

"OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacred to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—*Henry George.*

OWNERSHIP V. TENANCY UNDER VALUATION.

Mr. A. J. Balfour, writing on October 25th, 1909, said :

"It is a mistake to suppose, as many people do, either that small ownership is the *natural* organisation of rural life—that is, the one which would universally prevail, but for antiquated laws and bad tradition—or that if, it were suddenly established, as by a stroke of a pen, it would immediately work smoothly and automatically to the general advantage of all concerned. This is too sanguine a view. The life of a small owner, though honourable and independent, is rarely an easy one. In some parts of the country his industry needs for its full success to be supplemented by other employments; it is laborious, and requires the vigorous co-operation of all the members of the family who are able to help, be they young or old, male or female. It has its risks, and in many of the States where the system is most deeply rooted in the national life, it yet has to be sustained to heavy protective tariffs."

Mr. Balfour is right. The life of the small owner is always one of hard work for a poor reward, and often a hopeless struggle with debt. The British tenant-farmers and farm workers are hard pressed just now, but they have no desire to be bound like serfs to mortgaged farms. They want land, but they know that the man who buys land with borrowed money does not really get the land. The land more often gets him in its grip and ruins him. There is no freedom for a man in this position.

It is absurd and false to speak of small owners in France, Denmark, and Ireland, when these "owners" have to pay interest on millions of debt. As Mr. Balfour says, they and their families have to work from morning till night, on the farm and off it, to keep above water. The man who has borrowed too much money on his land is not a bit better off than the man who pays too much rent. When low prices or bad seasons come he is worse off, as he still pays interest at full rate.

There is one fault or vice in our land policy. Whether it is the landlord-tenant system, the Small Holdings Act, or land purchase schemes, their first concern is to give the landlords a high rent or a high price; it is only their second concern to give the farmers and labourers the fair play which they need to make a living for themselves and others. This policy must be changed. If we put the farmers and labourers first, not only will they themselves be better off but the landlords and all others will be better off. Farmers with plenty of capital can farm better than those with too little. Well-paid labourers can produce more than poorly

paid labourers. They are better customers of other workers. But how can farmers keep or gather capital, how can they pay their labourers fair or sufficient wages, if the rents take away too much of the produce? How can labourers improve their position when the landlords hold back the land on which they must get an independent living?

The land of Great Britain must be placed at the service of the men who will work it. Until this is done, nothing will do any good to farming. Dukes, Marquises, Earls and other landlords are far too busy with other things to manage the land and rents of the whole country properly. They have had a fair chance for the last 400 years. They got most of the crown lands, most of the church lands, all the land of the Highland clans, most of the commons and common fields, and most of the land of Ireland. They have had more power than all the rest of the people combined. Controlling land they controlled everything. They have ruined agriculture over and over again. For agriculture is only another name for farmers and labourers. They have made life a hell for these people, making them skip round the country and out of the country with high rents and haughty, disdainful treatment. They have broken the health and spirits of millions of men and tens of millions of helpless women and children. They have made the people poor. There are thousands of houses in our country that are a disgrace to the British nation, houses that take in rain, and are overcrowded. Poor food, poor clothes, poor houses, breed consumption and every disease. Idle land, or badly used land, means unemployed men, and unemployed men are poor men themselves and a burden to others. High rents make the men who pay them poor, and poor men do no good to anyone.

There is no reason why men should be poor. All the land is not idle and badly farmed, and all rents are not too high, but enough land is out of use and rents are too high in plenty of cases to keep millions of people in poverty. All this must be changed. The British people have built splendid cities, splendid steamers, railways and locomotives, they are now building wonderful airships, but they have never yet managed to make a decent use of their land. They have failed because they have never really tried. There is only one step which will enable them to use their land as it ought to be used. They must take over from the landowners the power of controlling the land of the country. They must refuse and put aside Lord Lansdowne's claim. Speaking in the House of Lords on the Scottish Small Land Holder's Bill on August 14th, 1907, Lord Lansdowne said: "Surely what gives reality to ownership, what makes it a valuable and precious thing to many people, is that we have hitherto associated with it the power of guiding the destinies of the estate, of superintending its development and improvement, and, above all things, the right to select the persons to be associated with the proprietor in the cultivation of the soil." This is the very citadel of the landowner's power, and this must go. Up till now, the people

have never faced this claim. It is their duty and privilege to do it now.

