

## Dark Days in England

RECENTLY I have been in England, which I had not visited since 1911. Before that I had on various visits, reaching back over a period of thirty years, spent more or less time in the British capital. By reading and by personal contacts during many years, I have tried to keep intelligently acquainted with the trend of public affairs over there, and with the tendencies that may mean so much to the people here and elsewhere in the world. Since my return to New York I am frequently asked to answer the question, "How are things in England?" I cannot help making a gloomy answer.

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For if a man cares, and thinks; if he has any habit of concern for the serious aspects of the history that is making before his eyes, then he needs to be a constitutional optimist not to be made unhappy and a little fearful by the seeming import of social and political conditions in England today. To me at any rate, the picture is somber in its coloring, and so unrelieved by any immediate prospect of better things, as to justify those portents of national disaster which some Englishmen of respectable standing have recently recognized. A few weeks ago Sir Philip Gibbs seriously asked, "Is England Done?" in a plain spoken article in the conservative *Times*, and J. L. Garvin, editor of the *Sunday Observer* warns the government that the threat of the communist revolution made by irresponsible agitators of Tom Mann's type, took on a new significance when the Trade Union Congress recently declared, in effect, for Socialistic dominance in government affairs.

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Meanwhile the signs of great poverty and misery, and of widespread and outspoken discontent with the existing order are more numerous I believe, than ever before known in England. The number of men out of employment approaches 1,500,000. Exports of manufactured goods have greatly fallen off. Trade depression in many industries grows worse. Housing conditions continue shockingly bad, despite various paternalistic and expensive schemes of government to bring relief. Not a few wretched, homeless men, women and children may be found at night, if you look for them, sleeping in dark places along the Thames embankment, a short distance from the gay and well-lit hotels where comfortable American tourists spend their London days. These symptoms, and many more that might be cited, of the prevalence of a terrible social disease that seems to threaten the existence of an ordered human society, are not yet receiving from the leaders of thought and action in England, or here, the attention that, I believe, their great seriousness demands.

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The late premier, Ramsay MacDonald, chides his successor for having yielded in August to the implied threat that bloody revolution might result if the coal miners'

strike was not averted. Well, revolution or something like it, seemed very near. The miners, strongly unionized, were fighting off a threatened reduction in wages that they claim are already too low. The operators of the open mines (many are closed) stood pat, as we say. A strike might have involved all railway and transport labor, whose leaders were said to be strongly in sympathy with the miners. That might have brought the country face to face with starvation within a week. So, as usual, it was put up to the government to "do something," and the "temporary" subsidy to the owners followed. It may involve the expenditure of twenty-five to forty million dollars before May first next, when the subsidy is supposed to cease. Nobody expects it to stop then. Cook, the leader of the miners' union, who sometimes talks like a bolshevik, declares he is out to compel the government to take over the industry; which means, among other things, the payment of great sums to buy out the coal mine owners and operators.

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The reduction in the demand for British coal abroad, the stagnation of domestic industries and the greater use of oil as fuel are all, no doubt, factors in what is called the Coal Crisis. But it is interesting to be told by the Manchester *Guardian* that one of the chief grievances of the miners against the existing order in the mining industry is the heavy charge against both capital and labor involved in the ground rent or royalties paid by the operating owners to the owners of sub-surface rights in the coal lands, or for "wayleaves" to pass through or under the land of another owner in bringing coal to the surface. The royalties alone amount to a toll of about thirty million dollars a year upon the industry.

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The usual governmental resort in England when any problem seems too hard to deal with, is to appoint a commission to look into it. And so a commission (not the first to deal with the subject) is now looking into the coal mining business. Little or nothing may be expected from it beyond superficialities. The adjustment of the mining royalties at a figure which would permit a fair return to both capital and labor, and then the absorption of these unearned increments by the state (which might easily be effected by taxing them into the public treasury) along with an abatement of the onerous income taxes and local rates which now oppress the industry, are suggested solutions; not, however likely to occur to any commission appointed by Mr. Baldwin's government. Nor, indeed, to any other government that seems likely to come into power very soon. But thanks to the Henry Georgites in both the Liberal and Labor camps, the solution here suggested may be seriously proposed in Parliament at its next session.

