

THE BEACON.

VOL. I., No 3.

JULY 1st, 1893.

PRICE, 1d.

BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Communications to the Editor must be written on one side of the paper only, and must be accompanied by a signature, not necessarily for publication. Matter which does not reach the office before the 28th of the month cannot be inserted in the following number.

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1s. 6d. per annum, post free; to Great Britain, 2s.; and to U.S.A., 50c. per annum, post free.

The yearly subscription may commence at any time. Money Orders or 1d. and 3d. stamps preferred.

Remittances and business communications to be addressed to THE MANAGER, Beacon Office, 349 Collins-street, Melbourne.

The Beacon.

"Where wages are highest, there will be the largest production and the most equitable distribution of wealth. There will invention be most active, and the brain guide best the hand. There will be the greatest comfort, the widest diffusion of knowledge, the purest morals, and the truest patriotism."—HENRY GEORGE (Protection or Free-trade).

JULY 1st, 1893.

As the prodigal son, in his extremity, turned to the home which nurtured him, so does Victoria, in her distress, turn for relief to the land. A generation has been sacrificed in the vain attempt to foster into premature manhood artificial industries which, in due time, would have arisen of themselves. The brain and the muscle of the people have been diverted into artificial and unproductive channels; their energies have been withheld, nay, have been withdrawn, from the development of the natural opportunities which surround us. Sweating dens have been substituted for farms, sickly factories for orchards, borrowing for producing, and the result is the total collapse from which we now suffer.

The factories that might have been prosperous if they had grown up under natural conditions, with a numerous and well-to-do country population at their back, are insolvent, and the men and women who were lured into them find themselves cast adrift. It is now clear to the meanest understanding that the old cry, "We cannot all be

farmers," applies with infinitely greater truth to city occupations. We certainly cannot all be bootmakers, or clothing hands, or shopkeepers, and merchants. All city occupations are seen to be overcrowded, because the country population, for whose service they exist, has been artificially decreased.

Frantic efforts are now being made to rectify the mistakes of the past. "Back to the land" is the cry which resounds through the country; which is heard at every meeting, and fills the newspapers in a variety of expressions. By the dozens may the schemes be counted which are intended to entice the people back to the land. Yet, whether it is for want of honesty or for want of perception, the question is never raised how it is that the people are not going on the land of their own accord. Nor is the more serious fact attended to, that those who have been settled on the land are abandoning the soil on which they have spent the labour of a life-time.

All over the country, in every district, except the newly-discovered Mallee, farmers are abandoning their holdings. Everywhere the land is again aggregating in large estates; almost everywhere cultivation is being abandoned for grazing. Even of the district which is justly regarded as the garden of Victoria, where irrigation has been most successfully instituted—even of the Goulburn Valley—Mr. Murray reports that the subdivision of large holdings into fruit-farms is accompanied by an aggregation of 300-acre holdings into grazing farms. What, therefore, is the use of establishing village settlements on small plots of poor land, or land remote from the arteries of communication, when the larger farms, more fruitful or more advantageously situated, cannot maintain the families who have devoted their energies to the cultivation of their soil?

We are a nation of canters. With ostrich-like stupidity we refuse to look the facts in the face. Nothing can be more obvious than that our system of taxation renders it impossible for a

man of average ability and industry to make a living from the land; that, in spite of all the precautions to the contrary, our economic and fiscal mistakes are reconverting Victoria into a sheep and cattle walk. What possible success can, under these circumstances, be expected from the endeavour of settling on the land the artisans, shut out from the city occupations into which we seduced them? Are they likely to overcome the difficulties and burdens which are crushing out the farmers; or is it not a matter of absolute certainty that in a few years the majority of them will be compelled to throw up the sponge?

Our farmers are driven off the land; hungry men perambulate the country in vain search of work which cannot be found; the streets of our city swarm with thousands who are in the same condition; our industries, protected and otherwise, are smitten with paralysis; our harbour is empty of ships and our trade at a standstill, and all we propose is to cut up a few acres of land into village settlements. It would be laughable if it were not so inexpressibly sad.

There is one course, and one course only, which can bring back prosperity to our homes; which can bring work and food to the thousands which are now suffering from the want of it; which can keep our traders out of the bankruptcy courts; which can keep our farmers on the land and settle thousands of other farmers by their side. That is a policy which makes farming pay, by relieving it of the overwhelming burdens which we have heaped upon it in our vain attempts to foster city trades before their time. Are we lacking the honesty to confess, what is obvious to every eye, that the policy which we have called "protection" is a policy of destruction? Whom has it protected, if not the masses against getting wages? Not our manufacturers. With the exception of a few small trades, which linger on in a half-comatose state at an enormous cost to the country, none of our industries have benefited by it. Is there any man who can deny that

our larger industries, our manufactures of agricultural implements and mining plants, our boot and clothing factories, our woollen mills would be more prosperous if we had not tried to coddle them into immature growth?

