

WANTED: ROOM TO LIVE.

By F. G. MILLER.

Will Blackburn, labourer, married, five children (one blind), rent 10s. a week, six weeks out of work, life-long references, native of Kent, would take any job offered.

These particulars, along with scores of others, remain week after week in a register kept at the public expense for the relief of the unemployed.

To tramp the streets in search of work is not "living," it may be existing—anyway, it all depends which end of the telescope you look through. You may be spending unearned land values, for instance, at Monte Carlo, or tearing up country roads in your motor; feeding, perhaps, your dogs and birds with food intended for human consumption, or slaughtering tame pheasants on land from which you have succeeded in driving peasants—in consequence of which your opinion of "living" is of small value to your fellow men.

You may, however, be a companion of Will Blackburn, and your view of life may be so clouded with grief that it appears hardly worth looking at.

Will Blackburn tramped the streets from before daybreak until breakfast time—he came home and saw his delicate wife start for the big laundry. He helped his hungry children off to school and watched the little ones thread their way across the field in front of his house; carefully leading his little blind girl between the broken bottles and piles of old tin cans with which the field was strewn. With eyes and heart struggling to express their sorrow, Will Blackburn sat alone mending his little ones' shoes. Either from sorrow or exhaustion, or both, that field of bottles and refuse seemed to draw nearer to him, like a slide being adjusted at a lantern lecture. It was gradually becoming clear. In the distance, Will saw a well-known builder with measuring tape surveying the scene of desolation. Again looking, he noticed crowds of men approaching eagerly; labourers like himself, carters, bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, painters, timber-merchants, ironmongers, quarrymen and many others including clerks, architects and lawyers; all manifesting the greatest possible interest in the proposed building.

Comfortable cottages now replace unsightly heaps of rubbish. To Will and others comes again the exhilarating joy of labour's reward; all are benefited and this benefit extends, like the ripples on a pool, to the farthest corner of the world. In fancy now he sees his wife remaining at home, his children no longer crying through hunger; and as he watches the thin twisting curls of smoke coming from the new chimneys, in his heart he blesses the builder to whose initiative he owes the happy change. And this will surely last; everyone congratulates the builder on the great improvement.

A thick mist comes over the scene, some shadow has been produced, and Will again sees the builder, not hopeful now, no crowd following him. He stands now meekly before two men: the rate collector demanding rates for his improvement and the landlord, first, demanding exorbitant ground rents (or taxes on industry), and, second, a condition that at the expiration of a term of years, the cottages and land shall be handed back in good condition to the landlord, and further, that as the improvements have increased the value of the land, any future cottages built must pay an increased ground rent.

Will Blackburn understands it all now; he can account now for wealthy dukes dashing about in motors, throwing the dust of Protection in the people's eyes, and spending princely unearned revenues on every species of self-indulgence. And he understands why his children go hungry to school—for idle land, growing in value by the industry of the community, escapes taxation while industry is taxed. Filled with wonder at the folly of those who, having the power, permit these things—this cruel wrong—to be continued. . . . A familiar voice calls him to himself—his little blind girl is calling "Daddy, I'm so hungry."

It was only a dream, but he had learned his lesson. The duke's gilded coach with all its glitter will dazzle his eyes no more. Will Blackburn is waiting now, with tens of thousands more; waiting with all those tradesmen; waiting while old tins and glass bottles accumulate on waste ground; waiting while furniture is sold and children's faces grow thinner every day; waiting on while home at last is given up and refuge taken in crowded slums; waiting still while he hears the cold heavy earth fall on wife and child; waiting for the people of this country to see

to it, that the House of Lords no longer escape their share of the burden of taxation.

No duke will now persuade Blackburn that it is better to tax his children's bread; he believed that once, but the scales have fallen from his eyes. His faith in his country is great now—the land which is now kept for the sport of the idle may be made to support the worker. The dark cloud between his children's food and the means of earning it is the House of Lords. And Blackburn longs now to join issue with this cumbrous institution. He has read, too, in an old book on law making, that laws are to be made to this end:—

"That there be no poor among you."

