

## OUR SUBMERGING FARMER

### Land Values Taxation—The Way Out

By E. E. MILLER

*Appearing in the NATION, 20, Vesey Street, New York City, 22nd February, and forwarded by that Journal to LAND & LIBERTY for notice or quotation.*

Those sanguine souls who think that all is well—not, perhaps, with “business” for the moment—but with our governmental policies and our economic system, should consider carefully these few census figures. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of farms in the United States increased from 6,361,502 to 6,448,366, a gain of 86,864, or 1·4 per cent. In this same ten years the number of farms operated by their owners decreased 23,627 or 0·6 per cent; the number operated by tenants increased 100,070, or 4·2 per cent; and the number operated by hired managers increased 10,421, or 17·9 per cent. The total acreage of the country's farms increased in the decade 8·7 per cent. The acreage operated by owners increased 6·3 per cent; that by tenants, 17·1 per cent; that by managers, 0·5 per cent.

These figures can mean but one thing: the farm lands of the United States are steadily passing from the ownership of the men who till them, the real farmers, into the hands of men who hold them as an investment or for speculation. The percentage of owner-managed farms in 1920, 60·9 per cent, is the smallest on record. The agricultural depression of the last year and a half will transfer thousands more farms from the owner-tended to the tenant-tended group. But while “hard times” accelerate this process they are not its primary cause. The movement is continuous, more rapid in bad times, but none the less constant in good times. . . . Yet the change from farmer ownership to landlord ownership and tenant-farming generally goes on fastest in sections where land values are increasing most rapidly. It is because land values have risen more rapidly than the profits of farming that tenancy has increased. The ownership of farm lands has proved better business than producing crops and live stock. The man who must live by farming finds it harder all the time because the increased interest on the capital tied up in his land more than absorbs his increased profits. The farmer of small capital, in short, is steadily being crowded out of farm ownership, and the land is passing to men with larger capital who can manage with a smaller immediate return from their investment and wait for a future increase in its value for their profit. . . . The growth of cities and towns, better roads, telephone lines, the automobile, were all adding much more to the desirability of the farm as a place to live, and so to its possible selling value, than the possible returns from tending it. Also, around every city and town in an agricultural section may be found tracts of farming land which if put into staple crops could not pay even 2 or 3 per cent on the prices asked for them. Their value is purely speculative, and is based on the future growth of the near-by city or town. No tenant could ever make enough money farming them to pay for them.

The remedy is to check the increase in land values by shifting taxes from the products of the farmer's labour—his crops, live stock, buildings, and other improvements on the land—to the site value of the land itself. This would at once make easier the acquisition of land by the non-owning farmer and make less profitable holding it purely as an investment. The speculator, knowing that increase in land values would be largely absorbed by increased taxes, could not afford to hold land out of use. The landless farmer could buy land, especially unimproved or partially improved land, for a fraction of what it now costs him and he would escape the burden of greatly increased taxes whenever he added to its value by his own labour.

This remedy, the only valid one, it seems to me, though many times proposed by a few individuals, has not yet caught the public fancy. Least of all has it appealed to the majority of farmers. Indeed, most citizens, on the farm or

off, have scarcely given a thought to the increasing farm tenantry. They must come to it before long if agricultural production is to keep pace with the growth in population and if the home-owning farmer is not to become the exception rather than the rule. . . . Justice and humanity join with good business sense to demand that the road to home ownership be made shorter and easier for the man who would till the soil, the world's truest producer.

## “A SHIFTLESS THRIFTLESS CREW— GOD! IT'S HARD”

By E. E. MILLER

*THE NATION, New York City, 22nd February, 1922.*

“Next year we'll buy a farm,” we said,  
My wife and I when newly wed;  
But next year came, and next, and next,  
And always we were sore perplexed  
To find enough to square the store  
And get a start for one year more.

I reckon somehow I'm to blame  
That we have gone on just the same  
For fifteen years; but looking back  
I can't see where my work's been slack,  
And we've not wasted what I made.  
I know I'm not much at a trade,  
And once or twice I've lost like sin  
By letting someone take me in.  
And twice a farm I've tried to buy  
But couldn't gather, low nor high,  
The cash I had to have in hand  
To get possession of the land.

So still we tend another's fields  
And pay him from our scanty yields;  
From hut to hovel move about  
Till all our plunder's plumb worn out.

At moving time in years gone by  
My wife would fret and fuss and cry  
And say, “It's just no use to try  
To keep things nice until we get  
A home to stay at.” “Right, you bet,”  
I'd say. “Next year we'll have it, too;  
I'm sick of this as well as you.”  
But now we just pull up and go.  
She says no word, because, I know,  
She's too down-hearted, tired, sad,  
From giving up the hope she had.

It's hard for one to spend his life  
Toil'ing and moil'ing in endless strife  
With worms and weevils, grass and weeds,  
For scarce enough to meet his needs.  
It's hard to work for years and then  
Be just a slave to other men—  
No home your own, no place to stay  
If some man says to move away.

It's hard to feel men think of you  
As one of a shiftless, thriftless crew—  
“He's just a cropper”—that means, “No good;  
He could do better if he would.”

That's hard, but harder still is this:

To think of what your children miss

And what your women-folks must bear

As you go drifting here and there.

What neighbourhood has in its life

Place for a cropper's busy wife?

Who cares to have his kids about?

At school they're likely in and out;

They leave their friends when they must go;

They lose ambition as they grow.

They never set an orchard tree,

Or fix the yard up so 'twill be