

NEW ZEALAND

The Town of Waitara in Taranaki recently adopted land value rating as the result of a poll of ratepayers. Waitara has a population of 1,787.—*The Liberator*, February.

INDIA

The Hardships of the Peasants

By M. J. S.

The new book* by Mr Trevaskis is probably the best account yet given of the successive failures of British rule in India to maintain the ancient rights of the people to the value of their land as vested in the Ruler as Trustee and "Protector of the Poor." The terrible story is lightly touched on of the ruin of Bengal under Cornwallis, when Britain established the Mogul tax collectors as great landlords at a fixed rental. The rights of the cultivators were ignored completely, and under this "Permanent Settlement" the newly created landlords of Bengal were left free to enjoy the whole increased value of land and to rack rent the helpless people. The peasant has sunk to the position of an impoverished serf, and Bengal, the richest province in India, is unable to pay the cost of its own administration, because while the peasantry are impoverished great landlords with incomes exceeding a quarter of a million pay only the land tax fixed 140 years ago, and do not pay a farthing as income tax or succession duties. The mildest race of Asia are reduced to maddened and hopeless pauperism, and every adjacent landholder is furious with jealousy at paying something like a fair rent *plus* onerous direct and indirect taxes to help the State to fatten the privileged class in Bengal. Is the "ruin of Bengal" too strong a term to use? But in the tenets of Georgeism there is immediate and the only helpful remedy.

When British rule was extended to the Punjab, the last great province, as Bengal was the first, the ideal of English landlordism had been abandoned, and the new will-o'-the-wisp was Free Trade in land and/or Peasant Proprietary.

A mere fraction of the site value was collected, and at the regular re-assessments improvements were levied on equally with the public inheritance of site values. A large equity in land value was thus placed in the hands of poor farmers, who were heavily rented on their improvements and taxed severely in other ways. Mortgages became general as soon as the "lawless" despotism of the "strong" Commissioners of the first twenty years gave place to a code of law under which "If a Deputy Commissioner wished to help a starving village, or to prevent the alienation of a peasant's holding to the moneylender, he was told that this was contrary to the general principles of political economy, that free trade in land (which had never been recognized by Indian rulers) was necessarily good for freemen, and that the replacement of an owner who had shown himself thriftless and incompetent by one of superior intelligence and greater command of capital cannot be otherwise than beneficial." That doctrine held the field during the last quarter of the past century: it played into the hands of the moneylender and the lawyer; the peasantry were being steadily expropriated to become the helots of their new masters until terrible outbreaks and reprisals showed the Government the madness of not collecting the full economic rent of the land. The British officials as a body tried to protect the peasants from the inevitable consequences of the

economic position in which they themselves had placed them. The Indian capitalists and *intelligensia* strenuously opposed (as they still do) any interference with a system which left them free under the forms of law to exploit the peasant and gain the benefit of the enormous increase in land values (from 2 to 200 years' purchase of the annual "land tax") resulting from British administration.

The final decision was to prohibit lending money on land mortgage except by castes which have no money to lend—in effect: and to sell at a trivial price the freehold of farm lands in the new irrigation settlements—a subject to be handled in Mr Trevaskis' new Volume II. "Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm" is the motto. First stage, "embattled farmers": second stage, "Peasantry": third stage, "To show in some dark hour of hate what things the wretched dare." A famous statue in the Punjab offers the people "The Sword or the Pen—which will you have?" The sword only strikes occasionally and may be used on occasion to remedy as well as to oppress. The pen directed by ignorant men of false ideals can and does bring whole populations of those engaged in honest productive work to destitution, while maddening the predatory classes and individuals that anything at all is left to their victims by straining the "law." The remedy is so simple and easy—to revise the rentals where necessary according to site values only; to do this not only in the country but in the towns, with the help of civic bodies; to assure to local authorities a large share of this fund, to obtain their willing aid (with due supervision of their expenditure); and to refund to all payers of such rents any and all other taxes paid by them and their dependents for upkeep of landlords elsewhere. Will India do it?

