

The Domestic Parallel To War

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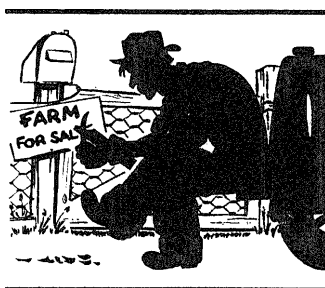
As Told To George F. Havell

IN the Vermont town where I live a retired school-teacher bought a lot about a year ago. He began to build a house this spring; and in front of the excavation he put out a sign—"For Sale." Construction reached the roof-raising stage; the sign remained. The house was completed and the owner moved in. The sign, "For Sale," is still there.

This man seems to be saying to himself something like this: "I am getting old; I want and deserve a home. That is why I bought this lot. However, the lot is increasing in value and I must prove to myself that I am not a fool. I shall hang out this sign. Thus will I placate the economic man within myself. If a buyer comes, I shall sell. If not, I shall enjoy those values that lie beyond the laws of supply and demand: beauty, peace, home."

This seems to be a fair rendering of the inner dualism that pervades all of us. And in this war crisis I hope that my readers will appreciate its true significance. The sign "For Sale" transforms the homestead into something unreal; sale is now the final destiny of the land—we "realize" real estate when we sell it for cash. Modern man could never have invented the term "real estate" for land. It appears in our age as an anachronism from a past in which money realization had not yet been thought of. Land was once the end of man's economic odysseys. In fact, the "Odyssey" itself gives us a clue to the meaning of "real estate." In this first book to

be written on the aftermath of a world war, Odysseus at last returns to a place on the mainland; there he will bury his rudder, and re-establish the *real estate* of man on peaceful earth.



The ownership of land today involves little obligation to the community. My neighbor need not discuss with me, nor with the town, the effect upon us when he sells his property. Modern man is torn between money and home, and as long as the conflict between values has to be locked in the solitude of the heart, the communicable values will have unfair advantage. People must translate values into action, or they wither; they must find expression in the national life. Without group expression, there are no values. "For Sale"—a communicable consideration—is given expression by every real estate broker in the country. But "For ever"—a consideration which is not communicable—remains unexpressed.

One may say: "Haven't we created national parks and recreation areas?" Here are leisure, beauty and pleasure. True enough, the

aesthetic sense is satisfied. But mere visual appreciation is an unreal relationship towards the soil—a pallid fragment of a full attitude.

Of this we become keenly aware in wartime. Then, land suddenly comes to be regarded solely from the standpoint of its military importance—we think in terms of naval bases, army camps, and airfields. Greenland and Guam quickly increase in value; and this has nothing to do with the cash price or with beauty; it is strategic value. All land, then, may possess at least three values: economic, aesthetic, and strategic. The sign "For Sale" symbolizes economy; the national parks stand for beauty; an ugly army cantonment may represent strategic value.

Can the case rest here? Many people seem to think so. They accept an infinite number of values, and lose all power of decision between them. But before any value makes sense it must be related to the whole. If modern man is ever to recover his sense of belonging, the *unity* of his relation to the earth must find expression in a domestic equivalent of war,—a form of service to the land. Land as home, as our's, must be symbolized. And this cannot be done through the institution of private property or by creating public parks. Land will take on the value of home, the dignity of Odysseus' "real estate," only by a ceremony of communal investiture, by enlisting soldiers of the land in a land corps.

In modern times this program of the conflicting concepts of land

as "home" and land as something to be translated into money became acute in 1904 with the Russo-Japanese War. At that time the Japanese attacked Russia at Port Arthur, without warning, just as they attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor on December 7. Both events mark the end of eras of colonial exploitation. And both contain the underlying warning that the whole earth must become man's home, or man will perish.

In 1905, feverish efforts were commenced to give reality to this new concept of the whole earth as man's permanent dwelling place. They were spontaneous and worldwide and they took many forms; we cannot possibly review all of them here. To sketch a few of them, David Lubin, a Californian, won the support of the King of Italy for an International Institute of Agriculture. Its purpose was to protect the land and those who work upon it from the influence of stock market speculation and those merely temporal fluctuations which bear no essential relation to the soil. The Institute quickly degenerated into a statistical bureau in *maiorum gloriam* of the Italian hosts. Institutes are not the solution.

In the United States, trees were planted, conservation began to be planned, the pollution of rivers became a topic of discussion. The climax of all this came—a quarter of a century later—with the TVA and the CCC. But the TVA has been a bureaucracy and the CCC

a relief organization. These cannot give expression to a country's deepest values; they divert human energy into side issues.

Our Mexican neighbors have gone through an agricultural revolution. When we started Camp William James in Vermont a member of the Mexican cabinet wrote to us: "The agrarian revolution has given to the Mexican peon the only release from his otherwise uninspiring life. Sanguinary as it was, it will not be superseded by disarmament and friendly acts, but only by a more positive and equally heroic service offered to the common man in his drab existence."

He went on: "Art and science give an outlet for creative energy, but they will always belong to a relatively small number. That which the scientists and artists experience must be realized by the millions, through other social activities of the same high standing."

During the last twelve years of his life, William James became more and more concerned with the lack of heroism in American education. As early as 1899 he said: "This question dominates the whole problem of individual and national education." In his dismay over the disappearance of the martial virtues he wrote his "Moral Equivalent For War." About the same time Popper Lynkeu advocated armies of youth in central Europe. After the first World War Pierre Ceresole and Christian Florens Rang preached the gospel of international work armies. I, myself, was allowed to pursue a line of thought first outlined in 1912, in the work camps for farmers, laborers, and students in Silesia.

In 1940, United States government officials, with the support of the National Defense Council, undertook to make the existing conservation service something better than mere relief. Their efforts did not meet with success. But in this same year some Harvard and Dartmouth students volunteered to

work on farms and in farming communities. They sensed the urgent necessity of bringing new life to our depopulated and neglected rural districts; instead of seeking to earn their substance in Boston or New York they elected to cast their lot with farmers who must work under conditions as adverse as any to be found the country over. These young men were not forced by circumstances to exchange places with their countrymen who had deserted the farming communities in which they had been raised; they deliberately chose to lend their efforts to the rehabilitation of rural America. Their experiences are related by one of their number in this issue of FREE AMERICA.

Today, the youth of the whole country must help to man the outlying districts. The domestic parallel to war is the use of land,—not as private property and not as public parks, but as the hearth and home of America. Men and women from every stratum of our population must win the right to enter into this home by an act of initiation. In each generation initiation must become a representative act by which the novitiates earn the privilege of taking possession of the settlements their forefathers made. And as our young men go to war, our girls must take their places in the back hills,—our bastions for peace. Land is man's "real estate,"—his home. And by positive action we must reclaim it, all of us, year after year, by a solemn act of investiture.

