

FARM LAND AT A PREMIUM

"The importance of food production in this country is so great and the whole business of farming is often so idealized that it requires courage for politicians to say that there is room for improvement in our agriculture practices. For a government supposed to be not too friendly to the profit motive, our present rulers have been remarkably kind to farmers and by a series of devices have ensured that a substantial carrot lures the farmer along. The inevitable consequence has been to shelter inefficient farmers from the bracing blasts of competition.

"One of the grave problems of British agriculture is this. A young man or woman wants to make a life-work of agriculture. The candidate takes a degree and works on a farm for a few years . . . then what? In 99 cases out of 100, unless he has capital—and a lot of it—he is stuck. The prices of farms to-day are fantastic. His brother can have entered one of the Forces or the X.Y.Z. Co., Ltd., and if he works hard and is intelligent he will end up as an admiral, general, air-marshal or managing director, while the farmer without capital will remain at best a foreman, with little chance of saving the capital required to buy his own farm. The reason for this is, of course, the small-scale farming traditional in Britain. I state the problem without trying to suggest an answer, but I am sure that it is a problem that will have to be tackled."—(From *Stephen King-Hall's "National News Letter,"* November 3, 1949. *S. K. H. may be interested to know that this reached us from one of his Canadian subscribers, G. R. D., who is also ours.*)

The testimony of the boom in land prices comes from all parts of the country. It is the reflection of all that governments have done to spoon-feed and subsidise the industry, these aids and doles necessarily resulting in raising land prices, so that the benefit goes not to the working farmer but only to the land speculator. And now the capitalised monopoly-rent thus created hangs like a millstone on the neck of all who would spade, plough, seed, or harvest the land. The shame is that it is a Socialist Government which, oblivious to the operation of landlord law, but rather doing everything to sustain and help it, has so contributed to the smashing of agriculture, at the same time closing the doors to that primal opportunity to make a living which is the one and only solution of the social problem. Nothing could so conclusively prove the imperative need for the application now, and in drastic measure, of the Taxation of Land Values to the countryside, held as it is more than ever in the grip of land monopoly.

The following extracts from a Review of the Property Market in 1949, appearing in the *Estates Gazette*, December 31, speak for themselves:—

BEDFORDSHIRE

Farms with vacant possession are seldom in the market and command very high prices, and it is very rarely that a farm is available for letting.—*Stafford, Rogers & Merry* (Bedford).

BERKSHIRE

Farm lands have again been much in demand and prices received have been maintained, in some cases exceeding those of the previous year.—*Dreweatt, Watson & Barton* (Newbury).

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Farms are in great demand and still make high prices. This refers to farms from 100-150 acres, with a good house and up-to-date outbuildings.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

With regard to general trends in the real property market, our experience has been that there has been no falling off in the

demand for farms with vacant possession, whilst the supply has been even smaller than last year. Previously unheard-of prices per acre have been paid, particularly for comparatively small farms with possession and, in a number of cases, the buyers are newcomers to farming, with little or no previous farming experience. We would most emphatically repeat our warning in 1947 that disaster from a farming point of view almost certainly awaits this type of buyer. The demand for agricultural estates for investment, as the best short-term guard against further inflation and for other obvious reasons, has been stronger than ever in the past year and we can see no signs of any slackening of the demand in the near future.—*Bedwell & Sons* (Cambridge).

CHESHIRE

Farms with vacant possession are in great demand, and high prices have been realised. Depending on situation and condition of the homestead, £150 to £250 per acre have been quite usual.—*Brady & Son* (Stockport).

CORNWALL

There is an excellent demand for agricultural land in large and small parcels—the demand exceeds the supply.—*John Julian & Co., Ltd.* (Newquay).

DERBYSHIRE

The main demand has been for farms with vacant possession and modest modern detached and semi-detached houses having suitable accommodation and conveniently situated for the town. Farms with possession have sold particularly well, the more so when they have been of modest size.—*John Wilkinson & Fisher* (Derby).

