

# **WHY WORK IS SCARCE, AND HOW TO MEND MATTERS**

**By W. R. LESTER.**

## **WHAT GOES ON IN THE COUNTRY.**

The average farmer is hard hit by our present land laws—this is true of the Small Holder as well. For example:—

An important Small Holdings Society in the Midlands rents 300 acres at 31s. 6d. per acre, while surrounding land, just as good, is let at about 20s. per acre for large farms.

The Small Holdings Society is clearly over-rented by about £180 yearly. This starves it of capital, and makes it unable to buy proper stock and implements.

To get money for the necessary stock and implements, the members of the Society are thinking of seeking a loan through a Credit Bank.

If they procure this loan they will have to pay interest at 5 or 6 per cent. for what they borrow, whereas if they were rented at the same figure as the surrounding farms they would have the money in pocket, so would not need to get into debt.

Meanwhile these Small Holders struggle on without proper stock, so that not only is their produce smaller than it should be, but men in the towns who ought to be making their ploughs and harrows are also idle.

This is a statement of fact. It is no hearsay idle story got up for any purpose, except to explain to you the lay of the land.

## **WHY HIGH RENTS IN THE COUNTRY MEAN IDLE MEN IN THE TOWNS.**

Now the high rent these Small Holders have to pay is responsible for their poverty. It not only prevents them from producing vegetables in abundance, but makes it impossible for them to give orders to the plough and implement makers in

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the towns. But for this land monopoly, which comes between them like a blank wall, the Small Holders would be employing the plough-makers, and the plough-makers would be employing the Small Holders, by each buying what the others produce. Perhaps, however, you will object that there is no use sending more produce to market, as markets are already glutted and prices often cut to nothing. Here you get to the heart of the matter.

### **WHY IS THE MARKET FOR PRODUCE GLUTTED?**

Are markets glutted at times because everyone has all the fruit or vegetables he desires, or is it because millions of English men and women are so poor that they cannot buy enough to keep themselves and their families in decent health?

Markets are not glutted because produce is too plentiful.

The true reason is that people are too poor to buy what is grown.

Surely the idea of too much produce is ridiculous so long as the barest needs of millions remain unsatisfied!

Ask yourself this question. If every person in London, Birmingham, and Manchester who is in daily need of fruit and vegetables were in a position to spend 3d. more a day in the purchase of such goods would the markets be glutted?—would they be over-supplied? I think I know your answer to this question. It would be that such a demand for farm produce would bring miles of land into cultivation and bring thousands of workers gladly back to the land. Just let us figure out what this would mean. Two millions of such new customers, spending 3d. per day each, would mean a daily demand for produce amounting to £25,000. Imagine this demand being maintained, day by day, week in and week out, and then try to think of glutted markets. The case need not be argued. It would be the reign of peace and plenty throughout the land, for no longer would land monopoly eat at the heart of your comfort and prosperity.

### **THE REMEDY FOR GLUTTED MARKETS.**

The remedy, therefore, is to increase the number of customers who can go to market with something in their pockets. In other words, we must raise wages.

Now, where are the best markets of the Small Holder and farmer? Surely in our towns and cities.

Why are our town markets not much brisker than at present? Because of the masses of under-paid, or unemployed men and women who can buy little or nothing.

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What is the root cause of their poverty?

The answer will show that town and country hang together, and that the labour question and the land question are the same in both.

### **WHAT GOES ON IN THE TOWNS.**

Round every growing town and village is a ring of high-priced, unused land. The owners of this land withhold it from use or ask prices which builders, manufacturers, and traders cannot pay. In this way is throttled the natural, healthy growth of towns and villages, and the expansion of their industry.

This means slack trade; slack trade means unemployed men; unemployed men struggling for work mean low wages all round; low wages in the towns means poor people who cannot buy what farmers and Small Holders have to sell. Glutted markets, in other words.

### **HOW WORK IS MADE SCARCE IN TOWNS.**

Look at a sample of what goes on, and see how people are kept poor by the land monopoly. London's population is overflowing, and land is wanted for housing the people.

Near by, at Wembley, lie some 92 acres of suitable building land. This land was recently put up to public sale, and though it was bid up to £32,000 by builders anxious to build the needed houses, the owner withdrew it from the market, saying he would not let it go till £45,000 was bid.

(Note: Under our present system of rating, this valuable land is only assessed on its agricultural value, and so the owner gets off with a payment of £15 to the rates!)

The land is sorely wanted to house the teeming population, but it remains locked up. Masons, bricklayers, joiners, and labourers are thus thrown on the labour market to cut down wages. In other words the monopoly price of land in the towns reduces wage-earners to poverty, and this prevents them buying the produce of the farmer and Small Holder.

### **LAND MONOPOLY AT THE ROOT OF THE MATTER.**

If we want to remove the disease we must remove the cause. Cut at the root, and destroy the land monopoly. The sure and certain way to cut at the root is to tax Land Values in town and country alike, and so make the game of withholding land not worth the candle.

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The key to the position is Valuation—that is, the separate valuation of land apart from all buildings and other improvements in or on the land.

### **HOW TO FREE THE LAND.**

After valuation, the next step must be to reverse the present system of taxation by abolishing taxes on owners of farm buildings, dwelling houses, factories, and shops, and substitute taxes on men in proportion to the value of the land they hold.

Landowners would then have to pay just as much in taxes when they lock up valuable land or only half use it, as when they use it properly.

If this were done no man could afford to own land without putting it to the best possible use; in other words, without employing the greatest possible amount of labour on it. Land now locked up would then come on the market, rents would fall, and our Small Holders would soon find themselves with their £180 in pocket every year, and able to keep men busy in the towns making implements for them.

Moreover, men like the owners of Wembley Estate could no longer afford to cry "Hands off!" because taxes would have to be paid on the real value of the land all the time it lay idle.

Under such a system building sites would fall to a figure which builders could pay; thousands of tradesmen in town and country alike would be set to work at decent wages, and they would soon buy up the increased produce of farmer and Small Holder.

### **ALL A LAND QUESTION AT BOTTOM.**

You have both the right and duty to insist on the free and full development of the land now held out of use at impossible prices, or only half used. Once secure that, and there will be work at good wages for all. No more need to emigrate to seek a livelihood.

**Do you want to bring real prosperity to town and country alike? Then help to unlock the land. You can do it by insisting that Land Values shall be taxed. Will you give a hand to those who are fighting for it?**

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