

Some farmers give a ton of coal and a certain number of faggots, but this also varies.

Men, if they want holidays, have to pay for them.

Even the Christmas Day holiday is deducted from the scanty wage. There is no half-day; the dreary round goes on with no alleviation to its misery and monotony.

A pathetic instance of the suffering of the children was given me by a child, the daughter of the man with the large family—

“Vicar, mother says there will be no Santa Clause this year.”

Poor little children! Even this gleam of brightness was taken away from them.

THE PROSPEROUS FARMER

Now what of the farmer?

During the nine years of my vicarage in Dorset the use of motor-cars by farmers is becoming universal. They seem to have an unailing supply of petrol, and are the only class in the village who can afford to use cars in war time. It is difficult to find a poor farmer, and they obtain their land at prices which seem most inadequate compared with the amount the small holder has to pay. They are careful to keep the assessments down to the lowest possible value.

Nothing is done for the moral or material advantage of the labourer or his wife. They are a brake on educational reform, and they have entirely appropriated the parish council and rural district council as their own. Consequently all reform is vetoed, and anything which would benefit the labourer quickly shelved.

“Punch,” in the early forties, contrasted the position of the prize pig and the prize labourer. His stock, in the Dorset farmer’s eyes, is far more important than his men.

The remedy for much of this evil is what the National Agricultural Union is demanding—a minimum wage of at least 30s. a week.

I distrust a Wage Board; it would become in time the willing servant of the farmers’ clubs and associations. No one unacquainted with the condition of things in the country can understand the influence the farmer wields, and how he contrives to get all under his influence.

The apathy of the Bishops of the rural dioceses and the majority of the clergy is astonishing.

They fear to make the state of things which exists public. Yet, in the final settlement of the wage question, they will have to contribute their share from tithes and land to the rural welfare, and this should have been done long ago; in fact, their association with the landowning class has been more of a curse than a blessing to the Church, just as a temporal lordship is destructive of spiritual power and influence.

COTTAGES AND HOLIDAYS

Secondly, the cottages must be improved, and the owner forced to keep them in decent repair.

The men must share in the public holidays and in the half-day, at the expense of their employers, and be encouraged to take an interest in the development of their parochial and county affairs.

Political influence or interference on the part of either landowner or farmer must be absolutely barred; educational facilities must be offered, and the whole system of rural education overhauled and placed in broader and more sympathetic hands than the present; and the labourer must be encouraged to be, not a slave but a free man, conscious of his own rights and his importance to the welfare of the nation at large.

AN OLD CHINESE SOLUTION OF THE LAND QUESTION

By W. P. TONER

(Aged 16½ years—student at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire.)

At the present time, when the land question is in everybody’s mind and on everybody’s tongue, one is apt to think that his own solution of that important matter presents quite a new line of thought on the subject, and that all other methods of solving the problem must of necessity be erroneous in principle, and must, consequently, collapse in practice. We, land taxers, however, are accustomed to take a broader and more historical view of the subject. For while we certainly do not admit that there can be any solution of the land problem so thorough, effectual and just, as that laid down by Henry George, we, nevertheless, do not deny that there are many other solutions of the problem which have attained at least a partial success, and which have served, for want of better, for very long periods of time.

By way of historical contrast, therefore, let us draw attention to a solution of this problem which has prevailed for a very long period in China, where it is known as the law of thirty per cent. When we consider that China is a country of three hundred millions of inhabitants, and that within its borders it contains territory subject to almost every kind of climate, we must come to the conclusion that a system of land tenure which has ruled in that extensive land for such a long period, is well worthy of the consideration of modern economists. As is perfectly natural to suppose, many Chinese political economists have from time to time discussed the question of land monopoly, and much heated discussion has taken place in that country amongst the various writers on the subject. Before quoting from one of the champions of this reform—for at its institution it was so considered in China—we must premise that this law means that the Chinese Government has fixed the rate of interest on borrowed money at thirty per cent. per annum throughout all their dominions. The object of this enormous rate of interest was to lower the value of land, and so prevent its accumulation in the hands of a few. A secondary and not less important object was aimed at. This was to prevent the hoarding of money and compel its constant circulation for the purpose of facilitating the land culture and the commerce which are of vital necessity to a nation like China, entirely dependant, as she is, on her own produce. It is time now to allow the Chinese economist to speak for himself. T’chao-Yng, a distinguished writer of the Celestial Empire writes as follows on the subject:—

“It is evident that money being inferior to land, as being more casual in itself, and in the income derived from it, the same value in land will always be preferred to that which is in money. It is evident, also, that in order not to run the risks to which money is liable, people will like even to possess a smaller value in land with greater security. The smaller value is proportioned to the risks of money and its profits.

“The more the interest of money is raised, the more land is required, all risks being compensated, to equal it, as you must have a greater number of acres of bad land to equal a smaller of that which is good and fertile. Now the more land is required to equal money, the easier is it for the poor citizens to preserve what land they have, and even to acquire a certain quantity; since it is not needful for that to be rich; and for the same reason the divisions are easy in families, and advantageous to the state for the lands which the Government has had especially in view. Why? Because property in land produces always more to those who cultivate it themselves, and that the rich, who possess more than they can cultivate, lose for the state in neglecting their lands, or making them over to others, what those gain who are their own cultivators—a certain and inevitable loss, to which must also be added the risks of the harvest and the

casualties of payment; a loss consequently, which, being aggravated by these risks, renders the purchase of land less advantageous to them than to the poor, and must facilitate it to the latter in the same proportion that it disgusts the former."

