

THE SWEATING EVIL IN AUSTRALIA.

To the Editor of Land Values.

SIR,—In your issue of June last, in a paragraph commenting upon a lecture delivered by Mr. G. P. Gooch, M.P. for Bath, on "Sweating Questions in Various Countries," you quote him as having said that the establishment of Wages Boards had met and conquered the evil in Australia and New Zealand. With the exception of New Zealand, of which I claim no authority to speak (although I am inclined to believe that conditions there in relation to this matter are similar to those met with elsewhere), I am utterly at a loss from whence he can have derived his information, as so far from the sweating evil having either been met or conquered in Australia, as alleged, by the legislative contrivances referred to, the evil is practically as great and as difficult to cope with as ever it was; and in all the States, save perhaps West Australia, both from Press and Pulpit, it is ever being exposed and denounced. Nor should this fact surprise us when, as stated recently, we are informed there are in Melbourne 5000 person unable to get a job, and 50,000 living just above the poverty line. Besides which, a week or two back, the papers contained graphic accounts of Mr. Tom Mann, who with his unemployed brigade visited the principal churches in that city, in order that the extreme condition of his poor followers might be more effectually brought under the notice of the church-going public. But it may, perhaps, be asked, What have the unemployed to do with the sweating question? Simply this, that no work means no wages, and no wages means poverty, or the existence of conditions which make sweating not only possible but inevitable. It should also be remembered that, while in certain notorious cases the sweater may be some greedy, avaricious wealthy employer, he more frequently is one who, from stress of circumstances, the result of extreme competition, is prevented from paying anything else but a sweated wage. It can, however, be easily recognised that the sweater would not have the least prospect of success if trade were brisk and labour in receipt of high wages. Although my illustrations and inferences have been drawn from Victoria, it must not be thought they could not be supplemented by others from neighbouring States; but because it is there where Protection has obtained the greatest grip of the minds and bodies of the people that sweating in its most forbidding forms is to be met with, and where, also, the machinery for dealing with it has attained its most complete development. In fairness to those who believe that it is possible to prevent sweating by legislative enactment, it might be said that experience, so far, has proved that while Wages Boards and anti-sweating legislation, with their minimum wage provisions, may operate to maintain at a slightly higher limit the wages of those operatives affected by them, it has been found utterly impossible to increase the general earnings of the great mass of the workers who must necessarily be outside the sphere of their influence. For, obviously, while you may by law force an employer to pay the minimum wage to those whom he employs, you cannot compel him to employ those whose labour should not prove sufficiently productive; and, consequently, it has been found that, apart from the fact that wages have declined and that now the minimum wage has become the maximum one, the slow, infirm, or otherwise ineffective worker who was incapable of producing up to the minimum standard promptly got "the sack," the labour of the less productive being now no longer sufficiently profitable. It was soon found, however, that the slow worker, unable to get a job at minimum rates, working on his own account at any wage he could get, threatened to be a greater menace than before, compelling the labour unions in their own interests to obtain the modification of the "minimum" provision, so that the slow or infirm worker might be granted practically a certificate of incompetency, enabling its holder to work for less than the standard rate, provided that the number of "slow"

hands in any one factory should not exceed a fifth of the whole number there employed. But cannot anyone see that in making this concession in favour of the slow worker the whole position for the minimum wage has been surrendered, and, what is more, that even this arrangement can but be regarded as tentative, and subject to still further modifications as time goes on, when the proportion will have to be increased to, say, a fourth, or even a third, as circumstances may demand. Every single-taxer knows that no legislation such as that embodied in Wages Boards provisions can prevent sweating, or even seriously affect it. For people toil and slave under sweated conditions not from choice but from compulsion. Open up natural opportunities to labour and it would be impossible to sweat labour. For under conditions of freedom which the adoption of the Georgian scheme alone would render possible, no one would consent to work for another for less than he would obtain by working for himself. There would then be no necessity to provide for a "minimum" wage, for all workers would obtain the "maximum"—namely, the full results of their labour.—I am, Sir, etc., W. H. POPE.

ADELAIDE, S.A., 31st July, 1906.

WANTED, A CADASTRAL SURVEY.

To the Editor of Land Values.

SIR,—The basis of your crusade must be a cadastral survey of the United Kingdom, by which I mean an accurate valuation of every acre, with references to the existing geometrical survey, and a record of the ownership of every plot. In a word, we want a new edition of the Domesday Book, on which the Conqueror's feudal edifice rested. That system was logical enough while it implied the performance of co-related duties by the feudal tenants-in-chief. In this country, however, privilege and land monopolisation have long outlived the conception of obligations towards the community which justified their existence. We are groaning under the very evils which brought about the French Revolution.

If anything could arouse the dormant national conscience it would be the divulgence of the myriad anomalies and injustices of our landed system. One is reminded of Bishop Butler's famous simile. He compared human society to a flock of pigeons surrounding vast heaps of grain, and looking on patiently while half a dozen of their fellows devoured, wasted, and defiled the common hoard. Any starving outsider who ventured to pick a single grain was ruthlessly done to death by the whole body.

