

## A PROTECTIONIST COLLAPSE

By Brougham Villiers

Supposing things had been different, and the Tariff Reformers had won the election of 1910, what would have happened now? The reader may consider this an idle question and may hasten to answer, "Nobody can tell." It happens, however, to be one of the few questions to which it is possible to reply with the utmost confidence. If "Tariff Reform" had been established in 1910, it would have been disestablished again already. This is not speculation; it is a practical certainty. Even if Protection had been adopted in this country, it would have been still a new and bitterly-resented thing, much less able to withstand the strain of war than the same system in Continental lands, where the people have been accustomed to it for years. In no Protectionist country, except Belgium, is there such a large population to the square mile as here, and nowhere else would agrarian protection, even if long established, have been so hard to maintain in time of stress. If, then, the Tories had won the elections of 1910, we might readily have seen Mr. Austen Chamberlain instituting Tariff Reform in that year and repealing it in 1914.

For Mr. Chamberlain would have been compelled to do what every other Protectionist Finance Minister in Europe, where the conditions even remotely approach those of our country, has had to do. The slow, wearisome progress of trench warfare may kill militarism by a lingering death, but the war took no such long time to deal a deadly blow at agrarian Protection. Almost immediately the food tariffs of Europe collapsed, as a glance at the following list of compulsory food tax suspensions will show:

On September 17th, 1914, the GERMAN tariff on bread, beans, butter, eggs, poultry, edible fats, fish, meat, prepared alimentary products, cereals and flour, potatoes, cheese, cattle, pigs, sheep, and margarine was suspended, and on May 6th, 1915, the taxes on certain fruits, game, arrowroot, sago and tapioca, sugar and yeast followed suit.

Beginning on October 9th, 1914, by a series of orders the AUSTRIANS suspended their import food duties on wheat, spelt, rye, oats, barley, maize, buckwheat, millet, pease, beans, lentils, meal and products made from meal, condensed milk, sago, tapioca and similar products, cattle, meat, bread, vegetables, dairy produce, bacon, poultry, fish and pigs.

In FRANCE the duties on meat, eggs, butter, barley, maize and potatoes have gone, while wheat is placed under a special régime to control the price.

In ITALY the Government suspended the duties on wheat, rye, oats, barley, white maize, cereals, flour, semolina, bran, edible pastes, bread and ship's biscuits as early as January 1st, 1915—long before Italy entered into the war.

SPAIN got rather slowly to work, suspending and again imposing various food duties, until by January, 1916, the following, among others, figured on the free list: Wheat and wheat flour, rice, chick pease and lentils, kidney beans, potatoes, fresh meat, bacon, hams, salted pig meat, eggs, birds, maize (except for the production of alcohol), barley, oats, cattle, hogs, sheep and goats, dari or sorghum, millet, rye and other cereals, pulse and flours of barley, maize, millet, dari, and other cereals. A fairly comprehensive free list for a highly Protectionist country like Spain, which, moreover, is not actually engaged in the war!

In PORTUGAL "special measures have been taken allowing the Government to import a certain quantity of wheat," and allowing the importation of maize and rye at a reduced rate. In SWITZERLAND the importation and sale of cereals was taken over by the State as early as January, 1915; while even in SWEDEN and NORWAY the duties on wheat, flour and potatoes have had to be suspended. I have

taken no account in this article of the less numerous, but not insignificant suspensions of duties on manufactured articles, but enough has been given to show that the fabric of Protection as it was in Europe is for the present in ruins.

The British Free Trader, at least, need shed no tears over it, for what should be an invaluable object-lesson has been given into his hands which should be very helpful for the fights in the future. It has been demonstrated beyond dispute that Tariffs are a broken reed in time of difficulty: and that if you want to secure a revenue in time of war you must raise it within the country by direct taxation. Protective tariffs and the ideas behind them draw nations into quarrels, but they do not help them to win the quarrels they have helped to make. This is the lesson of the Tariff débâcle.

## AFTER - THE - WAR PROBLEMS

Sir,—In many of your articles, and especially the welcome Saturday columns of "A. G. G.," we have been told to look for a better world, the doors of which will fly open at the sound of the magic words "social reconstruction." Never again "competition and chaos"! Hurrah for organisation!

Capital and Labour, it is said, have each misbehaved. They must stop their tiresome quarrelling. Employers must give good wages, and workmen must not down tools or ca' canny. Or if they won't be good of their own accord, Mr. John Hodge will make them be good. He will also (by prohibiting foreign trade) provide work for all, and (when he has knocked out Mr. N. Chamberlain) will supply employers with men, and men with employers, as desired.

Private enterprise, it is said, has failed in providing houses for the working classes. But the men from the trenches must not go back to slum and cellar. That good fairy, the State, will wave her wand and there will spring up houses for all.

Farmers and labourers, it is said, have failed to make proper use of the land. Small-holders have been lamentably remiss, in spite of all the Acts passed for their benefit. Never mind! We have now got Mr. Prothero to teach them their business.

Thus Capital and Labour, employers and workers in town and country, are weighed in the scales and found wanting. But meanwhile what of the class which controls the ways and means by which alone Capital and Labour builder and cultivator, can perform their functions? What of the land monopolist?

Oh no, we never mention him,  
His name is never heard.

Messrs. Strutt, Scott and Roberts, in their Minority Report, recommend (I quote from the WESTMINSTER GAZETTE) "the minimum wage, decent cottages, and a cheerier life; but they are silent or slightly evasive as to the means whereby access is to be obtained to the land, if the landlord should prove unwilling."

After the admitted failure of the series of Small Holdings Acts, silence or evasion on this essential point is the only course open to advocates of similar measures. The promotion of farm colonies by council or by State will break on the rampart of land monopoly until its stronghold is mined by the taxation of land according to its true value. And without general access to land on fair terms, any attempt to compel employers to pay higher wages must break down. Then a general rise in wages can only be secured by increasing employment.

Again, as to housing, what is the use of burying our heads in the sand like ostriches to avoid seeing what experience has proved? Builders have failed because they have to face an impossible business position. The first step towards better housing is to tax the value of land