

At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

By E. Wye

WE wish to remind readers of this Department that our good friend Horace Wenzel's offer of a prize of twenty-five dollars for the best account of the collection of ground rent in the form of a land tax in Soviet Russia remains in force. Meeting us the other day Mr. Wenzel asked who had won the prize, and we had to admit with humiliation that nothing on the subject had been received.

Strange how, when Russia furnishes the theme, one's lack of interest—not to speak of one's prejudice—gets the better of one. Nevertheless, every now and again the press prints something bearing on this subject which to some extent modifies the "conspiracy of silence" we like to accuse the newspapers of. Walter Duranty, for example, in his wireless message of May 11 to the *N. Y. Times* from Moscow had this to say: "If the harvest comes up to expectations it is estimated that the land tax ought to produce not far short of \$200,000,000 from about 20,000,000 peasant holdings. * * * This is the only direct tax the peasant is called on to pay and to a certain extent represents also the rent for the land, which legally is State property."

Quite a tidy sum is \$200,000,000, and we are wondering how the deed is accomplished. Then again in *The Current History Magazine* for March, under the title of "The Passing of Lenin" there was an interesting symposium, which the editor described as "Conflicting estimates of the character, career and historical importance of the man who led the greatest social revolution of the present age." Capt. Paxton Hibben contributed one of the articles, depicting Lenin as "the builder of a new order." "Having achieved peace," he writes of Lenin, "he laid the foundation of production through assigning the rent of the land to the people by an adaptation of the formula of Henry George." One does not exactly know what to make of such statements as these, for one has to confess small intimate knowledge of what has taken place. It is true that certain leading facts in this Russian land business do not stand out and serve as sign posts. For instance, we know that one of the very first pronouncements of the November Revolution of 1917 was the proclamation that "Private property in land is Abolished." Following this we heard of the subdivision of the great estates and the parcelling out of the land among the peasants. Then we read that the peasants had to put their land to use and could not buy or sell it. During the Civil War, when the country was overrun with enemies and the Russian people were fighting for their existence, we heard strange stories of the Red Land Army and wondered what that could mean. Readers of the magazine called *Soviet Russia* will remember accounts of the "Requisitions," which the Land Army insisted on collecting when they were not

forthcoming voluntarily or at least in accordance with the directions of the Central Council of Commissioners. Woe to the peasant who concealed the produce of his farm when he was required to contribute his *produit net*, as Quesuay would have called it, to the armies of Russia fighting in the field! What rude system was it that these uncouth revolutionists adopted to bring about something like the "association in equality" of which Henry George wrote? Perhaps they did not suspect that they were establishing a fairly general level of economic wages, and at the same time were skimming off and collecting the cream of production as economic rent. Yet so it appears to have been. And finally when the N. E. P. came round and a change was attempted from payments in kind to money payments of the land tax, and instead of "unlimited" the rent fund collected became "limited," we heard vaguely of a method of classifying and grading land according to its economic value—not as we should do, according to its money value, but rather by the estimation in which it was held by the surrounding community or neighborhood—the peasants differentiating one advantage from another and working under a plan not unlike in essentials the method we know as the Somers system. But there we are. What do we actually know? What we need is an authentic and authoritative account of the present Russian land system, which to all intents and purposes appears to be based on the famous first demand of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, namely that the economic rent of land belongs to the people and must be collected for the use of the community. For all of these reasons we hope that some well-informed writer will send a first class article to LAND AND FREEDOM and so win Mr. Wenzel's prize of \$25.

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THE WRATH OF LATONA

LAND PLAY IN TWO ACTS, A PRELUDE AND AN EPILOGUE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

The Goddess Latona
 Bion, magistrate of a city in Lycia
 Neocles, a wealthy citizen
 Glaucus, parasite to Neocles
 Myra, daughter of Bion
 Shepherd Boy
 Children
 Eldest child
 Neocles' two slaves

Between the Prelude and Act I a year has elapsed.

ACT I

Scene: A glade in a woody region of Lycia, with a stream widening out into a small basin or tarn visible at side of

stage. A road rising from the valley below and leading up from a little city passes diagonally along the bank of the water. There is a lovely prospect across the valley. Another road meets the valley road at the tarn and this one is supposed to stretch down toward the sea. Near the intersection of the two roads is a rustic altar. A wood occupies the side of the stage opposite the tarn.

