

# HOW LANDOWNERS ARE MADE.

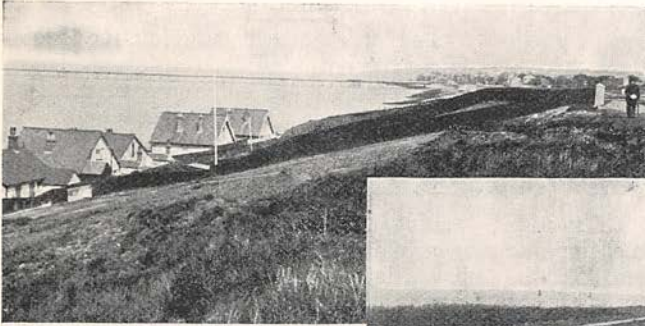
By ARTHUR GOODRICH.

*Illustrated from Photographs by C. Pilkington.*

**T**HERE can be no doubt that the success which has attended us as a nation is largely due to our cities, despite the fact that many people maintain that the only thing which can reconcile a man to a residence in town is the blessed hope of getting out of it. That cities have their evils no one will deny. The life they compel us to lead is artificial and often unhealthy. Nature presents us with luxuriant woodlands, open moorlands, lofty hills and deep verdant valleys ; breezes which stir the

became congested, a further exodus had to be made. Then came the problem, Where were they to go to next? At the opportune moment Mr. F. F. Ramuz, Mayor of Southend-on-Sea, conceived the idea of purchasing some of the Essex land which agricultural depression had driven out of cultivation, cutting it up into plots and selling them on reasonable terms to the public.

The Essex landowners, being wise in their generation, so approved of the scheme that the man of enterprise was soon in a position to say, "Come to me, all you lovers of Nature, doomed by circumstances to see the sun set from January to December behind a chimney-pot instead

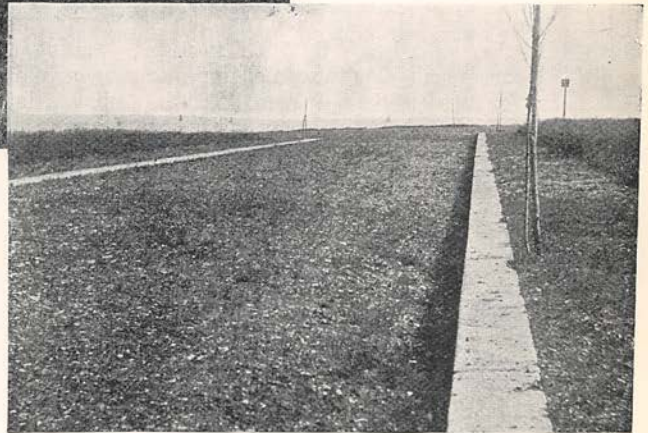


BUNGALOWS LEAD THE WAY.

hedges and set the trees a-waving, redden the skin and expand the frame. The vitiated air of big cities, with their close streets and stuffy rooms, impoverishes the blood and undermines the constitution.

Every year has so swollen the population of the cities, and so increased their size, that the country, despite the talk about the locomotive conquering space, has gradually become more and more remote. This is true of all our cities, but more particularly of the Metropolis.

Small wonder, then, that thousands of fresh-air-loving Londoners, finding their tether becoming gradually more and more narrowed, look eagerly about for some means of freeing themselves from the bondage of the big city. The suburbs for a time provided an asylum, but when these in their turn



ROSEBERY AVENUE AND SALISBURY DRIVE.

of a purple hill. Come to me, and I will provide you with a resting-place, out of sight and yet within easy journey of the great city, where you can plant your household gods amid groves and glades, hills and dales ; where those you love can watch the sunshine painting the meadows with delight, giving splendour to the flowers and beauty to the trees."

But confidence being a plant of slow growth, the public were loth to respond.



It was in vain that the voice of the pioneer announced that the plots would be sold absolutely without reserve; that payments would be extended over four years; that conveyances would not only be free, but that there would be absolutely no law costs; that tithes would be redeemed whenever practicable, and possession of the land immediately given.

It was all very well to talk about immediate possession, but what about roads and drains? Who would defray the cost of these?

"I will," said the vendor.

"There must be something wrong about the scheme if you do. You must have an axe of your own to grind. You offer us land on better terms than one can purchase a piano! It's bound to be a swindle!"

So the very people who should have canonised Mr. Ramuz denounced him as a trickster, and even when the enthusiastic Mayor, in order to dispose of the land he had purchased, offered to take them by special train and cheap tickets to the sale, they still held aloof.