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But a writer in *Land and Liberty*, mouthpiece of the parliamentary land reformers, pertinently points out

that an inquiry into what is truly the matter with the coal industry should be only the beginning of finding out what is the matter generally with trade in England. Other important industries are very sick also. The house building business is kept going, even in a most inadequate way, by immense subsidies. Iron and steel plants are closed, or running on short time; shipping is at low water; many merchant ships are idle for want of out-bound cargoes, retail trade is everywhere depressed. What is needed more than a coal inquiry is a broad and immediate inquiry into **WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ENGLAND.**

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Henry George, prophet and economist, honored more in England than in his own land, saw this situation coming.

More than 40 years ago, in the first chapter of his "Social Problems," he visioned it all with startling accuracy, and gave solemn warning of the dangers that would some day threaten the structure of civilized society in England. He saw that the evils resulting from the exploitation by a few of the land and natural resources of the country, would inevitably lead to the conditions we are now witnessing. He saw that the complexity of the industrial machine, and the delicate interdependence of its parts, would some day make vital and terrible the carrying out of the threat that organized labor recently delivered to Mr. Baldwin. Let Englishmen (and Americans too) read the first chapter of "Social Problems," first published in 1883, and see how true to life it is today. Just a paragraph:

"In London, dwellers in one house do not know those in the next; the tenants of adjoining rooms are utter strangers to each other. Let civil conflict break or paralyze the authority that preserves order and the vast population would become a terror-stricken mob, without point of rally or principle of cohesion, and your London would be sacked and burned by an army of thieves. \* \* \* Strong as it may seem our civilization is evolving destructive forces. Not desert and forest, but city slums and country roadside are nursing the barbarians who may be to the new what the Hun and Vandal were to the old."

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So it seems to me. Henry George declared that if disaster was to be averted there was need for the cultivation of a high degree of social intelligence—"for that concensus of individual intelligence which forms a public opinion, a public conscience, a public will; and is manifested in law institutions and administration."

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Well, I am unable to perceive among the rulers of England today or her men of light and leading in other departments of life, any high degree of social intelligence directed to the correction of the obvious social and economic maladjustments which seem to be the chief cause of consigning millions of men to unemployment and bitter poverty or to being supported out of the common purse. Not to consider more sinister implications of the situation, there

would seem a likelihood that a government bankrupt in statesmanship may ultimately lead to a country bankrupt in national finances. What would this mean to the world?

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If England's governmental managers know what is the real trouble with England; if they have any apprehension of the fundamental economic causes of industrial stagnation and unemployment, they make no sign. They palliate and postpone. They treat symptoms only, and these with soporifics and anodynes, which serve only to postpone the day when a desperate disease must be cured by fundamental remedies. The policy of subsidies and doles has imposed a tremendous financial burden upon a country already terribly oppressed with the cost of old wars and of preparations for new ones. The doles paid to the unemployed now reach a great sum annually—not less, I am told, than \$250,000,000. The housing subsidies have already reached hundreds of millions. Agricultural land owners are subsidized for about fifteen million dollars a year. Old age pensions take great sums, not to refer to the cost of pensions to war veterans and their dependents. One can hardly envy Mr. Churchill the job of balancing his budget.

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While I was in London the newspapers for nearly a week carried extended daily reports of the annual meeting at Southampton of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at which men of great learning told interestingly of the many directions in which advances in scientific research and discovery had been made recently. British scientists are fully abreast of the times. But contemplating the disordered and unhappy state of the country industrially and politically, I was reminded that it is still painfully true, as Henry George pointed out, that the application of intelligence to social affairs has not kept pace with the concentration of thought upon individual and material ends.

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That most of the leaders of British trade unionism in this exigency are, as a rule, more enlightened than the government, does not appear. While discountenancing the communist agitators, they, nevertheless, play the game of these red extremists, by keeping alive the spirit of class warfare and of antagonism to "capitalism." There has not yet come to the more powerful of the leaders of trade union movement a recognition of the fact that the legalized system that permits a monopoly of land and natural resources, is the fundamental source of England's trouble; a system that oppresses both capital and labor, employer and worker.

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A well-remembered witticism of Mark Twain is to the effect that while everybody complains about the weather, nobody does anything about it. That cannot be said of the Henry George men of England, and their friends in the

political world. Day in and day out they keep the land question to the forefront of discussion. When Parliament is in session, it is discovered that scores of the members in both Liberal and Labor parties hold the opinions of Henry George, and force discussion of the land question whenever opportunity appears. When Parliament is not in session, propaganda is kept up by letter writing to the newspapers and the circulation of books and leaflets. This is the work of a devoted and highly intelligent body of men under the leadership of John Paul, who direct the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, and its subordinate organizations, one of which is the English League, of which Sir Josiah C. Wedgewood, hero of Gallipoli and member of Parliament, is President.

