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FACTS AND FALLA

ABOUT THE

BOMBAY LAND REVENUE SYSTEM

CRITICALLY ESPOUNDED BY

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PRICE: Rs. 2-8.

X723.231

F9

Printed by the Scottish Mission Industries Co., Ltd. (J. R. Eason,
Manager) and published by F. G. H. Anderson, M.A.,
Queen's Garden, Poona.

1929.

7658

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE. |
|--|---------|
| Chap. I.—Foundations | ... 1 |
| Chap. II.—The State versus the Individual | ... 18 |
| Chap. III.—Owner and Tenant | ... 35 |
| Chap. IV.—Growth of the British System | ... 53 |
| Chap. V.—The Present Agitation | ... 75 |
| Chap. VI.—The Income Tax Illusion | ... 89 |
| Chap. VII.—Agricultural debt and wealth | ... 102 |
| Chap. VIII.—Tenancy Legislation | ... 108 |
| Chap. IX.—Other Systems of Land Revenue | ... 121 |
| Chap. X.—Elasticity : or Remissions and suspensions... | 131 |
| Chap. XI.—Urban and Industrial Land | ... 147 |

FOREWORD.

This essay had its origin in the study of the case for Tenancy Legislation, a subject at almost every point bound up with the theory of rent, and with the public right to share that value. The very mention of such legislation conjures up in many minds only the idea that rents will be restricted and fixed with 'moderation,' and removed from the sphere of competition. It became therefore necessary to examine and state carefully the eternal justice of the obligation that lies upon every user of land to pay rent or revenue, an obligation of which he cannot be relieved without destroying the foundations of society and civilisation.

At the same time I found these fundamentals very seriously disregarded or unrecognised in other quarters. We were surrounded with a cloud of loose thinking and looser talking against that structure which has so well stood the tests of over a century and given such splendid results, the Bombay land revenue system. The fallacious criticisms gaining currency in the Press seemed to demand a similar effort at restatement of the facts. The subject is not difficult but it is made difficult for many by the vast personal and sectional interests involved; there are very few men who can be trusted to speak impartially or who can trust themselves to think impartially about the income from land, which almost every Indian shares. Perhaps the fact that I neither own land nor pay or receive rent from land in either hemisphere at least acquits me of that temptation: and the further fact that I have now ceased to serve the Government should acquit me of any suspicion of speaking to order, or otherwise than from sincere conviction. If I did not believe what I write, I need not have written it.

I plead for a rigorous examination of what lies at the bottom of this controversy about the Land. Is it not strange that while in England the taxation upon the land is far heavier than in any part of Bombay, yet there the popular party, the Labour Party, has for a chief feature in its programme the increase of

those burdens ; while in India every 'popular' politician is strenuously fighting for their reduction? I have made the reason plain enough in the pages which follow. If my readers wish to get to the truth, they must be prepared to grapple with the difficulties.

"Loose thinking will inexorably corrupt the most ingenious mind. It is infinitely harder to be honest with ourselves than with our fellows. He who is guilty of loose thinking and an indolent acceptance of the pleasant in place of the true, is arraigned before no tribunal, is punishable by no court of law. Nevertheless retribution pursues and will always overtake him. Because he is too indifferent to face the logical conclusion of the facts which life presents to him, preferring rather to interpret these facts in the light of theories agreeable to his inclination, the loose thinker is condemned to failure in all great enterprise. Intellectual disingenuousness is the fundamental error in unsound social conceptions". So Lord Birkenhead on November 16th 1928.

Then last month the "Times of India" in a leader :—"In dealing with the Land Revenue system of Bombay it is essential, before changes are made, that they should be based upon adequate enquiry and due recognition of the whole facts : and it has been urged that these facts are not at present available." The point urged, that the whole facts are not available, is of course not true. All the relevant facts are fully available for those who will trouble to study them. But there are a great many futile and irrelevant enquiries which have never been made and ought not to be made. The salient feature of this Presidency is that there are far too many people on the land (not working on it, but idling) and far too few in industries. Every step taken to reduce further the burden of the land tax must make conditions worse and worse, till a fearful disaster ensues. It is rent and land revenue alone that can save ; Agricultural Commissions can do nothing unless the economic incentives that compel the rayat and the tenant to work as honestly as those employed in other industries are preserved in wholesome and safe operation,

In this effort to state the facts and the theory of their true interpretation and to refute unsound criticisms, I have not even spared the Government I have served when I feel they have been guilty of unsound thinking. But faithful are the wounds of a friend : and I desire nothing worse than to save them from repeating their own mistakes. I may fail to carry conviction ; I know I shall give provocation to many. But if I fail, still I remain serene in the consciousness that I have striven to promote the boundaries of truth and enlarge the reign of justice.

F. G. H. ANDERSON.

Poona, 21-12-28.