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RANDOM REFLECTIONS.



THE proposal of the Local Government to have all surveys of public lands carried out under their control, and at public expense, and to have them made in consecutive order, is a step in the right direction, which commends itself to every impartial mind that has made the land question a subject of careful study. To a working man with a family dependent upon him for support, the loss of time required for making a selection, and the expense of surveys, is a serious obstacle in the way of his taking up land. Such a system places him at the mercy of land peddlers, and compels him to pay for professional services out of all proportion to his ability and the remuneration he receives for his own employment. It reduces his capital, already small enough, for the undertaking before him at the most critical time when capital is most effective.

Labor is the only agency by which wild lands can be brought under cultivation. Capital is efficient for that purpose only when exchanged for or converted into labor. A working man's labor is his capital. If he wishes to

apply that capital to making productive the now waste lands of this province, the true policy in the country's interest is to make the way easy for him to so apply it. But labor to be efficient must be fed. The working man who goes on land must have some savings by him to feed himself as he works; to buy implements and cattle to work with. To take his savings from him at the outset to pay for exploration and surveys before he can get land, is to limit by so much his efficiency in applying his labor to land. And the Government in seeking to remove this disability—to furnish reliable information to home-seekers and assuming the cost of surveys—are truly working in the interest of actual settlement and of public revenue.

But in the whole of the legislation proposed in regard to the public lands by the Government, or in the suggestions of the Opposition to assist them, so far this is the only redeeming feature. The Hon. Mr. Vernon, in defending the despotic powers sought to be conferred on two or three members of the Government; the proposal to sell public lands at auction; and the reserving of town sites, seeks to shelter himself behind the precedent set by the Dominion Government. Let any honest man personally acquaint himself with the effects of the Dominion land policy as it has been administered in the country between Winnipeg and Edmonton. Let him see the vast blocks of land locked up by speculative holding from actual settlement as the result of that policy; let him get from actual settlers in that district their opinion of how the Dominion Government policy helps the actual settler, and he will see the flimsy character of this defence.

Mr. Beaven, while in a general way objecting to the policy of the Government, offers them nothing better as a substitute. Is he ignorant of the effects of taxation applied for the purpose of discouraging speculation in land? If not, he could have told the Government that a tax upon the value of land would prevent anybody, if properly applied, from taking possession of more of it than they can put to use. It would prevent the necessity of the restricting the sale of town sites or of the Govern-

ment's going into the business of real estate town site booming after the manner they condemn on the part of speculators. It might prevent the hon. commissioner of public lands from displaying his ignorance of economic questions, and the rights of the community in the values they create, when he speaks of town site values as rightfully belonging to the "lucky" individual who happened to get ahead of the community in getting possession of them.

If Mr. Beaven is ignorant of these truths, it is time he was getting acquainted with them. If he is not, he is clearly delinquent in his duty as the representative of the people in opposition to the present land policy. The evils of speculative holding of wild lands are no new evils. The effects of taxation applied as a remedy, have long been known and acknowledged. Ignorance on these questions cannot and will not long be tolerated by the people of this country on the part of those entrusted with the direction of public affairs. If the hon. Commissioner of Lands and the leader of the Opposition are not better informed upon this subject shortly, they may discover that the people are, and will demand on the part of those who represent them at least as great a knowledge of these truths as was possessed by the legislators of seventy-five years ago.

In Withrow's history of Canada, page 351, appears the following description of the land agitation of 1820 in Canada, which I recommend to them for perusal. "In the making of land grants, much favoritism had prevailed. Extensive tracts had been alienated from the crown, without any imposition of settlement duties or taxation. Much of the land was, therefore, held by speculators and allowed to remain in a wild state, that its value might be enhanced by the cultivation of the settled districts. In order to prevent this evil, royal instructions were issued forbidding the granting of more than twelve hundred acres to any one person. But this instruction was often adroitly evaded. A greedy land agent would apply in the names of a number of associates for grants of twelve hundred acres each. This application was often only a subterfuge, and the combined grant, sometimes amounting to fifty thousand acres,