"Well, free luncheon as well," cried the now desperate pioneer. And the lunch did it.

There was something suspicious about the plots. Terms and prices were too reasonable, or at least they looked so. But a thirty-mile railway journey and back with a champagne luncheon for two shillings; there could be no mistake about that. So they went, and as the road to the Englishman's heart lies through his stomach, they found the luncheon so good that they stayed to the sale, and, feeling at peace with the world just then, planked down their money with great cheerfulness.

They part with their money more readily now, but not so cheerfully. Deep down in the human heart, sociologists tell us, dwells an innate desire to own land. At land sales the instinct reveals itself in bidding that borders on the acrimonious, especially when plots directly facing the sea are put up.

Sales during the season are held three and even four times a week, and although 50,000 landowners have already been created, the special trains are always packed. Mr. Ramuz, the originator of the movement, notwithstanding his duties as Mayor of Southend-on-Sea—which, as far as I can judge, largely consist in feasting the juvenile population—still finds time to attend some of the sales, though the enterprise has evolved into what is known as "The Land Company," with Mr. George Ramuz, a son

of the Mayor, as auctioneer. So estates have been bought and cut into plots at Southend, Leigh-on-Sea, Westcliffe-on-Sea, Prittlewell, Maldon, Norton Park, Shoeburyness, Wakering, Tilbury Docks, Laindon Hills, Pitsea, Vange, Basildon, Chingford, Rochford, Rayleigh, Herne Bay, Westminster-on-Sea, Bishopstone Glen, Hilborough-on-Sea, Ropley, Ilford, etc., etc. But more are wanted, and prices must be low enough to bring the land within the reach of all.

At Laindon—breezy Laindon, as they call it—the Mayor sells plots to the working class, 100 feet by 20 feet wide, outright for £5, and spreads the payments over four years, which means that anyone can become a landowner for 6*d.* a week.

During the summer months the specials, fare nominal with luncheon thrown in, are simply packed. A tradesman will tell you on the platform that after forty years behind the counter he thinks sleeping in the air of the country will do him good.

And such a mixed gathering, too! May-fair may not send its contingent, but all other sections are well represented. Half-pay officers, on whose slender resources the rents of town press heavily, clerks, professional men, well-to-do mechanics, young couples, some starting in matrimony, others waiting till they have got the home, young men, old men, speculators of the sort who buy a lot with the object of selling it at a profit, and others who have come to buy for friends, a pushing, eager crowd, whose indifference to China, Transvaal, and other brimming questions is evidenced in the absence of newspapers and the abundance of plans of the estate. Ah, those plans! how they are conned over!

"You see that plot," said a gentleman to me recently in a land sale train, bursting to take someone into his confidence. "If I don't get that plot, I won't have any."

"Has it any particular advantages?" I asked.

"I should think it has," was the reply. "There's a running brook on this estate, and if I buy this plot I shall be able to divert the stream through my garden into some reservoirs I shall build. As it will be years before the water company comes along, I shall be able to supply the neighbours with water for some years on my own terms, which will be a halfpenny the pail."

Community of object making short work of insular reserve, conversation in land trains is delightfully general. Everyone laughs at the simple folk who make no effort to free





ONLY KIOSKS AND BAND-STANDS WILL BE ALLOWED ON THE ESPLANADE.

themselves from the miseries of town life, and is confident that the real secret of long life and happiness lies in purchasing a small piece of land outside London and building on it a house after a design of one's own.



THE SITE OF THE FUTURE TOWN.

On the train's arrival at its destination, the company with great precipitation rush from the station and, headed by the auctioneer, make straight for their future homes. To-day's sale is at Herne Bay, and as Herne Bay is close, quite close, to the German Ocean—which, as we all know, is remarkable for the quality of its ozone—everyone sniffs. This causes the auctioneer to declare that "Herne Bay is not only the garden of England, but quite the healthiest place in the world," which is, of course, saying a good deal.

It is a beautiful day, and everyone looks supremely happy save the land speculators. When the weather is bad attendances are small, and lots are knocked down cheap. The place we are bound for is the West Cliff, Herne Bay.

A smart walk of twenty minutes so

sharpens our appetites that the moment the marquee is seen all insensibly hurry forward. But the time for luncheon is not yet.

Messrs. Ramuz insist that their clients shall know what they are bidding for, so, escorted by the auctioneer, they are introduced to their future homes. A few take up their quarters in preference outside the luncheon-tent, to rest maybe, or possibly to have the pick of the seats—who knows? But the majority, plan in hand, follow the auctioneer.