THE SWISS PEASANT PROPRIETORS.**THEIR HARD CONDITIONS AND THE REMEDY.**

By GUSTAV BUSCHER: TRANSLATED BY R. OCKEL.

The opponents of the equal rights of all to the use of the earth have an ally whom they hope to be able to rely upon—the peasant. They say, "You will never be able to persuade the peasant to agree to the restitution of the equal rights of all to the land." And many who are convinced of the injustice of private property in land are of the same opinion. This opinion is all the stronger in Switzerland, since there are no large land-owners. In fact Switzerland is the much-vaunted paradise of all friends of peasant proprietorship. "In Switzerland," they say, "there exists everywhere a robust peasantry which is well-to-do and content. There you will find no favour for your proposals for the abolition of private property in land."

We challenge those who acclaim the healthy peasantry of Switzerland to show us a single peasant community where the land is anything like equitably distributed. Let them show us a single community where the minority has not more of it than the majority. Let them tell us of a single community where differences in fortune are based solely upon differences in diligence, economy, and skilful management. Let those who boast of "the robust peasantry of Switzerland" remember the hundred thousand farm labourers of that country. Are these not human beings? Are they rightly excluded from every share in the soil?

A return of the peasant proprietors in the Canton of Bern was made in 1888, and it is certain that the distribution of land has not changed much since then. These official figures show that 14,529 landowners own in all 167,489 hectares (a hectare is equal to 2½ acres), whereas 60,176 landowners own only 77,730 hectares. In short four-fifths of the population of the Canton of Bern own rather less than one-third of its arable land, while more than two-thirds of the land are in the hands of less than one-fifth of the landowners. This is what the upholders of private property in land call "the equitable distribution of the land of Switzerland"! If one were to select from all the prisons of Europe the worst thieves and robbers and set them the task of dividing the Canton of Bern amongst themselves, who doubts that the distribution so arrived at would be better and fairer than the one that now exists—a distribution enforced and kept going by the laws of a free, democratic state.

According to the best authorities on the economic conditions of Switzerland one may assume that the distribution of land in the Canton of Bern is typical of nearly the whole of Switzerland. As far as is known only the Canton of Aargau is an exception in favour of the small proprietors. In the community of Stettfurt, which may be cited as an example of the distribution of property in land, two-thirds of the population hold less than one-fourth of the soil, more than three-fourths being in the hands of the other third!

Should it be impossible for the Swiss peasant to see that such a distribution of land is a mockery of all ideas of justice? Should it be impossible for him to realise that if we restore the equal rights of all to the use of the land, he must be the gainer and not the loser? Is the peasant incapable of thinking it out for himself? If the equal rights of all to the use of the earth be restored, how is it possible for those to lose who to-day have the use of less land than would be due to them under a just distribution? Does one imagine that the peasant is so silly that he cannot grasp the difference between the wealth produced by human labour and the eternal and indestructible gifts of nature?

Can he not see that his poverty is due to his having too little land to use while others hold too much? When once this is made clear to the peasants, then the "friends" of "the robust peasantry," who now pocket so comfortably the rents paid by the peasants, will have a rude awakening.

