

has become of all the fine, brave talk we used to hear? "Might was right" they always used to tell us. "God for himself and Devil take the hindmost." Yes, but that was when the comfortable man had a secure position, well to the front—well out of reach of the Devil. "Might was right" when the "might" was with them, when the workers were but dumb cattle obedient to their goad; now that Labour is awakening to its own strength, now when the "might" is slipping away from themselves—well, there seems to be a sudden revulsion of feeling in favour of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

The suggestion now is that the Christian virtues should be given a trial. What about brotherly love and self-forgetfulness, together with the advantages of the Simple Life—on 12s. 6d. to 18s. a week? The argument still appears to be a little one-sided. When the doctors strike for a sudden increase in wage from 4s. to 10s., threatening to ask any gentleman who is run over in the street whether he is a supporter of the Insurance Act or not before they mend his leg, they are applauded and encouraged. But then the doctors, you see, belong to the "community." Besides, it would vex Lloyd George—an achievement cheaply purchased, according to the Tory Press, at the price of a nation's health.

When the miner strikes for a minimum wage of 5s. a day he is lectured as a selfish brute. What he, as a professed Christian, ought to be thinking about is not his own paltry affairs, but the good of the community as a whole. Let him think of the widow's empty grate, of the cold orphan.

They tell you that if you grant the minimum wage to one trade the time will come when you will have to grant the minimum wage to all; and, between ourselves—I hope it will go no further—I am inclined to think they are right. For some workers the minimum wage has existed since the beginning of human industry.

The human labourer in 1912 is, after all, only demanding what has been acceded to without question in the case of the ox and the ass since prehistoric times. I never heard a farmer suggest that the price of corn per bushel being what it is, he quite unable to give his horse more than half its proper rations. The horse has a very effective way of insisting on his minimum wage. The horse does not go out on strike, he just lies down and dies; and the farmer finds it cheaper—whatever may be the state of the agricultural market—to accede to his demands.

Practically speaking, the farm labourer does get his minimum wage. He can't live on 12s. 6d. a week and bring up a wife and six children. It can't be done. Charity has to step in and make good the difference. Where the minimum wage is not paid—the wage that enables a man and his family to live—the charitable public has to make good the difference. It is a good thing for the charitable public; it is good for their morals, it is good for their hope of a future reward.

But it is bad for the labourer; it turns him into a pauper, it robs him of his self-respect. It is bad for the employer; it makes him also nothing else than a pauper, going round to the charitable public, cap in hand, whining, "Help me to pay my wages. Have pity, kind gentlemen, on a poor employer of labour." It makes the employer also a pauper; and, if it doesn't, it ought to rob him of his self-respect.

In future a business that can only exist by the starvation of its workers will have to be suppressed as a public nuisance.

The unrest of labour is the healthiest sign of the age. Blind in itself and maddened by injustice, Labour can, like Samson of old, shatter the temple in its despair, bring the whole social structure down in ruin and in dust. But, given hope, it will build up, not destroy.

Myself I have no fear of Labour. I see a body of men realising the vastness of the power that has come into their hands, and recognising the duties and responsibilities that it involves—determined to claim for themselves no more than justice and expediency demand; grasping the interdependence in every civilised State of class upon class—wishing, as one of their leaders in language that other political parties might do well to learn has said, to regard themselves as citizens first and as members of this or that particular section afterwards.

The social revolution has got to come. The duty of every thinking man is to help to prepare the way for it—that it may come upon us, not armed with anger and with hatred, but clothed in reason, bearing promise in its hand.

"LIBERALISM IN ACTION."

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. LLOYD GEORGE.

In the DAILY NEWS AND LEADER of 13th May, "P. W. W." under the above heading, writes as follows of an interview he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the question of Industrial Unrest:—

The social upheaval and how the Government will meet it—this was the problem on which recently I approached Mr. Lloyd George. I put to him the plain question whether it was not absurd for Parliament to spend seven days upon the second reading of a Home Rule Bill when the demand for a minimum wage is shaking the foundations of industry.

"Home Rule," he answered, "like Welsh Disestablishment, is a matter which ought to have been settled twenty years ago. We are learning by experience that such issues when they ripen should be dealt with promptly—not postponed from Parliament to Parliament. Still, the Cabinet is to-day closely studying the industrial position with a view to putting forward definite proposals at no distant date. It is the next task for Liberalism."

"Why were no steps taken to prevent the transport strike and the coal strike?"

