

equivalent for those of our citizens who might happen to be detached from them." "Was the West a Safety Valve for Labor?" by Joseph Gafer, in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, December, 1937, p. 301.

"OUR COUNTRYMEN"

In "A Conversation between an Englishman, a Scotchman, and an American, on the subject of Slavery," attributed to Benjamin Franklin, and printed in the *Public Advertiser* (London), January 30, 1770 (UL.), the author puts the following words into the mouth of the American: "Your working Poor are not indeed absolutely Slaves; but these seem something a little like Slavery, where the Laws oblige them to work for their Masters so many Hours at such a Rate, and give them no Liberty to demand or bargain for more, but imprison them in a Workhouse if they refuse to work on such Terms; and to imprison a humane Master if he thinks fit to pay them better; the same Time confining the poor ingenious Artificer to this Island, and forbidding him to go abroad, though offered better Wages in foreign Countries. As to the Share England has in these Enormities America, remember, Sir, that she began the Slave Trade; that her Merchants of London, Bristol, Liverpool, and Glasgow, send their ships to Africa for the Purpose of purchasing Slaves. If any unjust methods are used remember, that under the Smut their Skin is white, but they are honest good People, and at the same Time are your own countrymen!" "Benjamin Franklin on Slavery and American Liberties," by Verner W. Crane in *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, Vol. LXII, No. 1, January, 1938, pp. 6-9.

FRANKLIN TO DEAN WOODWARD

In a letter to Dean Woodward of April 10, 1773, Franklin wrote from England concerning a petition of the Virginia Assembly for a law "to make a Law for preventing the Importation" of slaves: "his Request, however, will probably not be granted, as their former laws of that kind have always been repealed, and as the Interest of a Merchant here has more weight with Government, than that of Thousands at a Distance." Smyth (ed.), *Writings*, VI. 39.

BOOK REVIEWS

FREE LAND

BY ROSE WILDER LANE

12 mo. clo. 332 pgs. Price \$2.50, Longmans Green and Co., N. Y. City.

Some years ago, when the depression was still young, there appeared in *Harper's Magazine* an article which dealt with the proposition of giving some hundred thousand or more unemployed Americans and their families upon vacant lands. The object was to give them the opportunity to employ themselves at making their own living out of the soil and thus relieve those of their countrymen who were fortunate enough to be employed of the expense of supporting them, either through charity or taxation. The results were to be threefold. First, the independence, dignity, and self-respect of those given this opportunity would thus be maintained, a most important factor in any democracy. Next, the rest of the populace, relieved of the burden of supporting non-producers, would have more wealth with which to support the industries that cater to men's wants, and thus have more purchasing power. Finally, those who made a go of finding the land would need tools, machinery, clothing, household wares and furniture, all of which would mean a greater demand for the services of our manufacturing and transportation interests. This all looked very nice in print. A back to the land movement, to the better of all living things, seemed the logical way out of the economic mess in which mankind had bogged itself down. The writer had no doubts and expressed them in a letter to the Personal and Otherwise column of *Harper's*.

In the writer's time the term "homestead" had been frequently expressed by persons, more or less dissatisfied with their personal fortunes, as a sort of promised land that had once been offered but which they had been stupid enough to ignore at the time and now could not avail themselves of because the chance was gone. "Government land" was spoken of as being worthless for any purpose except mining or lumbering and such land was not to be homesteaded. After the opening of the Indian Territory it was generally believed that no land suitable for agriculture by farmers used to the well-farmed and wornout soil of the East was available for settlement. The encyclopedias and almanacs issued each year by certain American newspapers listed millions of vacant acres of government land upon which the would-be settlers were free to file claims. But the fact that great numbers of Americans were not doing so, in spite of the poverty of their lives, pointed to but one thing; the utter uselessness of such lands for farming by poor families. So the writer wanted to know where the lands for settling the unemployed upon were to be found. He said that but three classes of land existed, government lands of the national domain, state lands, and lands in private hands. As to national lands the poorest only remained, lands on which one could not keep a goat, surely useless for supporting a family. The available state lands were probably in the same condition or they would have been gobbled up long ago. That left privately owned lands as the only way out. The writer wished to know how these were to be obtained except by purchase unless taken for non-payment of taxes. Purchase by condemnation or at public auction would mean high prices to be paid by those taxpayers, the American People, who were to be relieved, according to the proposition, of the burden of supporting the unemployed. Did anyone suppose that the owners of good, rich, vacant farm land would part with it at a low price just to relieve others? And if they did, even if they reduce their price to the lowest possible figure per acre, would not the American people have to pay for the land and thus reduce their purchasing power?