When our newspapers and public speakers talk of "a robust and well-to-do peasantry," they only think of those peasants who own large fortunes, which in most cases have been inherited or scraped together by unheard of selfishness and detestable callousness. The great mass of the poor and debt-laden peasants, pressed down by sorrow and destitution, can hardly ever make themselves heard in public. The great mass of the Swiss peasants do not even possess as much land as is necessary to make a living from. According to Dr. Hofmann, four hectares (ten acres) is the minimum for the upkeep of a family. But this is true only of fertile soil, which allows of the cultivation of grapes. But in the Canton of Bern, where vineyards are seldom seen, one-fifth of the landowners own more than five hectares, two-fifths hold from one to five hectares, and the other two-fifths possess less than one hectare. And happy would the Swiss small peasant family be if it could but keep the yield of its small farm for itself! But the small peasants of Switzerland are for the greater part so heavily indebted that "Schuldenbauerlein" (debt-laden small peasant) has become a household word. According to the statements of Dr. Rusch, the small peasants in the Canton of Appenzell are on an average mortgaged to the extent of from 70 to 80 per cent. of the value of their property. As the value of the land is nearly always overestimated, such indebtedness is tantamount to no property at all! Besides insurance premiums, besides rates for the Commune, and taxes for the Canton and the State, the peasant has to pay every year several hundreds of francs in mortgage interest. It is incomprehensible how such sums can be extorted from people who have hardly enough land to feed a family scantily. In many cases homework must eke out the earnings of the mortgage slaves. According to a report in the papers a short time ago, the agricultural women workers in the Canton of Bern have a wage of from 4d. to 8d. a day! No wonder one finds in the Swiss peasant villages so few figures full of vigour and so many bent and weary, so few merry faces, so many dissatisfied and showing signs of overwork and underfeeding. The worn-out figures of the small peasants, aged before their time, their dragging, inelastic steps, speak more plainly of their fight against misery and want, of their deprivation and exploitation, than can any official statistics.

Private property in land has been a misery-bringing gift for the small peasant. In some parts of Switzerland and South Germany there are still to be found remains of the former communal property in land, the so-called "allmenden." The citizens of the community have a right to the use of these "allmenden," but this right is qualified by several conditions which cannot always be easily fulfilled and often give preference to the rich man. In spite of this it is a fact that in those parts of the country where there is "allmend" property, poverty is much less pressing than in parts where all land is private property. Where, however, the "allmend" has been divided up, the citizens are to-day hardly able to bear the poor rate. It sounds like a mockery of "the robust peasantry" and the well-to-do agriculture of Switzerland that many peasant communities cannot raise the funds necessary for the support of their poor fellow citizens. On the other hand, there is no need for any poor rate in communities where there is still much communal property in land. The poor man gets a plot of land from the community, and from that land he must gain his living. He is not degraded into an alms-receiving pauper. He need not loaf in enforced idleness. He gets the more—not the more insolently he begs, and the more he tramples upon his self-respect, but the more industriously he works his bit of land.

Private property in land has not only condemned the peasant to poverty and mortgage slavery, but it has also poisoned his moral character, has filled his mind with envy and egotism, his heart with hardness and bitterness. Daily the peasant sees that only callous selfishness and mean avarice can pave his road to fortune, while every inclination to helpful goodwill, to kindness and generosity must be hurtful to him. The man who cannot maintain himself on his inherited plot of land is lost, has fallen among the outcasts of fortune, and there is no rising again for him. The high price of land, the difficulty of finding a suitable plot, and the still greater difficulty of finding a willing seller, make it almost impossible for those who once lose their land to rise again. Is it a wonder, then, that the peasant is not inclined to benevolence and generosity, that he jealously tries

to seek his own advantage, and to stick to his property, that in his short-sighted selfishness he taxes all men according to their property? Can one wonder that under such conditions avarice becomes a hereditary vice in peasant families—a vice that suppresses all better feelings, and often causes the children to wait impatiently for the death of their parents? On the other hand, where, as in the German "allmend" counties, the old folks of the family bring with them a share of the common land, they are, as a German professor tells us, nursed with special care and their children vie with one another in making the evening of life as agreeable to them as possible.

"But," someone will say, "even if private property in land is harmful to the small peasants, it cannot be abolished. It is impossible to introduce a tax on land values in this country. Where would the peasant be if a land value tax were added on to his interest? That would rob him of hearth and home." So it seems; but it only seems so.

The so-called "owners" of peasant land are in most cases sham owners only, while the real owner is the mortgagee. The mortgagee has a claim prior even to that of the nominal owner. He must first be satisfied from the yield of the little farm before the owner can keep anything for himself. The rent of agricultural land goes in most cases into the pockets of the mortgagees; and for the peasant there remains, in good and bad times alike, only that with which the favour of circumstances rewards his labour. The peasant is, then, not a receiver of rents but a payer of rents; and a tax on the rental value of the land must therefore improve his position instead of making it worse.