"These big upheavals cannot be prevented," was the reply. "Until they have occurred public opinion is unformed. But, I admit, the lesson has now been learnt—not by the Government only, but by the nation."

I quoted the opinion of a great employer, who told me recently that he feared the structure of society will break down under the increasing strain of the wage movement.

"Yes," said Mr. Lloyd George, "there is this anxiety, but you cannot get rid of it merely by means of a legislative minimum wage. We are not only an industrial people; we are bankers. Every Government, representative of all classes, must recognise this."

"But surely you cannot leave the industrial warfare to exhaust itself in strikes and lock-outs of ever-broadening scope? Pensions and insurance may to some extent meet the case of the man who is aged or infirm or out of a job, but here is an uprising among the able-bodied who are in full work." Mr. Lloyd George answered:

"I agree. They want what the Kaiser called a place in the sun. I was talking it over with an employer, who said to me, 'Our workpeople are reading not newspapers only, but even books of economics. It is the new knowledge that makes the difference.'"

"Then are we to take it that strikes are to be allowed to continue?"

"The right to strike is fundamental, but strikes are no final remedy. A little levelling up here and there, that is all they achieve. No; whenever you begin to probe these matters you always get back to the land. It is the agricultural labourer on whom we should concentrate attention."

"But he has the lowest wages of all!" I suggested.

"Exactly. And all other wages are depressed in consequence. Take the platelayer, for instance, or the porter. How can he make an effective fight when there are fifty village lads ready to take up his job?"

"Consider how far the chain of influence extends. It certainly affects the docker, the carman, and the tramwayman, for all these must encounter the competition of the agricultural labourer, not perhaps directly, but through intermediate trades."

"Still," I remarked, "there are variations in wages for farm labourers. Some are paid a pound a week."

"That is just where the absurdity of the position lies. When a labourer is put off with 12s. or 14s. a week it is not due to supply and demand or the exigencies of the market. It is simply a matter of custom and organisation. In my county of Carnarvon the labourer gets his pound in meal and in malt. Yet the land is rugged and the soil uneven. But just across the Menai Straits, for no apparent reason, wages are lower on soil that is often more fertile. Indeed, the worst cases of under-payment are found in counties like Buckinghamshire and Dorset, where the land is admirable and there are populous markets for produce at the doors. No harm of any kind would come to agriculture if the wage for labour rose to a pound a week all over the country, and that condition would be much the most effective way of improving the minimum wage in other industries."

"Then," continued Mr. Lloyd George, "look at village life as it is to-day. I would rather die in six months than be condemned to go back to a youth spent amid conditions of such dull, grey monotony."

"But," I asked, "assuming all this, what steps will the Government take to reorganise the countryside? Will you give us a Minimum Wage Bill for agricultural labourers?"

It was perhaps, too bold a question, and one did not expect a reply. "You must take a longer view than that," was the answer. "Have you ever considered how much depends upon housing? Housing means health, a real chance for the children, a blow at indulgence in liquor, and in addition all the decencies of life."

"Yes," I answered, "but we were discussing wages. Without adequate wages a man cannot pay even for a cottage."

Mr. Lloyd George, thus pressed, made a remark, the significance of which will not be lost upon those who study the future possibilities of Liberalism.

"We must," he said, "clear out the slum—whether in city or village or mining urban district. We cannot tolerate the slum any longer. And if, from any source, capital is found for housing, it will mean just the demand for labour which will be best calculated to level up wages in the village. Once this is effected, the figure for wages will not fall again."

"But," I suggested, "you will still have the lowering competition of Irish immigrants to this country."

"That is just where you are wrong. The Irish immigration, which, I admit, has kept down wages in the unskilled trades, is not what it was. Emigration and the rural revolution in Ireland have made the difference. There is now a chance for Irishmen in their own country."

I put it to Mr. Lloyd George that the rebuilding of England, or, at least, of those areas which need rebuilding, might be a task more praiseworthy than popular. I even mentioned the Insurance Act as an illustration of a good measure badly abused.

"Let me tell you this," he replied. "The mere facts that we are democrats does not mean that we should live for popularity. I know very well that you cannot touch the simplest social problem—even sickness—without arousing some interest—perhaps quite unsuspected. But we are here to make a new nation or at least to make it possible for a new nation to arise. The older generation cannot be remade; its trouble can only be palliated here and there. But the boys and girls—they are the future."

"But," I asked, "all this depends upon the support of public opinion, and especially of English opinion. Is not England already weary in well-doing?"

