

## BOOK REVIEWS

## LLOYD GEORGE AND THE LAND\*

This book commences with such extravagant personalities that an impartial judgment of its merits is scarcely to be expected from the normal political partisan or from the reader who cannot get over his first impressions that it is merely a lampoon. The average Conservative will probably agree with the *PALL MALL GAZETTE* that Mr. Raine has provided "a strong and highly efficient indictment of the Chancellor's political personality" while the average Liberal will, like the *STAR*, dismiss it as a "shabby booklet" in which there is "much vulgar abuse of Mr. Lloyd George." Mr. Raine's violence has lost him the opportunity, if he desired it, to make a sensible contribution to the discussion of the land question, which is unfortunate, as many of his arguments might well be studied by Liberal and Conservative alike. When we pass over the abuse, which after all occupies but little space, we find such admissions as these:—

Agricultural well-being is, therefore, not merely an agricultural question but a national problem of the gravest concern to all. That land should go out of cultivation or be under-cultivated; that our workers on the land should be diminished; that the health of those who are there should be impaired; that the output from our land should be reduced; all these matters are not merely a condemnation of statesmanship but a challenge to the sanity of the people that tolerate them. (Page 52.)

The holding up of land is a crime against society. Let it not be thought that I wish to convey that all building land should be built upon immediately. That would be merely foolish and result in harm instead of good; but there are countless plots of land which should be built upon, and as the owner does not see his way to do it, the community should regret that they cannot see their way to live in a state of over-crowding and should relieve him of the anxiety of building houses by doing it themselves. Similarly, with regard to agricultural land. It is there for crops, and crops are very important to the nation; and the nation might insist upon those crops. Indeed, the nation should say to the occupier, "Up they come or out you go." (Page 59.)

In certain cases allotments have not succeeded in the past. In many cases they are succeeding. Where they have failed the reason is not far to seek. The land provided for allotments is some distance from the house; the rent charged has been excessive; the holder has not been taught how to make the best use of his plot of land. His hours of labour have been long, and there has been no customary half-holiday. Where a half-holiday is given it is often devoted by the labourer to the cultivation of his garden allotment. (Page 125.)

This reads like an indictment of landlordism with Mr. Lloyd George's political personality very much in the background, but we are afraid it will be missed by those friends of landlordism who simply hail the book as a clever character sketch of their arch enemy.

We commend some equally striking passages to the attention of those party Liberals, who unable to forgive the abuse of their political idol, throw down the book in disgust without giving it serious consideration. For instance Mr. Raine says:—

Why should not the provisions of the Town Tenants Bill as amended be applied to them (the ordinary occupying tenants)? Their difficulties are very similar. Many of them are leaseholders or the tenants of leaseholders. In many cases, too, they suffer under covenants which are out of date. Almost invariably when the lease falls in, they are called upon to pay a greatly increased rent. The extent to which rent is eating into the resources of every family is a grave national problem. The

proportion of the domestic income which has to go to the provision of a home to live in is becoming more exacting every year. (Page 149.)

Rent-courts from the tenant's standpoint are something of a boomerang. They have been tried in Ireland. Irish tenants welcomed them, but many of them do not like them now. They were expected to reduce rents, but in many cases they increased them. They might do the same thing in our big towns. On the whole I feel that it is really only in cases where renewals of leases which have expired are being negotiated that recourse to a tribunal would be salutary. But the rate question is the predominant one and should be taken in hand at once. There is an immediate relief in that, and a relief which would be sufficiently big to be a great boon. (Page 155.)

The chapter on "The State as Landlord" (page 156) and Mr. Raine's criticism of the proposed reclamation of wildernesses while there is plenty of land lying between that could be cultivated and should be cultivated deserves the attention of some of the "Land Inquiry Committee" folk, and we can endorse Mr. Raine's challenge to Mr. Lloyd George:—

If he would take anyone of those areas and ask why cultivation had been abandoned or impaired, he would be nearer to solving the question which is vital to all. (Page 50.)

It is when we turn to Mr. Raine's own proposals that we join issue with him. There is no benefit to be obtained from further "doles" on the lines of the Agricultural Rates Act, nor from schemes such as Mr. Boscawen's Housing Bill, nor from land banks, nor from wages boards, than an ultimate increase in rent which will simply continue and aggravate the present unequal distribution of wealth.

A. W. M.

## THE LAND RETORT\*

If we are not mistaken Mr. Edwin Savill, the joint author of this book, is the same Mr. Savill who in February, 1912, read a paper before the Surveyors' Institute, in which he stated that "we all agree with the Single Taxers as to the need of amendment (in the rating system), and I venture to think that if a fair basis for rating purposes could be devised it would do much to render their campaign unnecessary." To the dismay of the Surveyors Mr. Savill suggested that £31,000,000 required in rates for drainage, parish roads, lighting, &c., might be raised, quite fairly, by a rate on the capital value of land and buildings, or, *if preferred, upon land alone*. But in the *LAND RETORT*, which is an answer to the Report of the "Secret Inquiry Committee," appointed by Mr. Lloyd George, quite different opinions are expressed, and the present rating system is vigorously defended against any change in the direction of rating land values. One of the choice arguments is the familiar table of "sample values," relating to some district not identified and compiled from data that are not verified, which has already been copied, from a Memorandum of the Surveyors' Institute, into more than one anti-land-values pamphlet. By estimating the total land value of the kingdom conveniently low and presenting individual sites at a suitably high figure, very convenient statistics can be set together—at least for the opponent of land values taxation.

The rating chapter is the nonsense chapter in the book. For the rest, the discussion of the Land Inquiry Committee's rural proposals is instructive and interesting, especially in regard to the suggested land courts, State cottages, and the minimum wage. We wish we had space to quote some of the criticism, for it certainly contains much good argument deserving the serious attention of students of the land question.

A. W. M.

\* *LLOYD GEORGE AND THE LAND*, by G. E. Raine. G. Allen and Co., London. Price 1s.

\* *THE LAND RETORT*. By Charles Adeane and Edwin Savill. John Murray, London. 2s. 6d. net.