

he paused for a moment before replying. "Listen, Captain Haines. As sure as there is an only God, and He is in Heaven, I will not sell so much land as I can cover with my hand. It was the gift of the Almighty to the Mahras and has descended from our forefathers to their children over whom I am sultan. I know you can take our country by the strong arm, but I believe your principles of justice will not permit you."

Haines could not suppress his admiration for "this cripple deprived of his sight, who never forgot he was the patriarch of his tribe. Avarice failed to tempt him to barter his birthright for money."

Meanwhile, the troops had arrived off the island and their commander had to obey his orders. They landed opposed only by the breakers which drowned a number of men. Soon fever broke out. "Ere the island was abandoned," wrote an officer, "scarce a man could be found with sufficient strength to dig a grave for his companions."

Poetic justice? Or just a trivial incident signifying nothing?

To a modern scientist this might seem merely an illustration of the inferior medical ideas of our grandfathers as compared with the advances that have made us so superior. Modern politicians and economists, who tell us that currency manipulation is the key to prosperity, might smile at the old man's belief that land is more important than money. If any progressive church leader regards "the earth as the Lord's" as anything more than an out-of-date theme for a conventional harvest festival sermon this has never been publicised.

But there is such a thing as a sick society; and the symptoms today are too obvious to be overlooked. Obvious also is the failure of all the elaborate schemes, invoking compulsions and restrictions indifferent to the laws of Mine and Thine, to allay these symptoms. Perhaps old Omar's simple faith in the bounty of God the Creator, in simple justice, and his duty to all his people might eventually be proved the wiser course for all societies.

Facts and quotations from *Sultans of Aden* by Gordon Waterfield, John Murray, 42s.

LAND COMMISSION IN TROUBLE

ONE OF the twin objects of the Land Commission—"to secure that the right land is available at the right time for the implementation of national, regional and local plans" has, as foretold in these columns, failed abysmally.

Sir Henry Wells, Chairman of the Land Commission, puts the blame on the planning authorities and the Government, says the property correspondent of *The Observer*, December 1. Sir Henry has now threatened to resign because of the unfair criticism the Board has been subjected to.

"We have been pressing the Government and the planning authorities to release more land," he is reported as saying, ". . . I am tired of being nagged by the builders I am trying to help." Unless more land was released, development could, as pressure for land builds up, burst into the green belts like a tidal wave, he said.

Irene Wins Again

CORINNE GODDARD

(Reprinted from the *California Homeowner*, September)

THE RIGHT OF RECALL is one of the safeguards in California which guarantees the citizens the right of redress against their elected officials and their government. Without this right we would not have a single tool to remove bad officials before their terms run out.

In California the recall action has been used to such an extent that some talk of repealing the right has been heard. This would be very unfortunate, but perhaps some provision could be amended to the law which would make it impossible for those with money to buy professional signature gatherers.

Currently in California there has been much talk of the attempted recall of Assessor Irene Hickman of Sacramento. This abortive attempt was made by people who were simply wanting to remove an official who was not going to protect their "Sacred Cow" status. There was no attempt to prove malfeasance in office, or that the public official was not doing the job correctly.

The mud that was thrown against Assessor Hickman was beyond belief. It was all personal defamation against her personal beliefs; the recall committee could not find anything wrong about the way Assessor Hickman had conducted her job as assessor. On the contrary the only charge they tried to make, that Irene had somehow scared business out of Sacramento, was disproven by the figures. Building for new industry went up for the first time in five years!

Homeowners and the majority of voters in Sacramento (over 60 per cent) realised that the equalization programme put into effect by Irene Hickman had lowered taxes for thousands of homeowners and raised them for land speculators. If you have visited Sacramento you know it is one of the worst cases of urban sprawl in California, and you can see that the land speculators had a field day until Irene was elected. The economist Ricardo said over 150 years ago: "The interests of the land owner are directly opposed to every other element of the economy." Sacramento voters and the assessor realised that what was morally right 150 years ago is just as true today.

Few recalls have succeeded in removing the candidate from office, although the resultant publicity might prove harmful at the next election. Usually the recall committee smears are so amateurish that they bring out sympathy against the recall. However, a recall action may be good in that it brings public attention to a problem. Maybe if the recall action against Irene Hickman had never been started the voters of Sacramento would not have realised how powerful the land speculators were in the County. Thank God there are more homeowners than land speculators.