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Land Prices Going Up — The Cruel Purchase Tax — The Land Question in Roumania and Hungary — The New Duke of Bedford and His Interests — Bournemouth Approves Land Value Rating — The Cycle of Life: Soil, Plant, Man

FROM CORRUPT DEMOCRACY TO DECAY

Therefore thus saith the Lord: Ye have not hearkened unto me, to proclaim liberty, every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim unto you a liberty, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine.

Jeremiah xxxiv, 17.

IN A SERIES of articles she is contributing to the *Western Mail and South Wales News*, Miss Dorothy Thompson wrote, 18th October, on

FRENCH COLLAPSE APPLIED TO ANGLO-U.S. OUTLOOK

Miss Thompson rejects the military and political explanations and deplores the superficial views of those who attribute the collapse to the behaviour of the men who have played the leading roles "in the history of a people ambling toward destruction." She is terrified as she listens to these explanations for their failure to take the warning that we are marching on the same road to decline, and to see that we must rebuild and rebuild quickly if we are to prevent our own future collapse. She finds no sharp distinguishing features between Flandin and Daladier, Gamelin and Weygand, Paul Reynaud and Mandel, Bonnet and Blum, the Comité des Forges and the Confederation of the Trades Unions, Petain and Baudouin and Laval—all of them were members of the same society reading from Left to Right or from Right to Left—all displayed in their attitude and behaviour and in the institutions through which they expressed themselves the same characteristics.

"Let us start," Miss Thompson wrote, "with accusing not somebody else but ourselves. France was divided; a schism ran through society like a gaping crack springing the walls apart. But France talked about unity, too. There was plenty of moralising. But moralising does not create morale; it merely indicates its absence. Morale in a society and unity in a society are results, not causes.

"They come of common aspiration and common action for the accomplishment of a common aim. You cannot create a common aim out of the ruthless scramble of each individual and group for his own privilege.

"The weakness of the nineteenth century was to believe that out of such struggle the fittest would survive and that the survival of the fittest meant, automatically,

the greatest good for the greatest number. What survives is the strongest gangster.

"Oliver Goldsmith's dire prophecy of what happens to a land where wealth accumulates and men decay can be rephrased and come true on both counts; for men also accumulate while wealth decays.

"All of us want to be saved—provided it doesn't cost too much. Capital, fearing confiscation, wants to be certain that if and when the dreaded moment comes the principal will be nicely amortized and the fortune seized will be as large as possible. Labour wants to be sure that if it dies in chains it will be a well fed, well clothed corpse. The intellectuals spend their brains rationalising the case for one or another of the suicides."

Thus Miss Thompson in her reflections on the weakness of the nineteenth century and the faults that are with us (making France an example, not an exception) goes deeper than most of the commentators on the French collapse, who among them have filled so many columns in our newspapers and periodicals. But not yet not deep enough. It is only a glance in consternation at the cauldron where the forces if they must be contained will reach the explosive point and make irretrievable disaster for human society; those economic forces that are being heated and lashed to fury by the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity. But there is no gainsaying that Miss Thompson is right in refusing to regard the present fate of France as more than an example of the course events are taking all over the world; and it would be well if others, attempting to fasten the blame either on criminal personalities who betrayed France from within, or on bullies and brutes who ravaged it from without, would pay at least as much attention to their social philosophy.

It was more than fifty years ago that all which writers like Miss Thompson are now recording was predicted, and the accuracy of the prediction is startling when read in the light of present events. If Political Economy is to deserve any study at all, its service must be to trace effects to their causes; it must lead humanity on a right course of action; and in that kind of economic study, there is nothing to compare with the remarkable chapter in *Progress and Poverty* entitled "How Modern Civilisation may Decline."

Here are the thoughts for to-day. Here lies the

explanation that so many are groping after for the state into which the world has fallen. We quote the following passages, not attributing to Henry George any greater

gift of prophecy or clearer insight than must dwell in any mind that cannot escape from foreseeing what punishment justice will inflict if she is denied :—

HOW MODERN CIVILIZATION MAY DECLINE

The general tendency of modern development, since the time when we can first discern the gleams of civilization in the darkness which followed the fall of the Western Empire, has been towards political and legal equality—to the abolition of slavery ; to the abrogation of status ; to the sweeping away of hereditary privileges ; to the substitution of parliamentary for arbitrary government ; to the right of private judgment in matters of religion ; to the more equal security in person and property of high and low, weak and strong ; to the greater freedom of movement and occupation, of speech and of the press.