It is a fact, demonstrated by Mr. Arthur Dolling in the *Strand Magazine* for June, that five square miles of the most thickly peopled portion of London are in the hands of nine families, who batten on the brains and sinews of landless millions, without contributing the hundredth part of their ill-gotten gains to the cost of administration. These monopolists are permitted by law and custom to squander their princely revenues on every species of self-indulgence, and to increase their overgrown estates *ad libitum*. Lord Howard de Walden owns 290 acres of bricks and mortar, including recent acquisitions near the Edgeware Road. The Duke of Bedford, not content with 120 acres in Bloomsbury, has just made "important purchases from the Crown, of which Parliament and the public seem to have been kept in ignorance."

Another result of a cadastral survey would be the introduction into England of compulsory land registration. We established a mechanism of the kind in India about forty years ago, and, as a former *ex-officio* Registrar there, I can testify to its admirable working. Scotland, too, has enjoyed land registration for centuries, which, to quote an article in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*,

"Makes every person aware, for a trifle, not only of the precise title of every proprietorship of real estate in the country, but of the amount of money borrowed upon

every piece of land, so that a proposing purchaser, or a proposing money-lender, is in perfect safety, and acts with the greatest facility. It has often been proposed to introduce this highly useful institution into England; but had it been some custom of the Hindoos or ancient Mexicans, utterly alien to European ideas, it could not have been treated with more dread and suspicion than it has been in the Houses of Parliament. . . . England is *walled* against it as is the Celestial Empire."

Feudalism is, indeed, essentially secretive, selfish, anti-social. We must expect stubborn opposition from our land grabbers, who will misuse their legislative powers even as their forbears did during the railway mania of 1846-7. But influence that has been exerted for selfish ends is slipping from their grasp. I hope and believe that the British fetish of Property will be overthrown without the deluge of blood and tears which attended its destruction across the Channel.—I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

FRANCIS H. SKRINE.

147 VICTORIA STREET, S.W., 28th Aug.

AS OTHERS SEE US.

To the Editor of "Land Values."

I am home again after having spent six weeks in Britain. It is not easy for me to focus my feelings and impressions of this comparatively short period.

Seven years ago I spent a month in London. As everybody knows, politics have changed very much since. Hardly anything would strike a foreigner more than the difference in public opinion between the times of the Boer War and the times now of the Transvaal Constitution.

Seven years ago everyone who doubted the righteousness of private property in land was regarded as an anarchist or at least a crank; to-day there is hardly a question more discussed in Britain than the land question.

Seven years ago unemployed workmen occupying the unemployed land in Plaistow (is it possible to find anything more natural) would have been considered as robbers, now they found a large amount of sympathy in the greatest newspapers. Mr. Tom L. Johnson of Cleveland figured then in the British press as one of the very many cranks America had. Now they regard him as a courageous man doing, though in a somewhat unusual way—but still doing the right thing. I heard several times speakers mentioning the land question, but not one of them was in favour of landlordism. A speaker in Hyde Park, on the platform of the National Democratic League, said—"If the House of Lords refuses to pass the Education Bill, let us tax land values five shillings in the pound; if it still refuses let us increase the tax to ten shillings in the pound, and if it should still be against the Bill let the tax be twenty shillings in the pound. I never heard such arguments at open-air meetings seven years ago, and all the people cheered these sentiments. It is still certainly very profitable, more profitable than ever to be a landlord in Britain, but landlordism never was more unpopular.

Of course one cannot say that the majority of the public are single taxers, for this demands not only that they should see the question of the right and wrong of landlordism but also possess a certain mental capacity to understand what the rent of land means. And not everyone—even if he is a Professor of Political Economy—possesses this mental capacity.

Though one may find even to-day true of the single tax what Dupont de Nemours said in 1766 of the Physiocrat Principles, that "They are so clear and simple to everybody who will but think, that they are easily understood by people with clear heads who are not biased by private interests."

Public opinion is more and more against landlordism, and more and more in favour of the taxation of land values. All this shows how deep an impression Henry George's teaching has made. This progress must also be due to the excellent educational works of the Leagues both in England and

Scotland. A visit to Glasgow must have an encouraging effect upon every single taxer. From the Lord Provost to the poorest workman, I found everywhere single taxers, or, at least, sympathisers with the movement.

It has a great significance for us that Glasgow, which on the continent is not without reason called "the best governed city in the world" has the most vigorous single tax movement.

ROBERT BRAUN.

LIPPA (HUNGARY), 30th August, 1906.

ON UNEMPLOYMENT.

By W. R. LESTER, M.A.,

In the "Huddersfield Examiner," 28th July.

The whole labour problem hinges on the presence of an unemployed class needing to find a livelihood, and who are, therefore, always underbidding their more fortunate brethren. The vital question for us is: Shall we, by solving the land question on single-tax lines, also solve the unemployed problem? Will every man then who wants work be able to find it, and, if he can, will his wage equal the product of his labour? We believe that "Yes" is the answer. We have seen that, with a sufficient tax on land values all land would be forced to its most productive use, be it for agriculture, railways, docks, market-gardens, factories, offices, or dwellings. Who will assert that man's desire for these things or their products is yet satisfied?

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