

VACANT LOT CULTIVATION IN ENGLAND.

A wave of land-hunger is sweeping Great Britain as a result of the astonishing growth of the garden-planting movement begun there when Joseph Fels of America organized the Vacant Lot Cultivation Society.

To-day this Society is the nucleus of an organized movement of 250,000 allotment-holders,—men and women who are "doing their bit" by growing food on small plots of ground in and near cities and towns. And three times as many more are only waiting for the land to be made available for them.

In the Southern District, centering in London, the allotment-holders have organized a federation with a membership of 31,000. The garden-planting movement has become more than a fad or an emergency war measure. It has become a nation-wide demand that opportunity be opened to all who are willing and able to cultivate the soil, and public men are beginning to see in the army of allotment-holders a rising force of the first importance. Says the Editor of the London "Herald":

"A new and living force has come into the life of the nation. We refer to the allotment movement. It is one that will compel the practical attention and response of municipal authorities and the Government. Allotment enthusiasts have become an army, which during the war has, with spade and hoe, drilled and trained; have got the land hunger, and as a result are here to stay.

"Having fallen in love with Mother Earth in time of war, they will not, if, we rightly estimate their quality, prove false to her when peace shall dawn. They are out to capture the entrenchments of the land monopolist and food profiteer, and woe betide any barrier which privilege shall attempt to place in the war of the army's advance.

"An evidence of the spirit of this movement was provided by the Conference of Allotment Holders, held in Essex Hall, London. There were present more than 300 delegates from some 160 societies, with an aggregate membership of over 31,000. In his opening address, the chairman referred to 'the work of the founder of the movement for the cultivation of vacant and idle land—the late Joseph Fels'; and when, at his suggestion, the Conference rose in a body 'to pay a tribute to his memory, and place on record the determination of those present to realize the ideal,' it was clear that here was a force that will have to be reckoned with in the future."

In the allotment movement, land reform has secured the backing of men and women interested not as theorists, but as actual tillers of the soil. John Galsworthy, the English writer, said:

"This question of the land is the question of the future, no matter what happens in the war. To put men on the land we must have the land ready in terms of earth, not of paper; and have it in the right places, within easy reach of town or village. We know, for instance, that in the last five months half a million allotment-gardens have been created in urban areas, and far more progress made with small holdings than in previous years. We have the chance of our life to scotch the food danger, and to restore a healthier balance between town and country stocks.

"Only five generations have brought us to the parasitic, town-ridden condition we are in. The rate of deterioration will increase rapidly with each coming generation. We have, as it were, turned seven-ninths of our population into poor paddocks, to breed promiscuously among themselves.

"The great impedimenta is the force of things as they are, the huge vested enterprises frightened of losing profits. If we pass this moment, when men of every class and occupation, even those who thrive most on our town-ridden state, are a little frightened; if we let slip this chance for a real change—can we hope that anything considerable will be done, with the dice loaded as they are, the scales weighted so hopelessly in favor of the towns?

"Dare any say that this whole vast question of the land with its throbbing importance, yea,—seeing that demobilizations do not come every year—its desperately immediate importance, is not fit matter for instant debate and action; dare any say that we ought to relegate it to that limbo, 'after the war'? In grim reality it takes precedence of every other question."

CITY AND COUNTRY ADMINISTRATION IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS.

—By the Department of Surveys and Exhibits, Russell Sage Foundation.—The survey was made by D. O. Decker and Shelby M. Harrison, the latter being Director, and thirteen agents of the Sage Foundation. The report covers conditions in the city of Springfield and Sangamon County, in which Springfield is situated. In addition to an examination of government administration, the survey includes public schools, recreation, delinquency and correction, public health, mental hygiene, charities, housing, and industrial and work conditions.

There is much of real value to the student of municipal government. It seems a pity that underlying conditions were not dealt with, and it is evident controversial subjects were studiously avoided. The report of the City Water, Light and Power Department on the supply of electric current to private consumers which has since been issued, gives data encouraging to advocates of public ownership as does the report on the supplying of water. It is interesting to note in the report of the Commissioner of Public Property that the city is furnishing current to consumers at 3.29 cents per K.W.R., netting the city sufficient profit to pay for extensions and the rebuilding of the plant. The report states: "A well-managed municipal utility has inherent economic advantages over one privately owned, and its rates should always be lower. It has no expensive friction with the public authorities and the city organization reduces overhead costs to some extent. The municipality can also borrow at lower rates of interest than private corporations can and the fact that no profits are made should also help toward lower rates."

The Somer's system of assessment (introduced in Springfield in 1911) is approved of. This system is based upon certain front-foot values which have been agreed upon as fair, and which are to be used as starting points in ascertaining the value of other lots throughout the city. On the basis of these tables local values are then worked out. The report blames the assessment officials for abandoning the use of the tables of local values, and says there is no good reason for doing so. Land and buildings and other improvements are valued separately in Springfield—"a method which general experience in assessing is tending strong to approve."

The report advises a valuation every year rather every four years. "Obviously the cash value of all pieces of real estate does not remain uniform through so long a time. Some will increase in value while others may decrease; but even where the general movement is toward higher values not all will increase in value at the same rate, and disproportions in taxation are sure to arise; for the property rising in value fastest will escape some of its proper tax burden. Indeed, instead of allowing these increments in land values to escape taxation for parts of four-year periods, the proposal is now being made from time to time in many cities to put such an additional tax on land as would claim a part, at least of the increased land value which is due to the general growth of the community."

The report condemns the assessment of personal property, and adds: "In other words, the operation of this tax favors the perjurer at the expense of the conscientious, and makes false swearing more or less an accepted custom; . . . and it is a tax which the well-to-do and resourceful can usually find a way of escaping while the smaller investor is caught by it."

Some changes are suggested in the form of government but the commission form is commended and cities contemplating a change are urged to consider the city manager plan in addition to the Commission form.

The survey of the Sage Foundation is a valuable contribution and the report should be found in every county town and city hall in Canada.

H. S. ROSS.

A NEW CONTRIBUTOR.

We have pleasure in informing our readers that in the near future they will have the pleasure of reading an article from the pen of Mr. J. Beckett, the Borough Treasurer of Accrington, who is one of the best authorities in England on municipal finance. Mr. Beckett will deal with municipal financing in England.