The value of rural land has been so enhanced by the keen demand that the capital invested in land bears usually only 2 to 2½ per cent. interest. But the peasant has to pay from 4 to 4½ per cent. interest on his mortgage. At an indebtedness, therefore, of only 50 per cent. of the capital value of the land, the mortgage interest and taxes already absorb the whole of the rent. And the great majority of the Swiss small peasants are in most cases still worse off. Their indebtedness is on the average much higher than 50 per cent., and therefore the peasant must take still more from his wages in order to satisfy the mortgagee.

Will the peasant lose if the mortgagees are forced to bear their share of his burdens? To-day there remains in the peasant's own hands only a small amount as compared with the gigantic sums that they have to raise in mortgage interest and direct and indirect taxes. The biggest part finds its way into the pockets of the urban mortgagee; another big part is taken by direct and indirect taxes, which, again, only serve the one purpose of making the rich richer and the poor poorer. If land values are taxed, however, then this pernicious state of things will be radically changed for the benefit of the peasants. Then the golden stream of land values will flow into the coffers of their own rural communities instead of into the pockets of the urban capitalists; and the peasant communities, which to-day must beg incessantly for State support, will have abundance of money. The peasant, who to-day knows the community only as an oppressive taxgatherer that does him no good whatever, can then have help and support from the community in the shape of cheap loans, of insurance of his stock against illness, of his fields against hail, of his home against fire, and in the form of help in days of sickness and unforeseen accidents which might otherwise rob him of the fruits of his toil, or insurance against want and poverty in his old age.

It is short-sighted and foolish to think that a land value tax must ruin the small peasant. As a matter of fact, a tax on land values is the only reform that can help the small proprietor. The palliatives which are advocated to-day by so-called "statesmen" in order to help the small peasants may all be summed up in the old proverb, "Wash the fur, but don't wet it." These "statesmen" would help the small peasant, but they will not touch the vested interests of the mortgagees. The two agree as well as fire and water. The vital question for the small holder is, shall the peasant be ruined or the mortgagee?

A system based upon justice must not only bear good fruits, but will also withdraw the fostering soil of bad conditions from the exuberantly growing weeds.

The tax on land values would not only immensely improve the condition of the small peasant, but it would also dry up the springs of nearly all the evils of the peasant's life. Land-jobbery, this growing evil of peasant proprietorship, would be at once abolished, because land-jobbery is only possible when the price of land can be artificially inflated. The cutting up of farms into little plots, the stubborn holding up of sites

which cannot be of any good to the owner, would also cease. The rage for law suits, which involve whole generations in endless disputes about strips of land a few feet wide, would come to an end. The division of inheritances would cause much less quarrelling and injustice in peasant families if it were no longer possible to overestimate the value of land. The business life of the country would enormously improve. The peasant who wanted to acquire a piece of land would not need to pay a big purchase price, and he could use his capital for the improvement of the soil and for buying agricultural implements and machinery. It would be easy for the man without capital to rise by diligence and economy. Poverty and mortgage slavery, avarice and selfishness, which to-day press like a deadweight on the peasant's life, would vanish like the mists before the sun.

Millions of German and Swiss peasants emigrated during the last century to America, and many still emigrate thither, because in America land is cheap, while at home land is dear. Where land is open to all, every man willing to work is welcome, and every man who can earn his bread is his own master.

But most of the free land of America, which was for so long a time the refuge of the oppressed masses of Europe, has been stolen and fenced in. The wide gate through which the European mortgage slaves could escape their serfdom is becoming narrower and narrower. The position of the masses in America is sinking more and more to the level of Europe. To-day one must travel by train for several days through untitled lands in America before one reaches a place where land is still to be had on tolerable terms.

A second America does not exist. Therefore, if we would escape from our social miseries, there is no other remedy but the recognition of the equal rights of all to the use of the earth. This reform will help the small peasant at least as much as everybody else who lives by daily toil.

THE ACRES AND THE HANDS.

By A. J. H. DUGANNE.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,
Saith God's most Holy Word;
The water hath fish, and the land hath flesh,
And the air hath many a bird;
And the soil is teeming o'er all the earth,
And the earth hath numberless lands;
Yet millions of hands want acres,
While millions of acres want hands!