Let us, then, honestly confess that the policy of taxing men according to the number of mouths which they have to feed, and the number of backs which they have to clothe; the policy which fines the masses of men for every addition which they make to the wealth of the country, has proved an utter failure. Instead of taxing the labour and the production of the people, let us tax the few who appropriate the wealth which the many produce by raising revenue from a tax on the rental value of all land, exempting improvements.

That would make farming pay, and would, therefore, settle the people on the land. If once our farmers were relieved from the crushing duties on everything they have to buy; from the tax on their produce, which is represented by railway freights of double the amount of what they ought to be; from the iniquitous fine on all their improvements, which arises from the present system of local rating; if all this crushing taxation were replaced by a tax on the unimproved value of city and country land, their contribution to the general taxation, the wealth taken from their industry, would be very small. Our traders and manufacturers would then have at their back a vast army of prosperous cultivators, whose demand for manufactured goods would scatter prosperity into every street and corner of our city.

All this cannot be done at once, but surely the time is ripe for a beginning. Every step in this direction, every real attempt to rectify the errors of the past, would bring its proportional measure of prosperity. All that is required is the pluck and the honesty to confess the mistakes we have made, to turn back upon the path which we have trodden so long and with such disastrous results. Unless we as a people possess that pluck and honesty our future is dark indeed, and deserves to be so. Our destiny is in our own hands; what it shall be depends upon our own acts. The time calls for reforms, not for tinkering. Fortunately we have every reason to hope that real reforms, bringing lasting prosperity in their train, will be the result of our disasters.

The Railway of the Age.

Our frontispiece presents a sketch of the Yarra Glen Railway Extension as advocated by the "Age" newspaper, and as nearly as the same can be located at present. A not inconsiderable section of local residents are of opinion that the line should start from Croydon, but as the "Age" declares that "there seems to be very little justice in such a proposal," it may be regarded as doomed. There certainly would be very little justice to Mr. David Syme in this proposal. For if it were adopted, the line would either avoid his land, or, what might be objected to, would have to make a considerable detour in order to pass through it.

The total length of the line from Lilydale to Warburton will be about 19 miles. For the first eight miles of its course, as far as Seville, the expense will not be exceptionally heavy. The picturesque description in the "Age" of the natural beauties revealed during the remainder of its course, and the fact, which it mentions, that "owing to the hilly nature of the country, the carting of produce from the Upper Yarra to Lilydale is expensive work, often coming to £5 per ton," is, however, a sufficient guarantee that the balance will be restored by this section. An average of £16,000 per mile, or, say, £300,000 in all, will scarcely be an over-estimate of its cost.

We gather from official statistics that the number of inhabitants to be served by the line amounts to the marvellous total of about 1300. This gives an expenditure of over £230 per head. It may therefore be estimated that the railway will pay if every one of the residents, babies included, will spend at least £20 a year in freights and fares. Should they, however, adopt the unpatriotic course of the rest of the people of Victoria, each of whom, on an average, spends only about £3 a year in this manner, then it may still be calculated that the earnings of this line will compensate the Department for the additional expenditure on axle grease which it will necessitate.

We note, however, with satisfaction that the "Age" discovers the land through which the line passes to be "rich and adaptable for any purpose," and that "some thousands of

acres" are "under cultivation for the raspberry cane." We were not aware that the cultivation of raspberries was carried on so extensively as to require "some thousands of acres" in this small district alone, and we scarcely suspected the people of Victoria to be possessed of such a voracious appetite for this luscious fruit. The obligatory cream is, of course, supplied by the reporter's little joke. The discovery, on the other hand, that Mr. David Syme's land is neither rich nor adapted for this remunerative industry, excites our sympathetic regret. The land-tax register shows that this land is placed in the lowest, the fourth, class, and that its contribution to the revenue amounts to £6 8s. a year. It is true the "Age" mentions that, "Half-way between Woori Yallock and Launching Place the road lies along the valley of the Yarra, where the rich river flats furnish grazing and agricultural land that it would be impossible to surpass in any part of the colony," and also that, "all over the district there is land lying idle which should be utilised." But, though the situation of Mr. David Syme's land corresponds with that described in the first of these passages, the low value at which it is assessed seems to exclude the possibility of its being thus referred to. Mr. Syme's reputation as a Land Nationaliser, and the condemnation by the "Age" of landowners who keep their land idle, seems to make it equally unlikely that the second passage refers to it. We are, therefore, forced to conclude that this land is poor in quality, unadapted and unadaptable for any very useful purpose.

We, therefore, are all the more ready to congratulate Mr. David Syme on the good fortune in store for him through the increase in the value of his poor land from the unexpected construction of a railway. It is gratifying to find that the patriotism with which he has combated political influence in the construction of railways—a patriotism which has subjected him to two great libel actions—at last brings its own reward. Had he been less urgent in the cause of purity, had he protested less against this too prevalent type of corruption, ill-natured persons might have suggested that the advocacy of this line in the pages of the "Age," and its favourable consideration by the Government, were due to the fact that it must put money into the pockets of Mr. David Syme. In order, however, to place such a suggestion in its proper light, and to exhibit the