

THE CHURCH AND THE LAND By Father Vincent McNabb, O.P.

In this book the land question is shown from a different angle than the one to which most of us have been accustomed. We remember that Adam Smith says that there are some towns which have very little land and the author of *THE CHURCH AND THE LAND** is certainly not thinking much of town land—important as it appears to us—in dealing with the land question. Back to the land is his remedy; by that phrase he means an exodus from the factory towns, and a return to farming and hand crafts. Father McNabb, in an illuminating illustration, deals with a derelict farm of 500 acres, bought by a company for £5,000, and divided into a hundred holdings. On each holding a cheap bungalow was built and wells were sunk. These unworthy (?) capitalists supplied the means for supporting 500 men, women and children. Nowhere does the author deal with the taxation question, and we are not informed about the amount that all these useful people have been called on to contribute in rates because of their enterprise. We may be sure that the Duke of Z who sold to get a little convenient cash would not be called on to pay much on the derelict farm; also that he would have sold out earlier, and for less, if he had been rated on the real value of the land he had allowed to become derelict. However, that is not the only point. The people who are alarmed about the want of tools and capital are told that these people could get ahead with the tools which they themselves could make. A greenhouse was erected by one smallholder with the help of another, who had worked as a joiner before he was shell-shocked, and for a quarter of the usual cost. A boy dug up stones from the sub-soil, wrought them into a wall to shelter peaches, and his father had found the by-product—a miniature quarry hole—useful as a tank for rain-water. Hardly a generation had passed in these circumstances when the poultry alone (real capital) was valued at £10,000.

We do not forget—like Adam Smith—that our towns are built on land, and to quote our author again, one acre of that town land is as valuable, sometimes, as one thousand acres of farming land. Parliamentary returns and the blue books, which Father McNabb finds more entrancing than books of fiction, have shown us that more than half of our town land is rated as agricultural land, till human beings seek to use it for housing accommodation, and then it acquires the bigger values to which he refers.

The author has a lot to say about the housing question; indeed it is doubtful if anything on that question has ever been written quite so forcibly; with more sympathy for the slum dwellers, or a better acquaintance with the facts. While, however, he connects unemployment—so called—with the land question he does not associate slums with the urban land question.

But as already indicated, factory towns seem to him to be a mere blot on the landscape; the breeding places of vice, and places to be shunned by those who would lead a well-ordered life. He disputes the claim that industrialism adds to wealth; his argument is that neither the quantity nor quality of real wealth is increased by industrialism. With Eugenists, Neo-Malthusians and such like he has no patience, though he writes charitably as to their dupes. Scholarship in his case has done nothing to dry up the wells of his emotions and his colourings are of the most vivid description.

On unemployment he is particularly interesting. He

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informs us that it is quite a new word; he failed to find it in the Oxford Dictionary, and we are further informed that it was not used by General Booth in his book, "DARKEST ENGLAND." The term there used was "Out-of-Works." The latter term seems no better than the other if Father McNabb's argument is correct. It only needs to be mentioned to be proved that the problem is one of poverty and not one of a want of employment. As the author points out we look up to people who are said to be unemployed, provided they are not poor. The curse of the poor is their poverty; those above the poverty line are never out of work or unemployed. The so-called unemployed—rich or poor—waste much effort without performing any service either to themselves or anyone else. Most of the time it is not their fault, and Father McNabb feels that the real cure is to drop the delusion that the community is really served by railways which he holds in many cases only waste time by keeping the market away from the producer, and the worker farther from his work. In his words, industrialism and transport add to token wealth but not to real wealth, and that it is this token wealth which has disorganised our daily life. While we can agree with his idea of a full use of farming land, it will appear to our friends that he has overlooked that a fuller use of town land would contribute to the solution of housing and poverty (or unemployment) problems. It would at the same time put "token wealth" in its own place and out of harm's way. W. R.

SCOTTISH YOUNG LIBERALS

Addressing a Conference of the Scottish League or Young Liberals in Edinburgh, 24th April, Majol Donaldson presiding, Mr. James Scott, S.S.C., Liberal Candidate for Kincardine and Aberdeen, said Scottish common sense revolted against the idea of buying out the landowners of Scotland. The economic objections to that proposal, involving enormous commitments and unknown liabilities, were insuperable. There was also an almost unanimous opinion amongst agriculturists in Scotland against putting agriculture under County Executive Committees or County Councils. After all Liberals were not interested in securing to the landowners of this country a livelihood for the rest of their lives and for their families. The interests of Liberalism were to secure the full use of every acre of land. They did not mind who owned the land so long as free access to it was obtained and that every acre was put to its full use.

As to the land policy Young Liberals should adopt, Mr. James Scott said he would put the Taxation of Land Values in the forefront.

In the centre of Scotland they had 78 per cent. of the population; while the other 22 per cent. was scattered over the whole of the rest of Scotland. In regard to distribution of its population Scotland was losing its balance. The position was made worse by emigration, which was going on steadily from their sparsely populated districts to the Colonies. They were faced with the prospect of paying for the education of the people living in these districts, making them good Scottish citizens, and then letting them go to the Colonies.

It ought to be the policy of Liberals to prevent people from leaving their native land, and also to make it worth while for country-bred people to remain in the country districts and not gravitate as they had been doing in recent years into the towns.

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