The history of modern civilization is the history of advances in this direction—of the struggles and triumphs of personal, political, and religious freedom. And the general law is shown by the fact that just as this tendency has asserted itself civilization has advanced, while just as it has been repressed or forced back civilization has been checked.

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It is now manifest that absolute political equality does not in itself prevent the tendency to inequality involved in the private ownership of land, and it is further evident that political equality, co-existing with an increasing tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth, must ultimately beget either the despotism of organized tyranny or the worse despotism of anarchy.

To turn a republican government into a despotism the basest and most brutal, it is not necessary to formally change its constitution or abandon popular elections. It was centuries after Cæsar before the absolute master of the Roman world pretended to rule other than by authority of a Senate that trembled before him.

But forms are nothing when substance has gone, and the forms of popular government are those from which the substance of freedom may most easily go. Extremes meet, and a government of universal suffrage and theoretical equality, may, under conditions which impel the change, most readily become a despotism. For there despotism advances in the name and with the might of the people. The single source of power once secured, everything is secured. There is no unfranchised class to whom appeal may be made, no privileged orders who in defending their own rights may defend those of all. No bulwark remains to stay the flood, no eminence to rise above it.

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Where there is anything like an equal distribution of wealth—that is to say, where there is general patriotism, virtue, and intelligence—the more democratic the government the better it will be ; but where there is gross inequality in the distribution of wealth, the more democratic the government the worse it will be ; for, while rotten democracy may not in itself be worse than rotten autocracy, its effects upon national character will be worse.

To give the suffrage to tramps, to paupers, to men to whom the chance to labour is a boon, to men who must beg, or steal, or starve, is to invoke destruction. To put political power in the hands of men embittered and degraded by poverty is to tie firebrands to foxes and turn them loose amid the standing corn ; it is to put out the eyes of a Samson and to twine his arms around the pillars of national life.

In a corrupt democracy the tendency is always to give power to the worst. Honesty and patriotism are weighted, and unscrupulousness commands success. The best gravitate to the bottom, the worst float to the top, and the vile will only be ousted by the viler. While as national character must gradually assimilate to the qualities that win power, and consequently respect, that demoralization of opinion goes on which in the long panorama of history we may see over and over again transmuting races of freemen into races of slaves.

As in England in the last century, when Parliament was but a close corporation of the aristocracy, a corrupt oligarchy clearly fenced off from the masses may exist without much effect on national character, because in that case power is associated in the popular mind with other things than corruption. But where there are no hereditary distinctions, and men are habitually seen to raise themselves by corrupt qualities from the lowest places to wealth and power, tolerance of these qualities finally becomes admiration. A corrupt democratic government must finally corrupt the people, and when a people become corrupt there is no resurrection. The life is gone, only the carcass remains ; and it is left but for the ploughshares of fate to bury it out of sight.

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The under currents of the times seem to sweep us back again to the old conditions from which we dreamed we had escaped. The development of the artisan and commercial classes gradually broke down feudalism after it had become so complete that men thought of heaven as organized on a feudal basis, and ranked the first and second persons of the Trinity as suzerain and tenant-in-chief. But now the development of manufactures and exchange, acting in a social organization in which land is made private property, threatens to compel every worker to seek a master, as the insecurity which followed the final break-up of the Roman Empire compelled every freeman to seek a lord. Nothing seems exempt from this tendency. Industry everywhere tends to assume a form in which one is master and many serve. And when one is master and the others serve, the one will control the others, even in such matters as votes.

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The most ominous political sign in the United States to-day is the growth of a sentiment which either doubts the existence of an honest man in public office or looks on him as a fool for not seizing his opportunities. . . . Where that course leads is clear to whoever will think. As corruption becomes chronic ; as public spirit is lost ; as traditions of honour, virtue, and patriotism are weakened ; as law is brought into contempt and reforms become hopeless ; then in the festering mass will be generated volcanic forces, which shatter and rend when seeming accident gives them vent. Strong, unscrupulous men, rising up upon occasion, will become the exponents of blind popular desires or fierce popular passions, and dash aside forms that have lost their vitality. The sword will again be mightier than the pen, and in carnivals of destruction brute force and wild frenzy will alternate with the lethargy of a declining civilization.

I speak of the United States only because the United States is the most advanced of all the great nations. What shall we say of Europe, where dams of ancient law

and custom pen up the swelling waters and standing armies weigh down the safety valves, though year by year the fires grow hotter underneath? Europe tends to republicanism under conditions that will not admit of true republicanism—under conditions that substitute for the calm and august figure of Liberty the petroleuse and the guillotine!

