

THE LAND AND THE COMMONWEALTH

BY

T. E. MARKS

MEMBER OF SURVEYORS' INSTITUTION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

J. HUGH EDWARDS, M.P.

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TO ALL THOSE
WHO,
REALISING THE INJUSTICE OF THE MONOPOLY
OF LAND IN THIS COUNTRY,
EARNESTLY DESIRE
TO SEE IT MORE EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLED BY
THE STATE
IN THE INTERESTS OF
THE PEOPLE.

INTRODUCTION

IT is with much pleasure that I accede to the author's request that I should pen an introduction to this work. On the principle that "a good thing needs no praise" it will suffice to say that such a volume as this, so comprehensive in its scope and so seminal in its suggestiveness, really calls for no word of commendation. The book speaks for itself. Every page provides evidence of ripe experience and notable industry. One may however, be permitted to emphasise the opportuneness of its appearance. Directly as the result of Mr. Lloyd George's recent speeches, which may fittingly be described as "half-battles"—the reverberations of which are now being re-echoed on every hill-side throughout the land—the agrarian question has at last been brought into the inner realm of practical politics. The problem has alternatively scared and baffled successive generations of British statesmen. An occasional poet, with the unchartered freedom of his order, has ventured to stray where our statesmen have feared to tread, and with sympathetic touch has limned the hard, harsh lot of the agricultural labourer :

Bowed by the weight of the centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.

However, by a stroke of circumstance, surely as providential as it is auspicious, there has at length come the man—as even Mr. Bonar Law has been forced to confess—endowed with all the necessary qualifications for turning the strategic elements of the political situation to the profit and advantage of the class whose interests have so long been disregarded and whose welfare has been so woefully neglected. Great as is Mr. Lloyd George's record in the domain of legislative and administrative achievements, it is not too much to say that in no direction has his genius for constructive statesmanship displayed such radiance as in his recent campaign over the land question. Hodge has at last come into the full glare of the limelight, and the hardness of his lot has been revealed to the public view as it has never been before. That, however, is but an incidental result. It is necessary to emphasise the fact that the purpose of the campaign far transcends the zone of the limelight. It sets itself the task of unstrapping the heavy burden which has throughout the long centuries bowed the pathetic figure of the labourer, of elevating his downcast look and of substituting for the emptiness in his face that lustre which comes only from joyousness of life and hopefulness of outlook.

It must be obvious that ere the ideal can be transferred from the glow of the platform to the concreteness of legislation, much must needs be done. Sympathy with the lot of the labourer

must be wedded to a thorough knowledge of the circumstances and conditions of the system under which he labours. It is acknowledged on all sides that there is no institution in the country so deeply entrenched as is the land system. Indeed, so deeply and so cunningly laid are its entrenchments that even the most violent of social reformers have long despaired of being able to take it by storm.

Military strategists are now agreed that the walls of Jericho of old fell not because of the shouts of the hosts that perambulated day after day around the confines of the city, but rather as the result of the work of the engineers who were quietly sapping the foundations of the walls while the attention of the inhabitants was being diverted by the shouts of the circumventing forces.

In the light of that incident one may readily discern both the purpose and the value of such a book as this. It concerns the foundations. It locates the vulnerable spots in the ramparts of the system of land tenure. It delves down into the economic basis of the whole question, and, with a resourcefulness of statistical and argumentative force, shatters the ramparts which have so long sheltered monopoly and oppression. Mr. Marks brings to his task an opulence of information and a mastery of detail which are reflected on every page. The work may be justly described as one that is absolutely indis-

pensable to any politician or reformer—be his politics what they may—who desires to master in all its intricacies a question which is now becoming the dominant issue in British politics. Its appearance is timely; its tone is distinctly fair and judicial, and its presentation of the issues is as complete as it is brilliant.

J. HUGH EDWARDS.

November 10th, 1913.

PREFACE

WHEN it was first announced that the Government proposed to deal with the Land Question—now about fifteen months ago—the author decided to put into writing some of the phases of the problem as they had appealed to him during his experience in the management of large estates. This book was commenced in October, 1912, and the ground-work completed in July last.

The proposals of the Government have since been outlined by the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, M.P., and the Report of the Land Enquiry Committee has been published. The author is gratified to find that many of his suggestions in regard to the reform of our Land System are in harmony with the intentions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and also that his arguments follow on the main lines of the recommendations of the Land Enquiry Committee. So far, however, the forecast of legislation has been confined to Rural matters; this work deals with both Urban and Rural aspects of the Land Question, and several suggestions are made with a view to remedying the grave economic difficulties which prevent the best use of land in country districts and in centres of rapidly-increasing population.

Public attention is now being directed to the various problems relating to land, and for some considerable time, probably for years, the subject will be uppermost in the minds of the people, whatever their political predilections may be.

One truth which should be emphasised, at the outset, is the existence of good as well as unprincipled landlords. This fact should not be forgotten in public discussions. The aims of the Government will, doubtless, be directed towards securing something like uniformity in the use of land, and, in all probability, steps will be taken towards bringing unjust landlords into line with those owners who manage their estates well.

Anyone who has had experience in the management of large estates should be convinced of the desirability of fixing rents by judicial methods and controlling the restrictions and covenants imposed by some landlords on their tenants. It is urgently necessary that Land Courts should be established to secure economic justice to those who occupy land. It is also in the interests of the community, as a whole, that wider facilities should be available for the gradual acquisition of land by the State at fair prices. These two principles—Land Courts and Public Landownership—are the primary aims of this volume.

It was suggested to the author that the work would be more useful if it contained a brief outline of the Law of Land Ownership. This has been added, as briefly as possible, in Part VIII., but

sufficient has been said, perhaps, to give the student a general idea of the elements of the law, if he requires the information.

To his friend, L. W. J. Costello, M.A., LL.B., Barrister-at-Law, of the Inner Temple, the author desires to express his deep sense of appreciation of the valuable assistance he has rendered in revising the chapters on legal questions, and in generously undertaking the reading of proofs. The author is also most grateful to Mr. F. G. Haley, Librarian, for his courtesy and assistance in facilitating reference to official and other publications.

EALING, MIDDLESEX.

October, 1913.

Postscript.—Since writing the above Mr. Lloyd George has submitted certain proposals with regard to property in the occupation of traders.

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