

On appeal to the Court of Session, Lord Hunter's decision was reversed. In the case in question this means that the Board of Agriculture must pay additional compensation to the amount of £3,850. The decision of the Court of Session means that the cost of working the Act must be increased enormously.

UNCHANGING

("While the shells were bursting over the fields about Ypres, an old man was observed, ploughing as usual.")

Thou'rt wiser than the rest of us,
Who, far away, yet fret and fuss.
Though Death is stalking all around
Thou tenderest still thy plot of ground;
While men about thee burn and kill,
Still thou preparest land to till.
And while the human world with strife
Resounds, as though man hated life,
Thou, closely bound to Mother Earth,
Thinkest with her of growth and birth.
So, working there, thy steadfast will
The eternal purpose doth fulfil,
Said for all time, or war or peace,
Seedtime and harvest shall not cease.

E. D.

Crediton, Devon.

—DAILY CHRONICLE, May 20th, 1915.

THE AGRO ROMANO

By Nicola Fantini

The territory surrounding the City of Rome, generally known as the Agro Romano, contains over half a million acres of land, of which nearly 350,000 acres, even in its present state, are quite suitable for farms, small holdings and market gardens, for the production of grain, corn, hay, milk, and garden produce of all sorts, for which Rome offers an almost inexhaustible market; and the remaining portion of about 175,000 acres could easily be made cultivable if its swamps were drained, roads made, and it were cleared of its bushes, thickets and undergrowth. As things are, however, the traveller who crosses the Agro by rail will see only a flat, barren, untilled, uninhabited land, the natural pastures of which are overrun with wild cattle, a vast expanse of thickets, bushes, marshes, bogs and swamps. Here and there a few old, dilapidated buildings, ancient ruins of abandoned farms and feudal castles, and occasionally lofty woods appear on the horizon. Everywhere a close, sultry, humid air, clouds of mosquitoes, solitude and silence, as if in a country of the dead. In winter the land is covered with extensive pools of stagnant water; in summer it is a vast barren arid plain; and in autumn a constant source of malarial fever.

And yet this same land was once a great and splendid garden, the first home of the men who conquered the world, the source of the food-supplies and men-supplies of ancient Rome. During the Third Century of Rome, when the portion of land assigned to each Roman citizen was seven jugers, about 3.12 acres, this territory sufficed to give work and a comfortable living to over 140,000 families, the sinews and brains of the Imperial City. Not a foot was left untilled. It was the Agro Romano in the true sense of the term.

By successive appropriations, gifts and inheritance, this land has now become the private property of a few, two-fifths belong to the Church and three-fifths to not more than a hundred families. To-day, as shown in the last census, this vast territory is divided into 362 great estates, or "tenute," of which 234 are owned by 113 noble Roman families and 129 by Catholic congregations. The landlords, lay and clerical, manage their estates on a system,

which, if not the most profitable, is at any rate the least hazardous, involving the expenditure of neither brains, muscle, knowledge nor capital.

This system is to allow by far the greater portion of the land to lie idle and to collect only its natural produce, the privilege of cutting the wood and natural grasses, and of pasturing sheep and cattle being sold to the highest bidder. It is said that the net income from rent is scarcely 10 shillings per acre, yet those who claim to own the eight or ten thousand acres are thus enabled to command quite a good income without going to any trouble whatever in the management of their estates.

That the land itself is fertile and would yield its fruits abundantly at the call of labour, has been demonstrated beyond dispute by the striking contrast between the barren and neglected land controlled by the big proprietors and the small holdings cultivated by hard working peasants on the borders of the Agro. These small holdings are made to blossom like a garden and the pity of it is that they are much too small for all the labour that is and could be expended upon them. Small wonder that their owners look with longing eyes at the limitless expanse of land held idle by the greed and covetousness of the large proprietors—land which, if put to use, would offer homes and a comfortable living to over 100,000 families. But they are denied its use and the result is seen in the large and increasing emigration from Italy now being directed towards the South American Republics.

After the proclamation of Rome as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, in 1870, General Garibaldi proposed measures by which he hoped to restore the ancient fertility and glory of the Agro Romano. The Italian Government, apparently welcoming the proposition, appointed a Royal Commission to study and report as to the best means of redeeming that territory. One Commission followed another, until in 1883 the improvement of the Agro Romano was made compulsory by law, but only to the extent of 10 kilometers from the centre of Rome—that is, only for a tenth part of the vast area. And so to-day, some 27 years after the passing of this law, with the exception of some few holdings of land at the very Gates of Rome, which have been transformed from barren, unhealthy land into splendid and remunerative farms, the Agro Romano still remains in a condition of waste and neglect.

Results have condemned such futile and partial measures. A drastic and determined policy is urgently needed and this can be found in the adoption of the principle of the taxation of land values. This would force the landlords of the large estates that constitute the Agro Romano, either to relinquish to the nation the land for which they had no use, or to sell it to those eager to put it to use, or to take steps to improve it themselves thus restoring fertility to the land and giving work and wages to thousands and thousands of Italian peasants.

The legislators of Italy seem to have a blind belief that if land is taxed at all, it should be taxed according to what it is yielding, according to the use to which it is being put, and not otherwise. This principle might work out well enough in countries where the soil is divided into a great number of small farms, and where all the land is being used to the utmost—if any such country there be. But it is manifestly wrong when applied to a territory such as the Agro Romano; for it only encourages its owners to leave idle the land with which God has blessed the nation, and which by mere chance is now in their possession and under their control.

But the standard has been unfurled even in Italy, and true Progressiveness in Italy as elsewhere will enthusiastically fight for the principle of the taxation of land values. Ultimately it will and must triumph, and then the untilled and idle land of Italy will blossom like a rose. To yield its bounties and blessings the land demands only the labour and the love of man.