DEVON (SOUTH)

We have been unable to satisfy the many enquiries for farms within 10 miles of the coast. The prices paid have been well above their apparent economic value.—*Waycotts* (Torquay).

HAMPSHIRE

The demand for agricultural land has not declined and on the whole, prices have been maintained at 1948 levels. The two- to three-hundred acre farm, with good house and buildings, seems to be in the greatest demand and the number of purchasers for such a property is almost unlimited. There also appears to be no decrease in the demand for agricultural land and estates for investment purposes, but there are very few such holdings available on the market. The tendency for tenants to purchase their farms whenever they come on the market continues.—*Hall, Pain & Foster* (Portsmouth).

HEREFORDSHIRE

There has been a very great demand for farms with vacant possession and a good demand for blocks of land for investment purposes.—*Russell, Baldwin & Bright, Ltd.* (Hereford).

KENT

Farms and smallholdings with vacant possession still realise high prices, but they are much more difficult to sell. There has been very little land available to be let during the past year, but where properties are occasionally offered for letting the rents that can be obtained are often twice or two-and-a-half times the pre-war rents.—*A. J. Burrows, Clements, Winch & Sons* (Ashford).

LINCOLNSHIRE

The demand for agricultural land with vacant possession is very great and the high prices of recent years have been maintained. There is also a good demand for agricultural property in a good state of repair and cultivation, for investment purposes. . . . The high prices for agricultural property will, we think, be maintained.—*Escritt & Barrell* (Grantham).

NORFOLK

There has been a considerable increase in the demand for good dairy and light land farms with vacant possession. The provisions regarding security of tenure in the Agricultural Holdings Act are having a tremendous effect and prices of farm lands have been affected, noticeably by the scarcity element. Financial trusts have acquired a number of agricultural estates. . . .—*Cruso & Wilkin* (Kings Lynn).

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

There has been an increasing demand for agricultural holdings both to sell and to let, and there is also a demand for farms as an investment subject to tenancies. . . . We consider that the value of agricultural land is likely to be maintained, and, in fact, there is a tendency for prices to harden, which we believe is due to the fact that the country is more dependent than ever on home production of foodstuffs, and land is considered to be a very sound investment.—*Stage & Foot* (Brackley).

NORTHUMBERLAND

Values have been maintained and very high prices are being paid for farms with vacant possession, particularly smallholdings. There is also an excellent demand for investment purposes.—*Sanderson, Townend & Gilbert* (Newcastle-on-Tyne).

SOMERSET

There has been a keen enquiry for agricultural holdings of all sizes, and prices have shown a steady increase throughout the year. It is becoming more and more difficult to obtain agricultural land of any sort, either in small parcels or as complete farms.—*R. B. Taylor & Sons* (Yeovil).

STAFFORDSHIRE (NORTH)

Farms and agricultural land generally are still enjoying great demand. Farms with possession are selling as well as ever, and one often wonders how they can be made to pay at the prices given. Small units up to, say, 30 acres, are regularly realising £150 to £200 per acre; a smallholding of no particular merit of 15 acres sold at £225 per acre last month. We have dealt with the disposal of several agricultural estates in the area. Tenanted farms are almost invariably bought by the tenants, but where the tenant does not buy, a good farm is in demand for a lockup security almost regardless of the return. Good class tenanted accommodation land has also sold well, both to tenants and private buyers.—*Louis Taylor & Sons* (Hanley).

SUFFOLK

Agricultural properties have continued throughout the year to meet a stronger demand than any other class of property. Where anything approaching an economic unit is offered together with a suitable residence, prices have in most cases exceeded previous values. . . . Nearly all farms coming into our hands sell within a short period, and it is not possible to find sufficient land to satisfy buyers' requirements. As well as the insatiable demand for small farms, we have had a good enquiry for the larger units of up to 500 acres or more with possession, and considerable interest is also shown by the large-scale investor in acquiring estates for investment purposes, particularly where there is no mansion.—*Lacy Scott & Son* (Bury St. Edmunds).