After having shown by examples that the landed possessions of the people have always increased in proportion as the interest of money was high, Tchao-Yng concludes thus:—

"The great advantage which the law of interest at thirty per cent. has aimed at and obtained is, that the cultivators of land, who are the most numerous, the most useful, the most moral, and laborious portion of the community, may possess property in land, and have enough to subsist upon without being rich, and not be the unfortunate slaves of the moneyed interest, of those citizens who fatten their useless idleness on the fruit of the labour of these unfortunate men."

But this eminent writer seems to ignore the fact that the man who lends out his money at thirty per cent. is actually fattening "his useless idleness on the fruit of the labour of these unfortunate men" who till the land. This is a serious defect in the system, but, however, it has succeeded effectually in crushing the land monopoly in China, no matter what its other effects might be.—By W. P. TONER

IDLE LAND FOR FOOD

Official Recognition of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society

The authority for turning idle lands to productive purposes in London, under the new order of the Board of Agriculture, is the County Council; and they have been recommended by the Board of Agriculture to avail themselves of the services of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society which has been engaged on this work for eight years.

Hitherto the Society has endeavoured to give effect to its objects by seeking to secure the co-operation of landowners in London willing to lend free of charge any vacant or unused land which they might have no immediate prospect of using, the Society holding itself responsible for the right use of the land and the handing of it back when the owner required it. By these voluntary arrangements the Society has obtained plots in London for 819 heads of families.

Now there is a waiting list of nearly a thousand applicants, and as the vacant land in London capable of being brought into cultivation amounts to 14,000 acres, the Society hopes to be able to satisfy them all, with the help, if necessary, of the new compulsory powers.

The total expenditure of the Society for the year has not exceeded £180. Office accommodation is provided free at 14, Buckingham Street, W.C., by Mr. Walter Coates, and the secretarial work is done by Mr. John Gorman without charge.

The Treasury has decided to make a small grant for the coming year in order that the work of the Society may be still further extended.

Mr. Gorman gave to a representative of THE TIMES some particulars of the actual cash value of the plots to the cultivators. Returns obtained from 262 plots worked throughout the year showed that the value of the foodstuffs produced was £1,810 4s., or approximately £78 9s. an acre. "This result," said Mr. Gorman, "is highly encouraging and satisfactory, considering the nature of much of the land, and the conditions under which it is cultivated. Some of the vacant building sites from which these crops of vegetables were raised were ugly and insanitary rubbish heaps. At Battersea, last spring, the plowholders removed 80 tons of loose stones and rubbish from two acres, and had to go down in some places 8 ft. or 10 ft. to find the proper soil. This is an exceptional case, but it shows how the most unlikely-looking plot can be transformed into a beauty spot profitably gay with potatoes, cabbages and onions."—THE TIMES, 28th December.

COLONIAL AND FOREIGN

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Port Augusta for the Rating of Land Values by a Vote of 215 to 13

During the past two years we have been trying to get the Town Council of Port Augusta to take a poll under the Land Values Assessment Act. Port Augusta is the starting point in South Australia of the East-West Transcontinental Railway. The Federal government are spending over £8,000,000 in building and equipping this railway. A big sum of money is being spent in Port Augusta in building engine and carriage sheds, new wharfs, electric lighting works, and other public improvements. Naturally with this expenditure the population has increased and as a result land values have also gone up. Land speculators have a number of vacant blocks in the town held out of use for a further rise, whilst people are living in tents owing to the scarcity of houses.

We pointed out to the local councillors the need of taking for the community the land values which the community creates, instead of allowing the increment to flow into private pockets. After a good deal of agitation a motion to take a poll was carried through the Council, and the voting took place on Saturday, December 2nd.

With a view to arousing interest in the question the League sent me to Port Augusta. Public meetings were held, literature placed in every house, and a post card sent to every one whose rates would be reduced under land values. According to the Act a tentative assessment has to be prepared, and exhibited for 21 days before the poll, showing the rates paid under the present system, and what each will pay under land values. We go through this assessment and send out post cards as stated.

Under land values in Port Augusta, 4½d in the £ would produce about £30 more revenue than is now derived from a rate of 2s. 3d. in the £ on improvements, and furthermore the land values rate is just in its incidence.

The efforts put forth were the means of bringing the poll to a successful issue. The voting was:—In favour of land values, 215, against, 13, informal, 2. This makes thirteen municipalities in South Australia that have adopted land values as the basis for raising revenue.

E. J. CRAIGIE.

CANADA

The Land Waste in the West

The tremendous loss to the west by the illegitimate exploitation of the land was the theme of a vigorous and brilliant address by Lieutenant-Governor Sir James Aikins at a banquet given in the Royal Alexandra, Thursday night, by the Travellers', Sales-managers' and Credit Managers' Association.

Sir James astonished the 600 guests in attendance with the statement that of 100,000,000 acres of arable land granted to homesteaders, soldiers, railway corporations, the Hudson's Bay Company and various private interests, only one-third was being worked. The address of the Lieutenant-Governor was so complete with detailed figures showing the wanton waste and speculation of the West's greatest asset as to indicate long hours of study and research on the question.—GRAIN TRADE NEWS, Winnipeg, 30th December.