Before the curtain rises a shepherd's horn is heard and a "hallo!" off stage in a boy's voice. After the curtain has risen a Shepherd Boy comes on from the left (the sea road) and pausing at the intersection of the two roads looks toward the valley. He halloes again. Then he kneels down by the water and drinks to his satisfaction, after which he takes from his bag a red apple and begins eating it. A tiny "hallo!" is heard from the valley road.

SHEPHERD BOY. Come, little sister, hurry along. I am hungry. (Distant tinkling heard from time to time.) The sheep are safe and I want my dinner.

(Enter a small child, his sister, bringing him food in a basket. She is somewhat out of breath.)

CHILD. Listen, brother, (giving him the basket) what do you think? Today is holiday and a lot of children are coming out here to play. I saw them on the road. They were picking flowers. They will soon be here. Oh goody, they have baskets of fruit, and oh, cheese and bread and butter and olives and cakes, and I heard them say their school-teacher would dance with them and show them games too!

SHEPHERD BOY. (Who has opened the basket and is eating.) Well, what's all that to me? I've got to mind the sheep, haven't I?

CHILD. (Dipping into the basket and taking a cake.) May I stay to see the children?

SHEPHERD BOY. You? No, run home. Mother will want you. (Child begins to cry.) Here's another cake for you, little one. Run along.

(Child, pouting, starts to descend the valley road and comes into contact with Glaucus, Neocles' parasite, who stops short to observe the mite of humanity.)

GLAUCUS. Careful, young lady, or you'll knock me over! (He turns and watches her disappear. Seeing Shepherd Boy.) Ah, young man, maybe you are responsible for the damages I hope to collect under suit for assault and battery! If you care to settle the case at once out of court, give me a bit of that savory cheese of yours and a small piece of buttered bread and we'll call it quits. (Eating the things which the boy has grudgingly handed over to him) A lovely day! I see you are a Shepherd boy. Has your father any sheep for sale? I sometimes operate on a small scale for the market. Speculation is the life of trade. I try to impress upon myself never to miss an opportunity for profit.

SHEPHERD BOY. They are my mother's—my father is dead.

GLAUCUS. Alas, alas!

SHEPHERD BOY. Ain't you the fellow down in the market-place who sells onions and herbs? You look like the one I mean. He cheated my brother last week out of four obols.

GLAUCUS. You are mistaken. I am the friend and adviser of the rich Neocles, the eminent banker and promoter of enterprises, and I may say that our joint personalities are very well known throughout the city, our magic city, the coming metropolis of Lycia.

SHEPHERD BOY. Then I didn't see you in the market.

GLAUCUS. Do you know Bion, the magistrate, when you see him?

SHEPHERD BOY. No, I don't.

GLAUCUS. I have the honor of an appointment with him here today. By the way, as I have alluded to our enterprises, I have with me our most recent prospectus, number 17. If you care to read it,—

SHEPHERD BOY (interrupting). Are *you* invited to the children's picnic-party? (Sounds of children's voices are heard far off, but approaching.)

GLAUCUS. (Fumbling with his pouch). I have mislaid the prospectus. But if your mother will purchase for you one of our lots, say in Section B of this year's development, she will be laying the foundation of your fortune. Take this from me. Just let her put it aside for you and forget about it. No need to improve it. For every drachma invested by our patrons in this proposition we guarantee, yes guarantee, one hundred drachmas in five years. Our terms as realtors are easy. We—

SHEPHERD BOY. Here they come! Lamb, ram, sheep and muttons! Hurrah, here they are!

(Myra surrounded by her bevy of girls and boys, arrives—all in jolly mood. Two of the larger boys have flutes. The children bear baskets of fruits etc., and all have plucked flowers by the way. Amid laughter and animation Myra indicates that the wood is to be the picnic ground, where all their impedimenta are to be deposited. Some of the children go to the waterside and quench their thirst. Glaucus retires to the background. The Shepherd Boy out of sheer curiosity edges over to the wood and wistfully watches the preparations for luncheon, etc. Myra observes him.)

MYRA. Shepherd boy, your flock will not miss you before nightfall, will they? Tarry with us, if you will, and join our children in our midsummer festival. We are going to rehearse some dances in honor of our great goddess Deméter, who blesses our land with plenty.

SHEPHERD BOY. I cannot dance, but I can play on the pipe.

MYRA. Good. If we dance well enough and are successful in the trials we may be chosen with others to dance in the theatre in the city.

SHEPHERD BOY. I hope you will be chosen. But I may not stay now. My mother has bid me hasten down

toward the sea (indicating road) and bring our other flock to join our lambs and ewes in the valley. I'll take them by the lower road. When that is done I will return. My sister brought me my dinner and I am not hungry now.

