

SIR EDGAR HARPER, F.S.I.



SIR EDGAR HARPER, F.S.I.

(Photo-block by courtesy of the MUNICIPAL JOURNAL)

Sir Edgar Harper, who was present and spoke at the Dinner to Colonel Wedgwood and Mr. MacLaren on 17th February, has just retired from his position as Chief Valuer to the Inland Revenue Department. He received a very hearty welcome from his many friends, and expressed great delight in being amongst them as a "free man," an independent citizen, able to take part in promoting the principles in which he believes. Those who know the man, know his long and constant devotion to the cause of Land Value Taxation, are proud to think that his eminent knowledge and gifts of exposition are now available in the wider field of open endeavour.

Sir Edgar joined the Government service in 1911 as head of the Land Valuation Department, and was responsible for carrying out the work of the valuation under the Finance Act of 1909-10. He has now retired, having reached the pension age; but vigorous as ever, he looks forward to an active life in retirement from the duties and obligations of the Civil Service. Before taking charge of the Valuation Department, he was for 33 years on the staff of the Metropolitan Board of Works and the London County Council, being assistant valuer to the London County Council from 1888 to 1900, and from then till 1911 the chief of its statistical department. His public duties included membership of the Departmental Committee on Local Taxation which sat from 1911 to 1914, and he was largely responsible for the Minority Report of that Committee which pronounced in favour of the Rating of Land Values. He has given evidence before a number of various Royal Commissions and Select Committees (including Mr. Ure's on the Scottish Land Value Taxation Bill), and in support of numerous County Council Bills in Parliament. He has a wide and expert knowledge of local government, and is recognized as a leading authority on valuation, rating and taxation.

Already he has taken up his pen in the public discussion of these questions. He is the author of a series of articles on Housing now being published weekly in the MUNICIPAL JOURNAL, the first of which appeared on 13th February. Both THE TIMES of 12th February, and MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of 13th February, gave prominence to letters from him, dealing adequately in the first case with the incidence of rates on houses (in reply to Lord Denbigh and others); and in the latter case, with a long communication from Mr. Charles Roberts, ex-M.P., who had wanted more information on the application of Land Value Taxation to agriculture than the new

Liberal programme provided. Sir Edgar Harper's "new-found freedom" is not being devoted to the pursuit of pleasure; it is encouraging to record such special service and to realize that there is more to follow as occasion offers.

LONDON AND LAND VALUE RATING

Labour Party's Policy

(From the "50 Points for L.C.C. Electors," a booklet published by the London Labour Party)

32.—LONDON'S LANDLORDS

The present rating system, defended by Municipal "Reform" is unjust and unreasonable.

If an owner lets his land lie idle to secure famine prices he will escape rating under present conditions. If he improves his land by building on it he must immediately pay rates. His only way to reduce his rates is to allow his building to dilapidate. It is easy to see that this foolish rating system in effect checks building and strengthens the power of land speculators and monopolists.

London's housing history in the past few years shows how the ratepayers are held to ransom by the land sharks. In some of the outer districts of the county there is much uncovered land which is rated on the basis of agricultural value and which therefore pays rates on only one half of that. This type of land pays in London rates an average of only 6s. 5d. per acre. The rest of the land in the county pays an average of £238 an acre.

But when a local authority wants some of this "agricultural" land for housing it suddenly becomes "valuable building land." For instance, the three L.C.C. housing sites at Becontree, Bellingham and Roehampton were assessed at a net annual value of £5,031. The price paid by the L.C.C. was £465,883. This is absurd. Either the purchase price (at 20 years' purchase) should have been about £100,000 or the rateable value should have been nearly £23,300.

Labour stands for a sane municipal financial system and for the rating of site values, which would encourage building and break the power of those who withhold valuable land from use. This policy would be coupled with a well-thought-out town-planning scheme which would prevent undesirable building and the undue extension of towns.

JOSEPH ROWNTREE

In the death of Mr. Joseph Rowntree on 24th February, the movement for land and housing reform has lost a convinced and sincere supporter. As an employer of labour on a large scale Mr. Rowntree proved himself a humanitarian of the first rank. In that field of enterprise he had an international reputation. He was for progress and reform in every sphere of industrial and social life as a very wide public can gratefully acknowledge. In the matter of housing, the village of New Earswick is a monument to the memory of the man. He strongly believed in the Rating of Land Values, and was interested to the last in the progress of the movement, as recorded in LAND & LIBERTY.

When Joseph Fels, twelve years ago, was urging men with means in the reform movement to help him to make opinion for the Land Values policy Mr. Rowntree gladdened Joe's heart with a generous response. It was an expression of a strong belief in the practical proposal to rate land values instead of houses.

We extend our sympathy to the family circle in their bereavement.