"If the Englishman once realises that our task is the re-making of his native land, on a strong, healthy, and happier basis, he will respond—never fear."

THE "DAILY HERALD" ON "LIBERALISM IN ACTION."

The following leading article appeared in the DAILY HERALD of May 14th:—

We cannot pretend to be greatly impressed by Mr. Lloyd George's latest deliverance on Liberalism and the land. Mr. George knows, no one better, that the land is an invaluable asset for a Liberal Cabinet Minister in search of a programme. "When in doubt play land reform" is a maxim that the Chancellor has followed more than once with advantage. It was largely upon land reform that the Liberal Party won their tremendous, their unprecedented victory of 1906, when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman promised to make of this country "more of a treasure ground for the poor, and less of a pleasure ground for the rich." Land reform, or what looked like it, saved the Liberals again in 1909, when reformers of all shades of opinion fought with desperate energy for the vital clauses in the People's Budget, and land reform again it was (not Insurance nor Welsh Disestablishment nor even Home Rule) that sent the Party back to office a third time with a mandate to smash the Veto of the Peers. It is, therefore, small wonder that now, when Ministers find difficulties crowding thick upon them, when the people again show unmistakable signs of restlessness, and when it is only too apparent that they are prepared to kick, it is small wonder, we say, that the Chancellor turns again to the land to find some escape from the pressing difficulties of the situation. But in the particular utterance, in which Mr. Lloyd George

again raises his old slogan, there is a sad lack of the old fire and animation, and his remarks lack even lucidity. It may be that the melancholy absorption of one of his chief organs in the Press proved too much for the drooping statesman's spirits, so that when his opinion was sought by the ubiquitous representative of the now predominant partner in the latest newspaper trust "as to how the Government will meet the social upheaval," the Chancellor had little to say that was arresting, little even that was clear. Wages were to be raised, he said, by offering increased employment to men who could be put to work in building cottages for the agricultural labourer. It is not very clear how this will increase the employment of any workman engaged outside the building trades, and we are still left to wonder how an increased supply of rural cottages will reduce the number of, say, unemployed carmen, or out-of-work tailors—to take two trades at random from a hundred others. Mr. George may fairly claim, indeed, that the cottages once built, and other conditions secured, there will be a larger number of workmen settled on the land and, therefore, less competition among their fellows in the towns. That is true. But it is true also that, in offering this bait to the democracy, Mr. George is only repeating his promises of three years ago. If the Government's long delayed solution of the social question is this: that they will open up the land to Labour by forcing it into the market by a tax on its unimproved value, that they will thus compel the owners of deer forests, for instance, to give facilities for allotments, that, in a word, they intend to break down the land monopoly, then there is no need for Mr. George to submit to the puzzled interrogatories of Liberal journalists. He can give the nation a clear lead on the matter. He can do what he was returned to do. He can tax land values, and he can tax them now, and so he can fulfil his pledges to the electorate and justify the hopes of his own followers. If he does that, well and good. If not, he had better cease talking about the land question. The Liberal Party has played fast and loose with this matter too often. We are determined they shall do so no longer. The time for talk about land reform is over, and we are sick, with the sickness of hope deferred, of their protests and promises. They have the means to carry those promises out, for they are in power. Let them do so, or let them for ever hold their peace.

THE HOUSING QUESTION A LAND VALUES QUESTION.

The Local Government Board has asked this year for fuller information than has usually been given by Medical Officers of Health as to the housing accommodation in their districts. The replies which they are receiving should throw much light on the intensity and nature of the housing problem throughout the country. In some localities the existence of unsanitary houses and of slums is the outstanding fact. Elsewhere the quality of the houses is good, but the quantity seriously deficient. Thus the Southport officer reports that the character of the working-class houses in the borough is undoubtedly good, but he is "of opinion that there is a distinct deficiency, and what accommodation there is of far too expensive a type." He finds the root of the trouble in the rapid rise in ground rents. "From a halfpenny a yard a quarter of a century ago they have gradually advanced, first to a penny per yard, then to three-halfpence and twopence a yard, and now, although charged by the plot and not by the yard, to, I am informed, threepence a yard." It is a true analysis. You cannot build cheap houses on dear land; and the housing question is at bottom a land-values question.—WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 14th May.

We wish the truth, thus recognised by the WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, was apparent to all those sections among "housing reformers" who continue to advocate schemes of State-aid and municipal charity, instead of pressing for the rating of land values and the abolition of rates and taxes upon houses. The WESTMINSTER GAZETTE has struck a truth which we hope it will develop in its influential columns.