MYRA. When you return our altar will be in readiness and we shall have at hand our fragrant offerings to yield up with song and votive dance to the divine goddess.

SHEPHERD BOY. Dear lady, farewell. (Exit).

A CHILD. O Myra, must we wait so long before we dance? You told us we should dance twice and maybe three times. We all know the words you have written for us. Please let us not wait.

OTHERS. Oh yes, now! Please let us dance; etc.

GLAUCUS. (Approaching). Madam, it ill becomes me to intrude upon the pious and pleasing ceremony which you have planned for your little friends today. Nor indeed should I be here at all, save that by a curious chance my distinguished master and the august magistrate Bion, your father, are by appointment to meet here presently, at this fountain, this pool, pond, basin, mere or lake, if I may call it such, to settle a certain matter of business. (He swells with importance).

MYRA. My father mentioned this to me and hoped he should meet me here.

GLAUCUS. To be more exact, I should have said a matter of state. If you ask me, tho doubtless you know, who my master, lord and protector is, I hasten to tell you. But wait! The very trees and woods will proclaim and re-echo his name. What is his name? His name is (speaking very loud). Neocles! (He listens for the echo). Neocles! (Again he listens). Did you catch it? What, no echo?

NEOCLES. (In the distance, puffing up the hill). You blackguard! What are you breaking your lungs for? Do you think I'm deaf? Stop shouting my name. What do you want?

(Accompanied by his two body-servants Neocles appears. He is a heavy man and very hot and red).

GLAUCUS. (Disregarding the question). Your worship, all is prepared for your reception.

NEOCLES. (Looking about him and seeing the children and Myra). What's all this? Whom have you here? Witnesses? (Disgusted). You have about as much business sense as a calf. I've a mind to dismiss—

GLAUCUS. But, your honor,

NEOCLES. Silence! Is the magistrate here?

GLAUCUS. Not yet, your worship.

NEOCLES. I thought as much. I want to get out of this. No children for me! In spite of the heat I will walk back a short distance on the road and wait there for Bion—if he comes. Why do you stand there gaping at me? Come along, do you hear me? (They disappear with the servants down the hill).

(Having meanwhile prepared garlands and wreaths of flowers for offerings on the rustic altar, the children again

crowd round Myra, saying, "Oh, let us begin," etc. Myra divides the band into two divisions to carry out the choral dance with strophe and antistrophe. At the conclusion of each movement the dancers advance to the altar and heap their garlands upon it. In the concluding epode all dance. At the end, Myra lifts in her arms the tiniest child to aid it in decorating the altar. To accompany the dancers appropriate music is furnished by the orchestra. The two flutists may or may not play on the stage at side. The whole is intended to be carried out in the manner introduced by Isadora Duncan in her classic dances with children).

MYRA. (To eldest child). You must not forget what I have told you. The sister of great Zeus is our goddess Deméter, the goddess of the good, warm Earth, who cares for all her children and for them causes the grain to grow and the flowers to spring up in the fields. She bids us to her yearly table of plenty and she welcomes all with equal hospitality. For she is great and a just goddess, and she wills not that any shall lack of the abundance of the Earth's fruitage.

ELDEST CHILD. We shall not fail to do loving and pious homage to the warm-hearted goddess. And have we not gathered ears of grain, and poppies, myrtle, asphodel and narcissus, her favorite flowers—and pomegranates, sacred to her and to her dear daughter, Persephone?

MYRA. Remember what I have taught you. Render the dances carefully. So let us now begin. (Myra recites the words of the Ode to soft music, each strophe, etc., and the final epode preceding its dance movement).

CHORAL ODE TO DEMETER

STROPHE

Joyfully free, our garlands sweet
As votive gifts we bring,
Printing the turf with our radiant feet
As to thine altar we cling.
Goddess of favoring fruits and flowers,
Close to our hearts is thine—
A lyrical rapture of happiness ours
Under thy largess divine.

ANTISTROPHE

Freely thy gifts each gladdening year
With thy heavenly smile bestowing,
The bounteous Earth is a garden fair
Where every blessing is growing—
Where, leading thy children by the hand
And pointing them on the road,
Thou biddest them take of the boon of the land
And praise the all-goodness of God.

