

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 of 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

that was at first a heathen people, so that this nation would gradually come a witness to the truth of one God, who demands justice and righteousness.

Dr. Silver says that he has found the subject a very difficult one to treat, not only in view of the question as to what is the precise content of Jewish ethics, but also with reference to the question how the religion of the Hebrew people came to be so inextricably bound up with ethics.

His difficulty is not peculiar to himself, but to the present age of scientific scholarship, which has not thus far learned how to interpret the Hebrew Bible in terms of economic and social evolution. He has studied the works of representative modern Biblical critics, such as Driver, Davidson, Kautzsch, Ryle, Moore, and J. M. P. Smith. But these scholars were preoccupied with rearranging and putting into chronological order the various documents and literary strata in the Hebrew Scriptures. They never explained the social forces which brought into existence the religion and sacred literature of ancient Israel.

The bibliography given by Dr. Silver shows that he has had good productions to the field of conventional Biblical criticism, but has not consulted modern works dealing with the evolutionary problem which, on his own confession, has given him a great deal of trouble.

LOUIS WALLIS.

Correspondence

MR. BECKWITH ACCEPTS THE CORRECTION

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

I have been sharply and properly corrected for a misstatement of California irrigation district law in my letter appearing in your September-October issue, page 164, column 2.

The point is one in statutory law, not in economics. Knowing that, I relied upon others; and find now that I was misinformed. It is not true as stated in my letter that the tax in this district is levied upon a flat per-acre basis; it is levied upon the valuation, as pointed out by J. Rupert Mason of San Francisco.

Stockton, Calif.

L. D. BECKWITH.

LAND NO LONGER IMPORTANT

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

From time to time it has been my privilege to listen to a radio broadcast presenting a discussion of taxation, or some subject closely related to taxation, by three men who were doubtless selected as authorities. But the evident misinformation possessed by these gentlemen of the essential fundamentals of taxation has invariably misled them, in their three-way conversations, as comedians rather than economists. In a recent broadcast one of these gentlemen stated that land was more important at the time when Henry George wrote "Progress and Poverty" than it is now! It would be interesting to know what the same authority would say concerning the relative value of air and water then and now. The glaring fault in these discussions has been the entire omission to consider the subject of taxation from the standpoint of right and wrong. One is led to conclude from these conversations that considerations of justice in taxation are of no importance whatsoever.

Wichita, Kansas.

HENRY WARE ALLEN.

PERTINENT QUESTIONS

The following questions have been forwarded to us by The Single Tax Association of Toronto, Canada. They were propounded by Mr. H. B. Cowan of Peterboro, Ont.

1. "Farmers create an important part of city land values. How can land value taxation be applied as to return these values to them?"
2. "Cities like New York, Chicago and Toronto derive a considerable part of their land values from the produce of population through-

out the entire country. How did Henry George propose that the equity of the public at large in these land values should be recognized?"

3. "An important percentage of the most valuable land on the continent does not owe its value to the presence of nearby population. Reference is to oil wells in the Turner Valley of Alberta, gold mines in the unorganized districts of Northern Canada as well as to timber limits, coal mines, iron ore deposits, water power, etc. How did Henry George propose that these should be taxed. To whom would the taxes go (the country, state or national government), and how would their value be determined for assessment purposes?"

There is one way in which all these questions could be answered and summarily dismissed. That is, there is no use concerning ourselves about the details of this or that phase of the situation to be. We know that when all taxation is abolished, public services must be paid for out of ground rent. How it will affect this or that particular ground is unimportant. It will iron itself out. This explanation convinces no one and evades the issues.

The questions are asked as a result of more than ordinary thought on the subject and should be answered as fully and as definitely as possible. In our replies we do not say we have the only and final and correct answers. We hope they will prove convincing, but if better answers are to be had we welcome them.

In order that we may be better understood it is necessary that we avoid if possible many prevalent misconceptions. The average man accepts taxes as natural and inevitable. He considers them as his share of the public expenses and he protests only when they seem excessive or unequal. His protest is more apt to be an effort to raise his neighbor's taxes to equal his and especially is this apt to be the case if his neighbor has more ability to pay. This general conception of taxation on the basis of ability to pay has got to give way to an equitable basis of benefits received. In our replies we visualize an equitable return for ground rent paid in lieu of all taxation.

In reply to questions 1 and 2. Theoretically the justification for tax collections is payment for public services. No locality or tax area is justified in over balancing its budget even if its land values were increased by activities of populations outside. But this is not the case. Farmers do not create any part of city land values nor do city workers create any part of farm land values. Each creates its production and trades. The site values in either locality are the measures of opportunity to produce. When farm products are exchanged for city products the *exchange* enhances site values in both places. Emphasis should be laid on the word "enhances" as there might be some site value if no trading took place. The activities in New York or in Chicago or in London, Hong Kong or anywhere else create ground rent in their respective localities. There can be no enhancement unless they trade and to the extent they trade, they benefit.

In reply to question 3: It must be constantly kept in mind that ground rent is the annual value of the site only, viz., the opportunity to go to work, to produce. The value of oil, coal, water power, etc., is zero until labor is applied. When labor is applied or assisted by tools (capital) the result is wealth. There would be no question if the product were walnuts or potatoes. Yet the principle is the same and if there were any valuation of ore in the ground as taxable, the taxes would be a part of operating cost and would appear in enhanced price. We are so accustomed to consider ores from their monopoly and scarcity prices that we are apt to forget the cost of production under free conditions. Under such conditions, the site value uncapped, the product would exchange at a price determined by the full wages of labor, assisted by capital applied to ore land. The easy line of reasoning in reply to this question is government ownership of mines, power sites, etc., whereas we know that these is no more validity to government ownership of land than of individual ownership. The right of use by the living (whether individual or group) and subject to the equal right of all, constitutes the only