"We are now, ladies and gentlemen, in Rosebery Avenue." You look round; you are in a field dotted all over with little pegs, and, just where you are standing, kerbstones and a sprinkling of gravel indicate the site of the thoroughfare yet to come. To-day it is no more Rosebery Avenue than Cornhill is Cornhill, but it will

be before long; of that no one doubts.

"Which is Sea Street?" says a lady, who, having made a small fortune out of a lodging-house at Southend-on-Sea, is going to build another of her own to accommodate four-



EN ROUTE TO KLONDYKE.



FUTURE LANDOWNERS CONTEMPLATING SEA STREET.



teen guests, and do without "wretched landlords," as she calls them. Sea Street having been indicated, and a grocer from the south of London having been assured that no shops save those shown on the plans would be allowed on the estate, the genteel section of the crowd are taken to Alexandra Drive and Salisbury ditto.



SOME UNHAPPY LAND SPECULATORS—  
PRICES RATE HIGH ON A FINE DAY.

New communities are always aspiring, and those who owe their existence to the Mayor of Southend and his friends believe in high-sounding, not to say full-flavoured, names. At land sales it is so common a thing to hear the auctioneer exclaim, "We will now take the plot in Gracechurch Street or the Strand," that no one betrays the slightest astonishment. Besides, imposing and stately names add to the dignity of towns in the bud.

The people who rent moors and deer forests don't dislike their shooting-boxes any the more for their being called castles. Why, then, should we sneer at lesser mortals who find Sir Walter Raleigh Drive, Ann Boleyn Avenue, Ravenscourt Chase, etc., more attractive than Robert Street, Borough Road, and the like?

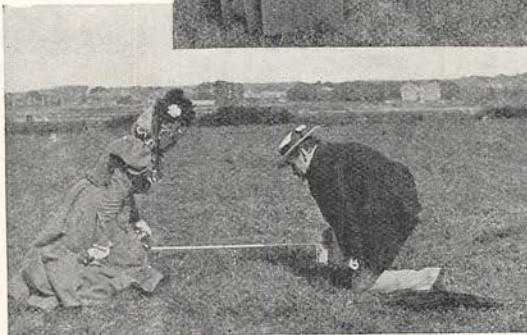
The tradesman who would refuse credit to

anyone living in Rothschild Avenue must have a very poor opinion of his species.

The company having been assured by the auctioneer that no houses will be allowed in front of the Spa and the Grand Esplanade, nothing except kiosks and band-stands, a bell is heard, whereupon everyone rushes with positively frantic haste to the marquee. The German Ocean has done its work, and for the moment plots are forgotten.

Land sale luncheons are above criticism. People will put up with anything when they pay for it. Give it them for nothing and they become critical at once. But the viands are first class—so excellent, indeed, as quite to neutralise the impression which, under less happy auspices, might have been conveyed by the itinerant orchestra in attendance outside.

There is nothing novel in the spectacle of several hundred people feasting in a tent, but this crowd is worth studying. Deadheads



FREQUENT MEASURING PREVENTS SHRINKAGE.

"BLESS THE MAN! DO  
YOU MEAN TO SAY  
YOU CAN'T FIND YOUR  
PLOT?"

are, of course, present. They talk glibly about land, study their plans with apparently absorbing interest, and occasionally bid, but they never buy. So, this being

noticed, and their address obtained by an official on the pretext of sending them a catalogue of the next sale, they one morning receive a letter politely requesting them not to patronise the sales any more.

Luncheon over, the tables removed and a rostrum erected, the auctioneer clears his



throat, calls for silence, and proceeds to describe the property he is about to sell. There is nothing automatic about this auctioneer. In fact, his eloquence grows quite seductive when he assures his audience that the place is not one of those delightful spots only to be reached after a long and agonising sea voyage, or an interminable journey by train, being actually within an hour and a half of London.

"Westward Ho! ladies and gentlemen, is a veritable Paradise at London's gate. Fish is scarce off the Dogger Bank, but not here; and as to shrimps——"

"Never mind the shrimps, man," says an austere lady with an eye like

"I'VE PLOTS EVERYWHERE."



satisfactory as to outfalls, drain-pipes, water-borings, lighting, etc., he has a distinctly bad time of it. Sometimes when closely pressed he will flood the meeting with eloquence, saying—

"Gaze around you, ladies and gentlemen. Here the sunshine glorifies sea and earth alike, ripening the crops and covering the dimpled surface of the ocean with splashes of molten gold. Think what the attractions of this enchanting spot will be like if the railway company redeem the promise they have made to build a rail-

way station. When that time comes, you will be brought within one and a half hours of the great Metropolis, where from clammy dawn to foggy eve stand interminable lines of houses, with every brick alike, myriads of chimney-pots, and lamp-posts by the thousand."