EPODE

From Taurus and Daedala white with snow
To the fair Chaledonian Isles
Thy Lycian children, wherever they go,

O goddess, will cherish thy smiles—
 For the equal gifts of thy great warm heart,
 In justice dower'd on all,
 Will be precious to them till from life they part
 And the curtains of silence fall.

(After the dancing is concluded,)

ELDEST CHILD. Dear Myra, do goddesses come to us here on earth, so that we may see them?

MYRA. Sometimes, so we are told, dear child.

ELDEST CHILD. Do they speak to children?

MYRA. I think they do, sometimes.

ELDEST CHILD. Do they speak to all sorts of children, good and bad alike?

MYRA. Sometimes they appear as in a dream—but only to good children.

ELDEST CHILD. I hope we are good children, and I hope I may see a goddess, if only in a dream. But I should like better to see a real, true goddess and hear her voice.

MYRA. To only a few is this privilege given. One knows not if they be the fortunate or the unfortunate.

(The children retire to the wood where they proceed without further delay to have their luncheon. Two of the children are sent to the water-side with water-jars, which they fill and take back to the others. The meal continues through the ensuing scene and the children pay occasional heed to what the elders are saying. Being in the background within the wood they should not interfere with the attention the audience is giving to the others.)

GLAUCUS. (who reenters) Madam, fair lady, exquisite creature, I return in some haste to acquaint you with the undoubted fact that your father is approaching from the city, with one companion, presumably a servant, by his side I came on ahead of my august master, who was passing the compliments of the day with your father on the road. Your father seemed anxious to reach this place as speedily as possible, so he bade the noble Neocles adieu, expressing the hope of seeing him here in a short time. Aided by his slaves my master is proceeding slowly and will pause to rest mounting the hill. It is a great mistake that he came not in his palanquin, accompanied by half a dozen servants.

MYRA. I hear my father's voice now. Sir, pardon me.

(Glaucus exits, passing Bion and servant, who enter). What, father, you have not walked all the way? Surely you must be tired.

BION. No, dear Myra, not very. We have just passed Neocles on the road. I spoke with him a moment, but came on alone, wishing to have a word with you. I will rest a minute or two.

MYRA. Here, on this bank. Do sit awhile and let me get you a drink of clear, cold water from yonder spring.

BION. Presently will do better. I will wait. Myra, I wish to have your opinion, your advice, upon a matter

of business which I am called upon to transact today. It concerns this very spot, this water-pool, which seems so pleasantly—

MYRA. Why, father, is it not impious for anyone to propose to mix business up with a sacred place like this? This is Melitis, the "fountain of the cross-roads." This is a shrine of Deméter, here her rustic altar. These dear children and I have just finished a festival-dance in honor of the goddess.

BION. Still, Myra, my dear child, the object of my coming here cannot be neglected. As a magistrate of the city I am bidden by the elders of the Council to report to them on the justice and feasibility of Neocles' proposal.

MYRA. A servant of his, a wordy fellow, has been here talking, but I haven't gathered anything from him. What is it that Neocles proposes? You have not told me.

BION. I am much upset. I do not see the thing clearly. He wants to purchase this sheet of water.

MYRA. This water, father?

BION. He offers for it a goodly sum of money—in fact, he asks us to put our own price upon it.

MYRA. But, father, have we not just invoked the blessing of Deméter upon this spot, and given honor to her for these gifts of nature free and open to all, these places of refuge to which all may resort for drink and food and succor? This water belongs, if to anybody, to the city does it not?

BION. It does—to our little state. I myself am opposed to parting with it.

MYRA. What does Neocles want with it? He cannot drink all of its contents himself. Besides the city needs it. Could not we in the city use this delicious water if brought to us thru pipes down the valley?

BION. There is no need of that, Myra, for we get our supply of water from the hills to the North, where the river Xanthus flows down naturally toward the city. I do not understand Neocles' motive, and therefore I withheld my consent in the Council and proposed to come here today to look more closely into the bargain which Neocles seeks to make. The Council will be guided, at least so they said, largely by my decision.

MYRA. Oh, father, do not give in to him. Let us keep this fair spot, with its sacred altar, for the children of our city.

BION. Would one of these little ones bring me a draught of water now? For now I begin to be thirsty.

SEVERAL CHILDREN. May I?

Let me, etc.

(Myra chooses one of them, who runs to the bank and brings back a jar of fresh water, from which Myra pours a glass for her father, who drinks. Enter Neocles, leaning upon his slaves, and Glaucus).

BION. Thank you, my child. And now, Myra, if you will, I will turn to these gentlemen and their business with me.

(To be Continued)