

Letter to the Editor

FOUNDATION OF LIBERTY

SIR, — Macaulay states somewhere that a people that cares nothing for the history of its forebears is not apt to leave any record of which its descendants can be proud. And Patrick Henry, in his famous speech to the House of Burgesses in Virginia, claimed that his feet were guided by the lamp of experience. In other words, by history.

England, a country whose political institutions developed under monarchical forms, serves as a model for all democratic and republican governments that pretend to political freedom. One may well wonder how it came about that England was, for centuries, the land of liberty. How did it happen that England, alone amongst the nations of the world (save perhaps for Switzerland), developed free institutions?

If one turns to Lord Macaulay's *History of England*, a clue to the mystery will be found in the historian's remarks concerning The Land Tax Act, passed against the opposition of the House of Lords in 1696, in the reign of William and Mary. The Act called for a reassessment of the land of England, and the imposition of a tax of four shillings in the pound on the rental value of land.

Macaulay, himself an eminent statesman and social philosopher, recorded at some length the history and implications of this form of taxation. He stated that: "from the time of Ethelred the Unready until the American revolutionary war, taxes on the rental value of land comprised nearly the whole of England's revenue." He drew a comparison between the show and tinsel glitter of France under the Grand Monarch and the solid prosperity of England, "where every man, striving to better his own condition, bettered the lot of all." He stated that: "from that tax which, for a thousand years, provided almost the whole of England's revenue, we now take less than one-fiftieth part." (He was writing in 1858.)

The sceptical will want to find confirmation of Macaulay's observations. Let them turn to John Richard Greene's *Conquest of England*. In that classic, Greene states that: "from the earliest times until the advent of the Hanoverian kings" the bulk of England's revenue was derived from a tax on the rental value of land.

The changeover from England's age-old system to the system prevail-

ing to-day was not accomplished without resistance, marked by such incidents as the revolt of the American colonies, the Battle of Peterloo, and the rise of smuggling as a major English industry. The change, no doubt, was rendered inevitable by the industrial revolution, for obvious reasons so unsettling of ancient patterns. As land ownership was relieved of its customary obligations, it became more and more profitable, and the ancient commons were enclosed for the benefit of the landed gentry.

But Englishmen, thank God, are still free men. That is, they can agree to pay the rents demanded of them, or emigrate to foreign parts. What more can they ask?

Yours faithfully,

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BOOKS RECEIVED

A History of Latin America by George Pendle. (Pelican, 4s.)

Vagrancy (Britain in the Sixties) by Philip O'Connor. (Penguin Special, 3s. 6d.)

Great Britain or Little England? by John Mander. (Penguin Special, 3s. 6d.)

The Science of Animal Behaviour by P. L. Broadhurst. (Pelican, 3s. 6d.)

Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy. Edited by T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel. (Pelican, 4s.)

A History of British Trade Unionism, by Henry Pelling. (Pelican Original, 5s. Macmillan, 42s.)

Voters, Parties and Leaders, by J. Blondel. (Pelican Original, 4s.)

Miscellany

Public Transport and Land Values

DR. BEECHING'S PROPOSAL to close the Bexhill West and Crowhurst railway line has caused a marked rise in the number of properties offered for sale in the area and house prices are falling. The difference in the price between comparable houses in Tunbridge Wells (with a railway) and Bexhill (without one) may be £2,500, says the secretary of the Hastings and District Estate Agents Association (*Daily Telegraph* August 29). This clearly demonstrates the effect of public investment on land prices, for presumably the value of the bricks and mortar remains the same.

Riddle of the Fiddle

ACCORDING to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, the number of patients on the lists of general practitioners is 101 per cent of the total population. Doctors are paid by the State on the basis of the number of registered patients and this has led to the registering of 450,000 non-existent persons — even if every single person is registered!

ABSURD

Entails are founded upon the most absurd of all propositions, that every successive generation of men have not an equal right to the earth. —Adam Smith.

Kindly Big Brother

FARMERS ARE "REMINDED" by a Ministry of Agriculture press release and are "again reminded" by another, of the closing dates for applications for capitation bonus and ploughing grants.

Presumably farmers are so befogged and fuddled by paper work and application forms for one thing and another that they have to be continually prodded into claiming the subsidies that have been provided for them.

Speeding the Flow of Trade

NEW AND SIMPLIFIED U.S. tariff schedules will go into effect on August 31, climaxing a task that has required seven years of effort and extensive international consultations" — U.S. Information Service.