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There are many things about which there can be no dispute, which go to show that our civilization has reached a critical period, and that unless a new start is made in the direction of social equality, the nineteenth century may to the future mark its climax. These industrial depressions, which cause as much waste and suffering as famines or wars, are like the twinges and shocks which precede paralysis.

Everywhere it is evident that the tendency to inequality, which is the necessary result of material progress where land is monopolized, cannot go much further without carrying our civilization into that downward path which is so easy to enter and so hard to abandon.

Everywhere the increasing intensity of the struggle to live, the increasing necessity for straining every nerve to prevent being thrown down and trodden underfoot in the scramble for wealth, is draining the forces which gain and maintain improvements.

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There is a vague but general feeling of disappointment; an increased bitterness among the working classes; a widespread feeling of unrest and brooding revolution. If this were accompanied by a definite idea of how relief is to be obtained, it would be a hopeful sign; but it is not.

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What change may come, no mortal man can tell, but that some great change *must* come, thoughtful men begin to feel. The civilized world is trembling on the verge of a great movement. Either it must be a leap upward, which will open the way to advances yet undreamed of, or it must be a plunge downward, which will carry us back toward barbarism.

THE CENTRAL TRUTH

The evils arising from the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth, which are becoming more and more apparent as modern civilization goes on, are not incidents of progress, but tendencies which must bring progress to a halt; that they will not cure themselves, but, on the contrary, must, unless their cause is removed, grow greater and greater, until they sweep us back into barbarism by the road every previous civilization has trod. But it also shows that these evils are not imposed by natural laws; that they spring solely from social maladjustments which ignore natural laws, and that in removing their cause we shall be giving an enormous impetus to progress.

The poverty which in the midst of abundance pinches and embrates men, and all the manifold evils which flow from it, spring from a denial of justice. In permitting the monopolization of the opportunities which nature freely offers to all, we have ignored the fundamental law of justice—for so far as we can see, when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe. But by sweeping away this injustice and asserting the rights of all men to natural opportunities, we shall conform ourselves to the law—we shall remove the great cause of unnatural inequality in the distribution of wealth and power; we shall abolish poverty; tame the ruthless passions of greed; dry up

the springs of vice and misery; light in dark places the lamp of knowledge; give new vigour to invention and a fresh impulse to discovery; substitute political strength for political weakness; and make tyranny and anarchy impossible.

COTTON CREED

As an instance of how Planning is regarded in the Cotton trade the following epic verse is being circulated amongst members of the Royal Exchange at Manchester and other haunts of Cottonopolis:

TO ENABLE THE UNABLE TO DISABLE THE ABLE

In Cotton's creed we must believe:

Thou shalt not spin, Thou shalt not weave,
Thou shalt not bleach, Thou shalt not dye,
Thou shalt not sell, Thou shalt not buy,
Thou shalt not print, Thou shalt not knit,
Without a Board of Trade permit.
Whatever your task, before you do it,
Request permission from Forrest Hewitt;
For spinning rates both rough and flat,
Please enquire from Mr Platt;
For finishing charge and printing dues,
Kindly consult our Mr Hughes;
For all these things you've got to pay,

Yours very truly, Sir John Gray.

A MONEY PROBLEM

The following amusing story was told about two years ago in a letter to the *Church Times* :—

"A commercial traveller once put up at a certain hotel, informing the hotel-keeper that he hoped to stay at least a month. Not wanting the responsibility of carrying round with him a £50 note, he lodged it in the hotel safe. The hotel-keeper's wife was seriously ill, and had to undergo a serious operation that week. Owing to financial stringency, the hotel-keeper borrowed (!) the £50 note to pay the doctor, knowing that he should be able to replace it before the month was out. The doctor who received the note was anxious to give his wife a fur coat, and promptly went to a furrier and spent the same £50 note. Now, the furrier had a daughter, whose wedding was being solemnized that week, and in order to accommodate a large number of guests, it was arranged that the reception should be held at the hotel. Consequently, in due course, the much-travelled note returned to the hotel-keeper, who replaced it in the safe ready for its rightful owner. When the time came for the commercial traveller to move on, he was leaving the hotel without the £50 note. So the hotel-keeper, being an honest man, reminded him of it. Whereupon the traveller said that it did not matter, as he had heard from his firm that it was a forged note, and so had better be destroyed."

Perhaps some of our readers who are interested in the "money question" may like to find relief from recurrent crises by trying to solve the puzzle, "Who paid for the various goods and services?"

STUDY ECONOMICS AT HOME

A Free Correspondence Course is offered to you. Your only expense apart from your postages would be 1s. 6d. for the text-book, *Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George.

For full particulars, apply—

THE HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE,
34 KNIGHTRIDER STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.