Whether it is a working man, a labourer, who wants a quarter of an acre for a cottage and garden, or a farmer who wants 20 or 40 acres, or another farmer who wants 100 or 200 acres, or another farmer who wants 1,000 or 4,000 acres, or a sportsman who wants a shooting or fishing, or a man who wants a site for a mansion and park, for a house, a tenement, or factory, or a railway company which wants land for a railway, or a mining company which wants to open a mine, it should be the business of all the responsible and intelligent people in every district to see that they get land for these objects, and that they get it on terms which will enable them to thrive and prosper. In the centre of London, as well as in the most distant parish of Ireland, the Hebrides, or Shetland, the occupiers of land should rise up and come out of their little narrow businesses, and exercise the right that Lord Lansdowne claims for the landowners. They will never be free and independent men until they do this. They will be at the mercy and disposal of the men who "guide the destinies of the estate."

The people have got their chance now in the valuation of land under the Budget of 1909. In every parish the men who know the value of the land best of all men in the world can form themselves into committees to advise and assist the Government valuers. They can decide what is the best use of the land for all concerned, and who are the people best fitted to use it. The value of the land having been fixed each year at a figure which would leave to its occupier a full return for his capital and labour, that value should be taken as the rent payable by the occupier. Every piece of land would then be used in the way that would commend itself to the commonsense and opinion of all the people; for every man could offer his opinion and every opinion would be heard. All the taxes on food, houses, shops, and other good things could be abolished, and a sufficient portion of the land value could be taken in their place. Everyone would gain. There would be higher wages, because far more land would be brought into use, and a greater demand would be made for labour. Labourers could save money and become capitalists.

This is the only national or universal scheme of land reform before the country. It is the only one worth fighting for. It touches every parish and every acre of land in the country. It will make a man prosperous and all his customers prosperous. It is a reform for the labourer, farmer, builder, shopkeeper, manufacturer, miner, and every man who takes

part in industry. Credit banks, small holdings and small ownerships are paltry, patchwork schemes for a small number of people. Under the form of Government assistance, they all lead these people into the trap of mortgages, high prices and high rents. The Taxation of Land Values throws open the land to men. That is all they need, all they want; that is all they emigrate to the colonies to get. The British people do not ask for assistance. They only ask that the land should be set free for their use, that they themselves should be freed from high rents and taxes which deprive them of their own earnings. When they gain this request, they will be free as they have never been before.

J.O.

THE VALUATION AT WORK.

THE forms relating to Land Valuation are now in the hands of owners, and the Press bristles with protests, because the British people at last have taken steps to get an official record of the value of every acre of British land. These protests appear mostly to come from "big men" professedly speaking in the interests of "small men." They wax indignant over the trouble and expense the "small man" is being put to, and condole with him on the still greater sufferings the new system holds in store. Small owners, it is said, are now freed from illusion as to the meaning of the Budget, which they, alas too late, now realise is only to add to their harassments and sufferings.

It will not therefore be amiss to record our own experience of the new valuation, and by using a typical case as an illustration, to show that with average intelligence the plain man can quite easily fill in the new valuation forms. Moreover, it can be shown that when the value of the land thus ascertained comes to be taken as the basis for rating, the typical occupier and owner of rural cottage property will benefit largely through the reduction in the amount of rates he will have to pay.

One of the Bedfordshire Parish Councils holds some small cottage property, and the other day received the much-abused forms relative to Duties on Land Values. The property consists of four small cottages which stand in a row, on the outskirts of a village of about 300 inhabitants. A form has been received for each cottage, and they were treated as follows:—At the outstart the commissioners furnish the following information, re Cottage A.

Situation of property	Green End Road.
Estimated extent	15 poles.
Gross estimated rental (or gross value in valuation list)	£3 0 0
Rateable value	£2 5 0

The questions asked in Part II. being those which have given rise to the outcry, we shall confine our attention to them.

- (1) GROSS VALUE.—This is the combined value of the cottage, its site, and the garden if sold freehold without any legal restrictions or fixed charges. The cottage is very old and in indifferent repair. Eighteen years' purchase of the gross estimated rental was therefore considered its fair market value, viz.:—£54.
- (2) FULL SITE VALUE.—This is the value of the bare land apart from the value of improvements. The