

evolution of a good, simple, flexible, functional tongue. The conditions of land tenure might very well have had something to do with it, and some one ought to do a study of the effects of land tenure on language.

The terms under which land has been held and used throughout history deserves a great deal more attention than it has received. With some probing we learn that in the course of the Middle Ages, new lands were brought into cultivation by letting them out to settlers on very favourable terms and at low rentals. Was there not a relation between this and the revival of civilisation? A revival taking place at an anonymous level before the men of fame developed?

We can still honour the famous ones, but following Voltaire's lead, we might re-examine some of the noisy heroes of history and perhaps bring to light some quiet heroes who deserve more notice. Napoleon's brother Lucien saw his sibling as a vain upstart, an opportunist without principle, whereas Lucien thought a person should form high principles, then seek to apply them in the world. Thus we might honour Lucien Bonaparte above Napoleon in our revised history.

We might also take others of our honoured great at their own word and accept more respectfully their own self-evaluation. Newton thought his religious studies more important than his scientific studies. Einstein at the end of his life said he would have been more useful if he had entered life as a plumber. Gainsborough wrote to a friend that he was "sick of portraits" and wished he could "walk off to some sweet village, where I can paint landscapes". Jefferson, who had held so many high offices, wanted only to be remembered as the author of the Declaration of Independence and of the Virginia Bill of Rights and founder of the University of Virginia.

What were these people trying to say? Perhaps the same thing that the dying Augustus Caesar, master of the world, whispered to his wife, "Have I lived well?", as though suddenly realising that this is what counts above all.

Later, Diocletian resigned the emperorship and retired to his Illyrian villa. When a deputation tried to persuade him to return to power because of all the troubles, he replied: "If you could see the cabbages I grow with my own hands you would not talk to me of the cares of empire." He may have been right. Who knows but that today we may be enjoying a strain of cabbage developed by Diocletian, whereas who cares about the division of the Roman Empire into prefectures, etc.?

Thus in our repainted history, cabbages would be more important than kings; and the way the Farmer of Marston Moor ranged his crops may be of more consequence than the way Cromwell ranged his soldiers. Which brings us back to Voltaire: "Let us cultivate our garden."



New
they

BRI

BIG CITIES and their big problems continue to grow, and in the quest for some improvement of the situation, the New Towns of Britain have attracted wide attention and have been studied and emulated in other countries.

After World War II the New Towns Act provided for the creation and planning of moderate-sized towns whose growth would be limited, which would combine the advantages of cities with open green areas, and would be "self-contained and balanced communities for work and living". Local corporations, responsible to the central government, were appointed to get on with it. The New Towns were publicly financed, in collaboration with private enterprise.

Two decades after getting started, there are thirty New Towns, with a combined population of around one million, the initial capital outlays have been recouped, and by and large most of them show a profit (although when governments issue financial reports it is well to be doubly careful). In this respect the New Towns have lived up to the accomplishments sought by the plan. But, besides being a showcase, do they point to a solution for our choked cities? Much money and planning have been expended on New Towns, but provision for a million people makes no dent in the population, which has multiplied faster than that of the New Towns.

The first problem in developing a New Town is that of acquiring a suitable site. Here the government encounters the same problem that private builders do—the price of land. The laws of economics exhibit a peculiar inflexibility here—the more desirable the site, the higher the price. Since the government is willing to do almost anything for the people except return to them their birthright in the land, the price is paid to the land owner, and no matter what else is done afterwards, this initial cost is a loss to the people and a burden to the taxpayer.*

Sir Frederick J. Osborn, an enthusiastic promoter of New Towns, is reluctant, in his book *The New Towns—the Answer to Megalopolis*, to discuss this aspect of the matter, which has turned out to be much more expensive than originally estimated. "We do not

*This, together with other criticisms, was brought out in a series of articles in *LAND & LIBERTY* on the New Towns Act and the related Town and Country Planning Act, from 1946 to 1948.

Towns: are a Solution?

WOODWARD

propose", he says, "to discuss at length the difficulties that the development corporations, and the Ministry, encountered in the acquisition of sites and the early stages of this huge enterprise." And later: "We need not here discuss further the social misfortune that up to the dates of public takeover increments of value benefited the shareholders and not the towns and their inhabitants." As indicated, some improvement in the situation occurred with public appropriation of increments in value—including land value, although no great effort is made to distinguish it from improvement value—and rentals are adjusted as values rise. But did all the planning have to go into the same package?

New Towns are a dream of planners and Sir Frederic was annoyed that nobody else seemed interested in the dream. People have moved there, however, and still live there, and the planners are quite pleased about it, as though people would not find some other way to live without the planners. Human beings have a way of adapting to an enormous variety of circumstances (even concentration camps) and planners need not take credit for the fact that people work, play, breathe, eat, etc.

The "balanced community" concept has not really worked out. A good many New Towns, like Cumbernauld near Glasgow and several around London, are simply "bedrooms" for people who still work in the cities, and have given rise to transport problems very much like those of the "suburban sprawl" so deplored by planners. Some New Towns are one-industry towns, like Corby, whose dependence on the steel industry caused it to be thrown into disarray by the uncertainties attendant upon the nationalisation of the steel industry.

In their desire for the "balanced community" the planners look for skilled workers and professionals. But it is the unskilled workers living in poor conditions in London and other cities who are seeking to improve their environment. Their applications are subtly discouraged, and there is a long waiting list of such applicants stretching to ten years! At that rate the New Towns are not going to rapidly depopulate the big cities.

Another phase of the "balanced community" idea is a rather self-conscious effort to produce a varied architecture; but for all that, to the visitor, a New Town does not escape an antiseptic look of boredom

and barrenness. A much more interesting town layout was made by the old smugglers at Clovelly in Devon!

New Town residents, although they have adapted, do not quite do the things planners meant them to do. The malls were supposed to provide congregation points at night, and lighting was carefully arranged for that purpose, but nobody comes—they stay at home and watch television. In response to polls, residents show indifference as to whether the New Towns should be run by local bodies or the central Ministry; they are more concerned with buying a home at a price they can afford, which appears to be difficult in as well as out of New Towns.

The planners of one of the more recent towns, Milton Keynes, taking note of the various anomalies, began to discover the virtues of "non-planning". This is a step forward, and with a few more steps they might begin to separate the idea of more freely accessible land from the notion that the whole community has to be planned rather than letting the people themselves do their own planning.

In view of the congestion of cities, it is understandable that New Towns seem an attractive way out. Sir Frederic Osborn, in *Town and Country Planning*, Jan-Feb. 1969, wrote: "You won't find specific proposals for a wiser distribution of the population in the works or speeches of Tom Paine, Godwin, Burke, Fox, Karl Marx, Disraeli, Gladstone, Joseph Chamberlain, Lloyd George, Churchill or Chairman Mao." Had he gone a little further with his extensive reading, he might have found this, in Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*: "The destruction of speculative land values would tend to diffuse population where it is too sparse; to substitute for the tenement house homes surrounded by gardens, and fully to settle agricultural districts before people were driven far from neighbours to look for land."

George and other eminent thinkers have shown that "the destruction of speculative land values" can be attained through the full taxation of land values, a



plan, moreover, that would have all the benefits of "non-planning" and would make it easier for people to fashion for themselves the kind of life they want to live.