It does not do to tear a proposition apart without offering a substitute. The writer offered a substitute, a plan that would put everybody back to work without cost to the taxpayers. Single Taxers know the plan. It was the plan proposed by Henry George, that the government proceed to collect the rent of land. Of course he prophesied that there would be available all the land needed and of the best quality for whatever purpose desired as soon as such a scheme should be put in effect. *Harper's* editor of the Personal and Otherwise column wrote to him and said that if space permitted the letter would be published in part together with two other letters received on the same subject. The names of the writers of the other letters were mentioned.

In the next number of *Harper's* neither of the three letters appeared either in whole or in part. At no time thereafter did any of the letters appear. Instead, a letter by Rose Wilder Lane, appeared; a letter which condemned the proposition, not on the ground of the impossibility of obtaining suitable land without cost to the taxpayers and without paying tribute to private landowners, but upon the utter impossibility (?), of anyone making a living out of land. Mrs. Lane said this in all seriousness because in her youth her father had tried to make a living for his family on a homestead and had found the scorching heat, the deadly blizzards, the years of droughts, the tornados, and prairie soil that resisted the plow and wore out horses and the high cost for tools, harness, lumber, besides the great distances from such aids to civilization as doctors, nurses, and schools, too much for one man. The picture of those early years is engraved deeply in Mrs. Lane's soul, and so she could not believe such a life possible in spite of the fact that millions of farmers have lived and are now living through labor applied to the raising of food crops from the soil, let alone other products, such as rubber and cotton.

The writer was disappointed in Mrs. Lane's letter. She seemed to

be writing of particular lands, and thus was arguing from a part to the whole. Her latest work, "Free Land," was heralded as an expose of the land racket. The writer hoped to find in this some inkling that she understood the land question and its economic significance. Careful study of it shows that she understands the immediate causes of the distress of farmers but she betrays no understanding of what underlies it all. "Free Land" is a narrative about the trials of David Beaton and his young bride in trying to make a go of it on a homestead west of Minnesota. David and Mary were both farm children. Both could do all the chores of the farm and home as well as their elders if not with the same degree of judgment which comes from experience, a matter which comes with age. David's father had farmed in "York State", and had gone to Minnesota. He bought his land, land that had been brought under cultivation. Naturally he paid a good price for it, but the improvements were worth it to him. He did not approve of going west for free land. He did not think highly of anything that could be got for nothing. As a matter of fact he did not realize how dearly David would have to pay for the government land before he could prove up on it. But he did not stand in David's way, and even gave him a team of Morgans, thoroughbreds raised by him, and a new wagon, besides turning over to him all money coming to him for his labor.

In all the story of these two people there are but a few references to the underlying cause of our troubles in this land which had so much public domain to start with. When the young man arrived at the land office to file a claim in a certain division he found all available sections near to the town site had been filed on already although news of the opening of the division for filing had not been made public. So he had to file miles away from the town site. For fourteen dollars and a half he was allowed to file on one hundred sixty acres, and if he took a tree claim, he could get an extra quarter section. All he had to do was to plant trees on ten acres on this second quarter. He was given five years to build a home and cultivate the land. If he had lived upon it continuously he could then buy it for one dollar and a quarter an acre. But he found that the law was not strictly obeyed. Men filed by proxy. Wagons were considered habitations and were moved after proving up. Trees were planted but not raised. Claims were filed and not cultivated except as a bluff while the filer worked on the railroad, leaving a member of his family to spend the greater part of the year in a well-stocked shanty. This grabbing of choice town sites on inside information and the fraudulent holding of them was for speculation and it caused the moving of legitimate settlers far back into the hinterland thus increasing their difficulties, making it harder for them to meet expenses and driving them into the hands of the loan sharks and mortgage hounds with interest from three to five per cent a month. Couple this with the severity of a continental climate, intense summer heat, extreme winter cold, long dry spells that burned up all plant life to the brick red soil, or sudden deluges that caused sod houses to actually melt on their inhabitants. Then add to this fact: with every purchase of machinery, every extension of house or barn, every addition to the live stock, and the taxes were increased. Surely, it is a wonder that any settler was successful! Mrs. Lane has told a wonderful tale of how two young Americans have met the worst vicissitudes and overcome them. She has saddened us with the tragedies that went on around these young people but through all we have been thrilled at the wonderful spirit of Americans in the face of disaster. With such spirit we need fear no foreign institution that suppresses the liberty of the individual.