PALESTINE

Col. Wedgwood's Account

In *The Seventh Dominion*,* which deals with the relations in Palestine between the Jews and the British Government, the issues are stated with great lucidity and comprehension. The author has provided a wealth of information and some trenchant "criticism of the secretariat." Embodied in his story there is much of interest about methods of representative government in India and Cyprus which should be a real warning to those who have the future of Palestine in their care. How land settlement was carried out in Macedonia for Greek refugees from Asia Minor as well as for the Jews in the Ukraine (by the Russian Government) is described in such detail as to give the book a place of its own. Repeatedly Col. Wedgwood emphasises the importance of the land question and shows how the problem of access to land and of just taxation is of paramount importance in the building up of the new communities in Palestine. Gravest of all the impediments that Zionism has had to face is the exorbitant price exacted for land. "Government officials," he writes, "uncoached in protecting the interests of the Crown, seem to have protected the interests of native property owners. They accepted as genuine claims which the Turks would have laughed at, and Crown lands became private property for all time—only, this private property remains still unused. . . . The Jews wanted land which they could drain and lease from the Government, so Government looked into the matter and made a 'settlement.' Native rights were to be preserved.

* *The Seventh Dominion*. By Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, D.S.O., M.P. (The Labour Publishing Company, 38, Great Ormond Street, London, W.C.1. Price 4s. 6d. cloth; 2s. 6d. paper.)

* *The Land of the Five Rivers (the Punjab)*. By H. K. Trevaskis. (Oxford University Press, 1928, 10/6 net.)

Directly the inquiry started, the Bedouin rushed in and claimed the lot. Their claims were welcomed, granted royally, and Sir Herbert Samuel's excellent intentions have ended in Arab titles to excessive and untilled lands, while none is left for the Crown to lease to the Jews." The two chief direct taxes are the Tithe and the Wergo, and both constitute the most damning indictment of the Palestine Government. The Tithe is a tax on the gross produce of agriculture. The peasant may not sell his harvested crop till the difficult business of assessment has been effected. The crop has to wait and perhaps rot upon the floor or miss the market. The Wergo is a tax upon real estate and the valuation upon which it is based is so old as to be beyond memory. All unbuil upon suburban land escapes valuation and therefore taxation. What makes the tax a perfect example of injustice and so unique is that the valuation is only raised when sales occur and the purchase price takes the place of the old valuation. Both Tithe and Wergo definitely discourage any sort of development or enterprise. These are important considerations Col. Wedgwood has put before his readers. It is not surprising that progress of the great experiment in colonization is slow. On balance, some 90,000 Jews have settled in Palestine since the war, making 160,000 all told. Of these not more than 32,000 have found any work on the land and less than 5,000 are working as free men or women in the 41 new free Zionist Colonies.

A. W. M

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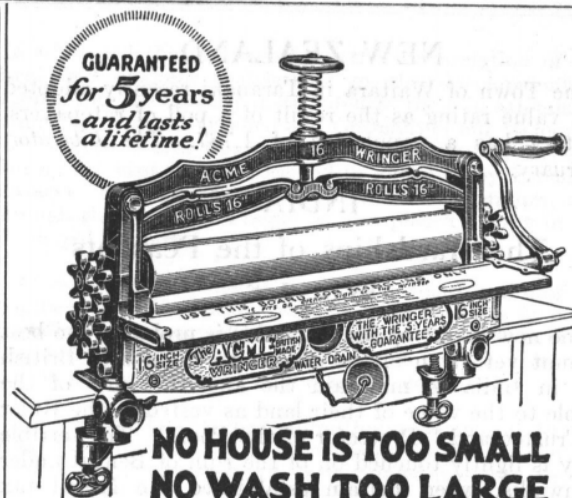
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