WILTSHIRE

The demand for farms with vacant possession is still very heavy and those with modern buildings realise exceptionally good prices. There is a heavy demand which is increasing, for agricultural land for investment, and it is anticipated that this demand will continue. Farms to rent are extremely difficult to obtain and, when available, prospective tenants are willing to pay a rent greatly in excess of that obtained under the old tenancy.—*Rawlence & Squarey* (Salisbury).

WORCESTERSHIRE

Agricultural properties remain in very keen demand, very high prices being realised for all types of agricultural land with vacant possession and particularly for farms sold with the benefit of a hop quota. It is felt that in many cases the provisions of the Agricultural Holdings Act affect the prices realised for farms sold subject to existing tenancies in so far as comparatively high prices are realised for properties let and farmed indifferently as compared with those let to good tenants.—*Bentley, Hobbs & Mytton* (Worcester).

YORKSHIRE

Agricultural land is in keen demand; tenants have shown considerable interest in purchasing their holdings and have been in competition with investors who appear willing to buy this type of property to show a modest return on capital outlay.—*Morphet & Morphet* (Harrogate).

NORTH WALES

Farms are in very strong demand up to 150 acres at enhanced prices up to £95 per acre. Smallholdings are easily sold up to £140 per acre.—*John Pritchard & Co.* (Bangor).

ENGLAND'S LESSON FOR FREEDOM

One thing is very clear to-day: the Western Democracies face a challenge to their existence, not only from external forces, but internal, that are far more dangerous. Any failure to achieve a sound basis for a just society leaves the door wide open for those who would destroy the benefits of the partial freedom already secured.

In time to come Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty*, will be recognised as the greatest discoverer of the 20th Century in proving the direct relation between the law of wages and the law of rent. Henry George pointed the way to a just society which would not only retain the existing freedoms, but would extend them to every sphere of social life and make them stable. To-day we see politicians or statesmen, whichever term is preferred or desired, putting the cart before the horse in professing to establish a welfare state before attempting to discover how much welfare is really needed.

To talk of security from the cradle to the grave in an insecure society, compels one to believe that under such circumstances the only security comes in the grave, whereas, if the barriers of all kinds which exist now were removed by the application of the policy of Henry George, that would throw all natural resources open to those who would use them, and at the same time abolish the iniquitous system of taxation which will surely, unless altered, prevent the maintenance of sufficient funds to provide for social welfare, but if the right road were taken, the number of real unfortunates, who needed assistance, would be a very small proportion, and a just society could easily take care of them.

One hundred years ago in Britain the condition of restrictions was almost precisely those existing to-day. All lovers of Liberty were well acquainted with Buckle's "History of Civilisation in England," where he described how the people of Britain, with political patience through all the bonds of repression, had achieved a state of freedom, although only partially, it allowed the country to raise its prosperity to the state of wealth and power that made the nation a great country. The Government which Britain has endured for the last five years has maintained and extended the shackles of restriction that were already put there by their predecessors and have inflicted in addition such a condition of taxation that by all previous standards show them to be the most reactionary Government of Britain in the last hundred years.

A century ago, when we were struggling for freedom, the businessman who belonged to the Manchester School, did not avoid public affairs, but, on the contrary, was the spearhead of the movement led by Richard Cobden and John Bright, that removed the controls and repressions.

Unless the businessmen now in the Western Democracies are animated by the same lofty sentiments which were the compelling force of those businessmen of Manchester, things are likely to move from bad to worse, until the enemies, who are always present, seize the opportunity to destroy democracy and abolish even the partial freedom that we enjoy.

(Address by Ashley Mitchell at the Commerce and Industry Luncheon, Chicago, November 9.)