTURE AFTER THE WAR. By A. D. Hall, F.R.S., John Murray, London. Price 3s. 6d. net.