

AGRICULTURE AND LAND VALUES

A valuable series of articles by Mr S. L. Bensusan dealing with the condition of agriculture in England and Wales has been appearing in the *Daily Herald*. He says:—

The total land area of England and Wales is 37,000,000 acres, and of these we have 25,000,000 under crops and grass, and 5,000,000 or more of what are known as rough grazings, land that is only waiting the hand of the cultivator to become a contributor to the nation's food.

Ten million acres are under the plough, and these could be extended by 50 per cent. Two million acres yield wheat, 1,500,000 oats, 350,000 go to sugar beet.

The reference to the possibilities of rough grazings is confirmed by the account given in the Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture of Professor Stapledon's experiments at Aberystwyth, where 3,000 acres of rough hill grazing at an altitude of 900 to 1,800 feet are being clothed with special strains of succulent grasses. It is suggested that some 15,000,000 acres in England and Scotland are amenable to this treatment.

One of the most interesting of Mr Bensusan's articles is that dealing with smallholdings. We may make a few quotations:—

There is one question that I have asked in forty counties of England and Wales, a double-barrelled question. It has met but one reply.

The question was, "Is smallholding progressive in this country? Is there an unsatisfied demand on the part of qualified men?"

The answer to both sides of the question has been "yes." And no authority has sought to modify this affirmative.

At Oxford, Professor Orwin admitted that he started out with a definite hostility to smallholding as a type of farming, and that the irresistible logic of hard facts had converted him.

One of the interesting aspects of smallholding is that all these holdings under councils cost much more than the large farms lying round them.

Land may be worth £1 an acre in the district where the smallholder must pay 50s. or £3 because his land has been equipped with homestead and farm buildings, and this equipment was often carried out when building prices were high.

In spite of this, you must look far and wide to find any county in England and Wales where statutory smallholders are in default with their rent.

"More than 90 per cent of rents are paid promptly," one county agent said, "and when a good smallholding comes into the market and men are competing for it, you will find, as a rule, that they don't bother about the price. It may be as high as £3 an acre, but they pay without complaining."

You cannot go about the country without being more than ever convinced that this land-hunger is a real force in Great Britain.

An interesting sidelight on the disinclination of certain county councils to provide smallholdings is found in the remark: "The large men don't like the little ones; as the latter come into their own, skilled labour will tend to become scarce" and, we may add, dear.

The greatest obstacle to the establishment of smallholdings is the excessive price or rent which has to be paid for them. A tax on the value of agricultural land would rapidly even out these values and enable land for smallholdings to be obtained at reasonable terms. A further benefit would accrue from the rating of land values. At present both the smallholder and the farmer pay rates on their houses, and it is evident that a disproportionate share of local taxation must fall on the smallholder.

Dealing with the effects of quotas, subsidies, duties, and marketing boards, Mr Bensusan remarks that none of the benefits of these have been passed on to the agricultural labourer. He is equally clear as to the ultimate destination of these imposts.

It is quite likely that in a few years unless drastic changes come about, the bulk of State assistance

will find its way into the landlords' pockets and that they will benefit by the subsidies just as those who sold out during or directly after the war benefited by the rise of wheat to the region of £4 a quarter.

Dealing with the wheat quota, he says: "the quota is at once an extravagant subsidy to the skilled farmers and an encouragement to the others to grow corn when they might do better with another and different farming system." It also increases the price of feeding stuffs for other branches of agriculture. The *News-Chronicle's* agricultural correspondent (22nd September) points out that "barley and millers' offals, the main feeding stuffs for pigs and poultry, have gone up by nearly 33 per cent since June while the price the producer is getting for his pigs, chickens and eggs has slumped."

The effect of the Government's policy on land values is confirmed by the *Daily Express* (12th September) which says "Agricultural land is improving in value. In some cases land that was unsaleable two years ago is now finding a market." Its further comment is that the policy of duties on the import of agricultural produce is now bearing fruit.

Extended proof of the rise in agricultural land values is contained in an article by that newspaper's Agricultural Correspondent, who writes:—

"Agricultural land has risen in value by an average of 10 to 12½ per cent in just over twelve months. It is now regarded as one of the best investments in the country and is being bought extensively by colleges and corporate bodies.

"The market is hardening, and auctioneers report a rapid increase in the number of sales by private treaty.

"I heard yesterday of a Midland estate of about 3,500 acres which had been hawked round the country for three or four years.

"Within the last few days several offers in the neighbourhood of £50,000 have been received. That is approximately the reserve placed on the estate two years ago.

"The biggest advance in values has been in the Fens, where land which was almost unsaleable at £50 an acre a year ago is now being disposed of quite easily at £100 an acre.

"The reason is the increased demand for good sugar-beet land, and the advance made in the cultivation of vegetables and market-garden produce since the introduction of duties on foreign horticultural products."

The joy of the landed interests at the return of the National Government in 1931 has been more than justified. Even they could hardly have anticipated such facilities for dipping their hands in the consumers' pockets.

LAND PURCHASE

A correspondent has written asking what is the attitude of the Land Values Taxation Movement to proposals for State land purchase, or the buying out of landowners with public money. The answer is given very definitely and emphatically in the Resolution which was passed unanimously at the International Conference on the Taxation of Land Values held at Oxford in 1923, convened by the United Committee. This declared that:—

"We, the followers of the philosophy of Henry George, in International Conference assembled, are opposed to all schemes which have underlying them the nationalization of land by way of purchasing it, or by the issue of bonds in compensation to landowners."

The resolution states the view that has always been held by the Land Values movement.

FORM OF BEQUEST

I bequeath (free of duty) to the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, Limited, the sum of £.....