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A circumstance that points to the probability that the land question may soon be the storm-centre of British politics, is the recent spectacular "Back to the Soil" campaign inaugurated by Lloyd George, in which he is demanding that the monopoly of agricultural land be destroyed, and access to idle acres be secured for idle men. It is not clear that he has any definite idea of how this is to be brought about, except by involving the country in deeper socialistic commitments to be financed by the people for the ultimate benefit of the monopolists. Remembering his various and terribly expensive adventures in state paternalism in the past, one must smile at the assurance which permits him in recent speeches to attack the Baldwin government for the subsidy dole to the coal people. "If we go on" he says, "we shall be subsidizing each other right to the end of the chapter. We shall all of us be paying each other's wages."

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Which is true enough, of course. But coming from Mr. Lloyd George, this seems to justify the old taunt of Lord Cecil, that the Welsh statesman has "an opalescent mentality that protects him from embarrassment when confronted with the ghosts of his dead selves."

—CHARLES O'CONNOR HENNESSY.

## A Definition of Land

"**L**AND is the habitation of man, the storehouse upon which he must draw for all his needs, the material to which his labor must be applied for the supply of all his desires; for even the products of the sea cannot be taken, the light of the sun enjoyed, or any of the forces of nature utilized, without the use of land or its products. On the land, we are born, from it we live, and to it we return again—children of the soil as truly as the blade of grass or the flowers in the field."—HENRY GEORGE.

COLUMBUS man who has been in Florida a short time boasts he has "made more money there than in a lifetime in Ohio;" but he does not tell who lost it.

—Lorain, Ohio, *Journal*.

## Memories of Henry George\*

**T**HERE is a dispute in progress among the banner-bearers of today as to who discovered the desirability of railway control, the need of interstate commerce commissions and the value of conserving forests, streams and mines. The Republican Progressives claim to be the true conservationists, while the Democrats assert that the Progressives have stolen democratic thunder, while the Socialists rejoin, "We are the only real Progressives," and the Populists, (what there are left of them) point to their platforms of twenty-six years ago, and quite justly say, "We are the people! Here are your regular ideas! Here are your notions of leasing coal lands, and your scheme for controlling transportation, and telegraph." In this they are quite right, for Jerry Simpson and I helped General Weaver insert those planks in the People's Party platform at St. Louis in 1892.

Jerry and most of his associates have gone to their last pre-emption claims, but I am still here to bear witness to their early tillage. Without being able to settle any dispute, I can, at least, tell you that Jerry Simpson took those planks from a book called "Progress and Poverty." He boldly borrowed them for his party's uses.

As a matter of fact, most of the economic reforms of today were discussed by Henry George and his little group of disciples in the early eighties. Before the publication of "Progress and Poverty," there was no statement of the question of the injustice of grants of Eminent Domain, and of the danger of railway domination. Our system of government was considered almost perfect, our resources limitless and our transportation system the best in the world. To pick Uncle Sam's pockets was a delightful exercise of ingenuity; he was rich and could stand it. Henry George was the first clear voice saying, "Thou shalt not steal public values." Under his instruction "equal rights to all and special privileges to none," meant something more than political rights; it meant that all men should stand on an equality as regards the earth and the values which come from social organization.

More than forty years have passed since I first took up the little paper-bound edition of "Progress and Poverty." I am one of the veterans of the Anti-Poverty War. I was living in Boston when I first gave an open allegiance to the cause. Although I had been converted to the theories of "the prophet of San Francisco" while living in Dakota, I had said little about it. It wasn't as easy to be a "George man" in those days as it is now, not even in Boston where radicals abounded. I had been several years in the East before my conversion from a passive disciple to an active advocate came about. My change of attitude was due to hearing the Prophet himself.

\*This article from the pen of the distinguished novelist, Hamlin Garland, will form one of the chapters in a work to be published by Will Atkinson, Capon Springs, W. Va., entitled "The Henry George We Knew;" a fuller announcement of which will appear later.—Editor LAND AND FREEDOM.