But in explaining the land situation to the American people, "Free Land" is a sad failure. It is to the foreword that we must look to get Mrs. Lane's point of view. The foreword begins with this quotation: "But everything is changed now; there's no more free land."

Mrs. Lane does not mention whose words these are but they fit right into our philosophy. Our troubles with unemployment began with the passage of the national domain. But she goes on to explain

that the United States is the only American government that gave no land to settlers. Spain and Mexico offered free land, but the United States sold its land to rich speculators. She blames the gamble on American lands for the huge bull markets and crashes. She claims that after the fertile lands were taken up and only the plains remained the Homestead Act was passed. It remained in force from 1862 to 1935. Strange to say the greatest period of homesteading was from 1913 to 1926. More than one million acres were homesteaded in 1934. In 1935 homesteaders held title to more than six million acres. The question is what happened to the titles to 270 million acres homesteaded between 1862 and 1935, or to the titles to 95 million acres homesteaded between 1913 and 1926! Figures for the total number of acres homesteaded are, 101 million acres from 1913 to 1926, and 276 million acres from 1862 to 1935.

The appalling loss of homesteads would indicate the failure of the system. But it would not show that farming would be bound to fail. Suppose the land had been given free. We have instances of land given in grants to Dutch and English settlers of Long Island and Manhattan by both the Dutch West India Company and by the Sovereigns of Great Britain, and by the Colonial governments. We know that we, the people of New York, have had to pay enormous sums for those lands to the heirs of the original grantees for values which exist only because we have made them. To have given land free to settlers would not have eased the plight of present farmers nor their neighbors but would have built up landed aristocracy able to live by those who must pay tribute to use those lands. To give land free is to produce a future class of parasites. The huge bull markets and crashes, the railroad stock gambling, the mining monopoly and gambling in mining stocks, are not the result of American land as Mrs. Lane asserts, nor should the lands acquired from Mexico and France have been sold to lighten the expense upon the taxpayer. Mrs. Lane has David's father believe. American land is the patrimony of all the American people, of every race and creed. Whether it was bought with American money from France and Mexico, or wrested by force and fraud from the Indians, it is the birthright of all Americans, of every human being calling America his home. The government had neither the right nor the power to give it away nor sell it. The government, being the agent of the people, the steward of the nation, should have guarded this patrimony most zealously. It should have leased on a rental, justly appraised, to any one wishing to use the land. This would have been the only way to insure its use by homemakers. But because it didn't do it, settlers such as David and Mary had to pay out in life's blood, drop by drop, for the right to live and raise a family on the surface of the earth which the Great Creator planned for the source from which all life should flow in harmony with all creation. When private ownership of the right to collect rent from the best of this surface drove men to seek a living on the poorer lands we find men and women meeting the conditions so graphically portrayed by Mrs. Lane in "Free Land."

JOHN LUXTON.

THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM

BY MAXWELL SILVER, D.D.

Maxwell Silver, D. D., (New York, Bloch Publishing Co., 1938). \$2.50.

Every theological seminary, Jewish and Christian, ought to have this book. While it tells nothing new, it states the case for the ethical significance of Israel with a summary emphasis which would be revealing to millions of Jews and Gentiles if they could be induced to study it. But since it will not be read by the multitude, the substance of it should reach the world through the religious and moral teachers who instruct the public.

The author points out that the demands of ethics or morality exist in themselves, independently of religious cults, the same as the principles of science or art. The relation of Israel to ethics is expressed symbolically in the priestly and ceremonial regulations of the Hebrew Bible, which are intended as objective means to train