Sunlight, and breezes, and gladsome flowers,
Are over the earth spread wide;
And the good God gave these gifts to men—
To men who on earth abide;
Yet thousands are toiling in poisonous gloom,
And shackled with iron bands,
While millions of hands want acres,
And millions of acres want hands!

Never a foot hath the poor man here,
To plant with a grain of corn;
And never a plot, where his child may cull
Fresh flowers in the dewy morn.
The soil lies fallow—the woods grow rank;
Yet idle the poor man stands;
Oh! millions of hands want acres,
And millions of acres want hands!

'Tis writ that "Ye shall not muzzle the ox
That treadeth out the corn."
But, behold! ye shackle the poor man's limbs,
That have all earth's burdens borne;
The land is the gift of a bounteous God,
And to labour His Word commands,
Yet millions of hands want acres,
And millions of acres want hands!

Who hath ordained that the few shall hoard
Their millions of useless gold?
And rob the earth of its fruit and flowers,
While profitless soil they hold?
Who hath ordained that a parchment scroll
Shall fence round miles of lands,
When millions of hands want acres,
And millions of acres want hands!

'Tis a glaring lie on the face of day—
This robbery of men's rights;
'Tis a lie, that the Word of the Lord disowns—
'Tis a curse that burns and blights!
And 'twill burn and blight, till the people rise,
And swear, while they break their bands,
That the hands shall henceforth have acres,
And the acres henceforth have hands!

HERE AND THERE.

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Fels sailed from New York on March 23rd. As we go to press we learn that Mr. Tom L. Johnson is accompanying them. The United Committee are preparing to entertain these good friends to a complimentary dinner early in April.

The night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

Mr. J. C. Wedgwood, M.P., was elected on March 8th to the Staffordshire County Council as member for Chesterton.

It would be perfectly in accordance with Unionist argument during last Session to give the local authorities the option of taxing local site-values for local benefit.—OBSERVER, March 13th.

As Charles I. wrote to his son from his prison at Carisbrooke: "The English nation are a sober people, however at present infatuated."—DAILY TELEGRAPH.

The House of Commons was entitled to say that they were not going to put a duty on tea to be paid for by the poor people of this country unless Land Values bore their share of the burden.—Mr. LLOYD GEORGE in House of Commons on March 1st.

A man was charged last week at Bow Street with breaking a window of the House of Lords. It is scarcely surprising that the public should be getting impatient at the delay in abolishing the Upper Chamber.—PUNCH.

Norfolk. The Wretham Estate. A sporting and manorial estate of 6,556 acres. The greater part in a ring fence, and not one single public footpath across the property.—TIMES (Advt.), February 23rd.

This meeting, recognising that the financial proposals of the Government are intended to postpone indefinitely the policy of Tariff Reform, declares its adherence to that policy.—Resolution at Conservative meeting, Birmingham. (September 22nd, 1909.)

A. A. to G. F., on S.Y.C. "Adriatic."—Have wired to V. No need to come back. No election just yet. Their wings have been so clipped that trade is getting better. J. R. has got them like a pig with a string to its leg.—MORNING POST Agony Column, March 17th.

I hear that the United Club, the Unionist organisation corresponding to the Eighty Club of the Liberals, had a meeting at the House of Commons to-day, at which there was a strong expression of opinion in favour of the municipal rating of land values.—London Correspondent of GLASGOW HERALD, March 10th.

On March 31st 1909, the debt of London secured on the rates, was £110,621,600, an increase on the previous year of £638,426. This debt has been incurred by the County Council and Borough Authorities. The valuation, which subject to appeals, will come into force on April 6th is as follows:—Gross, £54,657,914; rateable, £44,883,325; assessable, £44,875,809.

The DAILY NEWS of March 10th said that at the opening of the Preston Labour Exchange, on the previous day, Mr. Rowland Williams, divisional officer for the North-Western Division, said the exchanges, certainly as regarded his Lancashire division, had justified themselves. Out of the total number registered they had been able to place 6 per cent. in situations.