

### THE FEUDAL SYSTEM

To the Editor, LAND & LIBERTY,

One of your correspondents lately suggested that the Feudal System had but one redeeming feature.

I am no historian—I am afraid that few Americans are, when it comes to the history of their forebears. So my objection may be due to a misconception of what feudalism really was. Only echoes of it crossed the Atlantic. But whether rightly or wrongly, I have always thought of feudalism as a most admirable system for its time. It is based on the theory that the land belongs to the Crown, surely a tenable one, and more truly just than the system which it replaced. The proprietor was as much a trustee as an owner, and performed many functions, in his own interest and in that of his vassals, which now are handled by public servants, paid out of tax funds. In England the system never completely replaced the freehold land tenure of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but it was very generally the political and economic basis of the state for some centuries, and they were centuries of increasing population and prosperity.

It recognised the common interest of all in the land. Recall the rights of tenants to pasturage, hunting, fishing, wood, etc. It was only as such rights were disregarded that the system commenced to rip at the seams. As long as they were respected there were no peasant rebellions. And, at least during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the national revenue consisted almost entirely of taxes on the land. Other forms of taxation, direct and indirect, appeared later, and increased as feudalism declined.

We see little of the system to-day except vestigial remains left by the illegal usurpation of privilege, scar tissue left from the very wounds which destroyed feudalism. But that is no reason for maligning it. Of its real essence, the military, political and economic responsibilities necessarily assumed by every holder of a fief, we find hardly a trace. To view it in true perspective, we must remember that these duties did exist, and that they were accepted and discharged, with benefit to the community at large. I can think of no group at all likely to have discharged them so well as a sufficiently powerful aristocracy, motivated at least partly by self-interest.

For the political, economic and cultural *milieu* in which feudalism functioned it is hard to imagine an order of things more natural and appropriate, more effective, or more just.

MARSHALL CRANE, BEDFORD, NEW YORK.