

The King and the Commoner

By GEORGE B. BRINGMANN

The time: October, 1939

The scene: England

The King:

(Walking the countryside lane from Witchery in the Meadow to Nubbinsruffiangate. A rolled scroll is under his arm. A figure comes from the opposite direction, recognizes the king and doffs his hat. The king holds up his hand and unrolls the scroll, reads from it.)

We in this grave emergency
Called WAR, decree
That all our subjects' property
Be pledged to save democracy.
From peer and commoner alike
We'll confiscate, and build a dike
To stay a rude theocracy.

(Points authoritatively at the commoner)

Your life, and soul, your very heart,
Your shillings, pounds, your horse
and cart—

Commoner (Moaning):

And e'en my wife's green apple tart?

King (Frowning):

Yes. Your pots and pans, your rolling mills,
Your boots and gloves and doctors' pills
Shall be commanded to defense
And be real loyal evidence.
This is our will. We so command
That all of wealth, excepting land,
Shall so be deemed the nation's
own—

Excepting land, and land alone.

(Rolls scroll and tucks under arm)

Commoner:

(Touching forelock and pulling that when he realizes his hat already is off)

Have I not ever, ever done?
Has England any setting sun?
Have her great wars been ought but
won

When came the final crash of gun?
Shall I not fight this war until . . .
Until our enemy is still?

Aye! That I will. Aye, that I will!
(Scratches his head and screws his
eyebrows)

But what I cannot understand
Is the exception made of land.

King (Vibrantly):

'Tis what you fight for in this strife.
Beyond my will. Your source of life.
What justice would that really be
Were we to take your land from
thee?

Aye, even in this darkest hour
A deed to land's beyond my power.

Commoner:

When England fights as one great
wall,
And some shall die of those that
fall,
And some shall live. Tsk. That's not
all,

For what I cannot understand
Is what the quick will use for land?
(Peers at the king from his brows.
scratches his shoulder)

We fight, say you, my liege and
king,
For land and crown, and everything
That we hold dear. And so must
give

That Britain's high ideals may live.
Yet, still I do not understand
Why an exception's made of land.
Is it that kings and dukes have
known

We'll fight for that we do not own?

Aye! 'Tis a mystery to me
Why land's exempt from your de-
cree.

King (Patiently):

Have we not pointed out, my friend,
That land's the means to mankind's
end.

Would be unfair, would be unfair.

Commoner:

You have, my liege, my gracious
king,

And I have taught my sons to sing
"God Save the King." But what I do
Not understand is the exception made
of land.

What will my sons and daughters do
For source of life when peace comes
through

The brazen sullen clouds of war,
And when that source is deemed by
law

To be controlled and owned by your
Own kindred of the blood or jaw,
Your kindred by their birth or
words?

And they'll eat butter; we'll eat
curds.

High sounding, lands exception be,
It does not seem in equity.

And you and yours seem to have
known it

For ages past, else we would own
it.

Should thy subjects own by your
decree

An equity in liberty,
Then, sire, that would surely free
All England to democracy.

(Shakes head thoughtfully and
mutters)

Excepting land, and land alone.

We fight for land we do not own.