But what is the use of badgered land auctioneers taking refuge in such verbal gorgeous-



DURING LUNCHEON LAND IS QUITE FORGOTTEN.

Mars to threaten and command; "tell us something about the drains."

"Are the town council of Herne Bay to be relied on?" says another.

"What is the attitude of the Local Government Board towards Westward Ho?" cries a third.

"Unfriendly, you bet," says a stout man. "Whitehall don't care about us landowners."

Then a heated debate ensues. There was a time when people bought plots without reference to sanitary conditions, but all that is changed now. The auctioneer has to undergo a searching examination, and if his answers are not



THE COMPANY NOW SETTLE DOWN TO BUSINESS.

ness when a lady sternly interrupts him, saying, "There are mothers present, and in their name I ask you, sir, to say plainly whether



the authorities at Herne Bay will look after the sanitary wants of Westward Ho!"

One admirable feature characterises these sales. There are so many lots for disposal that anything in the shape of a knock-out is difficult. It has been tried, with results disastrous to the ring.

It is whilst the bidding is in progress that you learn what a varied thing humanity is. An extremely genial old lady buys several lots. You ask who she is. It transpires that she keeps a sweetstuff shop somewhere in London. The neighbourhood is so poor that she declares that only on two occasions has she ever sold, in twenty years, as much as a pennyworth at a time. Yet she has saved out of ha'porths and farthingsworths enough to invest £400 in land.

But her investments are greatly exceeded by those of another lady, who, as far as the number of her estates and plots is concerned, is the largest landed proprietor in the world.

"I could not really tell you how many plots I possess," she said, in answer to a question of mine. "All I know is that it's everywhere."

Judging by the sweep she gave her arm when she said this, I took everywhere to mean all over the world.

The public evidently believe in the future Westward Ho! of Herne Bay. Shop plots, always a sure test of the calculated development of local prosperity, fetch high prices. The bidding is characterised by a sublime disregard for the schemes of those reformers who would nationalise the land.

I have alluded to the landowning desire as an instinct. This applies only to the gentlemen. With lady bidders it becomes a passion, revealing itself in the most curious and unexpected manner.

I watched one lady bidding unsuccessfully for plot after plot. Presently she secured one. "My boy is a landowner at last," she cried, and the tears rushed into her eyes. I looked at the infant she carried in her arms. Being only two months old, he did not, of course, realise the enormous change the last few moments had wrought in his *status*.

Another thing noticeable in the crowd which attends land sales is their lack of humour. That they are hopeful admits of no doubt. They bid as if the lots were in Klondyke instead of Kent or Essex, but they won't joke.

When the auctioneer playfully recommends

a lot on the ground that there is more ozone in Lot 45 than there is in Lot 46, which he has just sold, someone is sure to remark, "There won't be any at all if you allow any more buildings in front of it."

They are also peculiar in other respects. When an Englishman determines on transferring his goods and chattels to some other clime, choice is regulated, as a rule, by the advantages offered. At land sales it is different. People from the south of London will buy in Kent, but not in Essex, and *vice versa*.

By 5 p.m. the last lot is disposed of, and the newly made landowners stream into the open to sample the land of which they are now the proprietors. Some glare at their purchases with a stern intentness, as if they suspected the plot had an intention of absconding; others gaze rapturously at the site on which the home is to be built, and debate the position of the kitchen and how much will be left for the garden.

I noticed one landowner regarding his investment with such evident distrust that I asked him if he was afraid of its running away.

"There's worse dangers than that," he replied severely. "Three years ago I bought a lot at Rochford. Last year I ran down just to have a look round, when I found that someone had built on it by mistake. I *was* pleased."

"Why?"

"Because I got good compensation. Run away! That's why I like land, because it does not run away."

Nevertheless, owners at first frequently behave as if they thought such a contingency not impossible. To pay a weekly visit to your plot after it has passed into your possession, "just to see that it is all right," is quite a common thing.

It is quite a sentimental scene, with the landowners all round one surveying their purchases; but the lengthening shadows warn us at last that the day is ageing fast.

"Train goes at 7.15," cries the auctioneer.

Still none of the magnates stir. True, the land on which they stand is their own, but have they laid out their money to advantage? Of course they have. Is not the air laden with health and exhilaration? Why, of course! And are not the payments spread over four years? Nothing like leather? "Nothing like land!" says the Britisher.