

or homes, for to every anxious query the harassed local operators answer, "The wires are down."

The sense of isolation is added to worry over the despotic interference with so many plans and agreements by the White Czar of the storm, and the compulsory vacationers hugging the fires become the despair of their hosts as well as a torment to themselves.

Then in twenty hours the glad news is shouted through the thousand moping households, "The wires are up again!"

Messages fly to and fro, anxieties are relieved, and broken plans pieced together.

Trolleys and trains resume their service to cities and towns dug like Pompeii and Herculaneums from the snow's clean ashes, and delayed business plunges forward as if to recover the lost day, as a diver might dare a tide-race for a dropped diamond.

What a difference it made to have the wires down, and then up again!

Yet how many to whom these were as the very links to life, gave a thought from their distress to what happened during the twenty hours of the blizzard's triumph?

Wires do not mend themselves and climb back to their poles of their own accord; and the wind can no more restore their intricate nervous system to its place than the boy can fit the torn cobwebs to the attic window again.

No, while the snowbound folk snuggled to the Christmas-week fires, a daring species of human spider was out in the white wilderness repairing the wire web.

Agile, hard-limbed linemen, many of them mere lads, struggled through huge drifts, fronted the needle-lashed gales, and climbed with fanged leg-irons the sleet-cased poles.

With all their care, sometimes the savage wrath of a live wire, stealthily concealing the rattle-snake poison of its voltage, hurled a repairer dead to the pole's foot. Sometimes the treacherous glaze of shaft or cross-bar shook one of the reckless men-spiders from his hold, and broke a shoulder or leg across the railroad steel below.

But the gaps in the ranks were swiftly filled, and the battle for communication between heedless folk won against the appalling odds of the elements and their chaotic mischief.

ELIOT WHITE.

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## SOCIAL IDEALISM.

A Fragment of a Political Dialogue On "Justice and Liberty," by G. Lowes Dickinson.\*

*Martin* . . . Looking at the thing as straight as I can, and in what philosophers call a calm moment, I find in men a real fact, the impulse to create the ideal, and this I represent to myself as a seed

sown into the soil of Earth with her insufficiency and insecurity, of the flesh with its needs and desires. What therefrom grows up is the tree of human history, receiving its form from the seed, but its matter from the soil and air, warped and stunted, blighted and starved, battered, mutilated, broken, but always straining upward to the light and the sky, and throwing out branches and bearing leaves by the law of its inner impulse. At any moment, then, we may, indeed we must, say, at once that man is a spirit, if we look at his ideal form, and that he is a brute, if we look at his stuff; at once that his Society is bad and that its shaping soul is good; at once that his history is a sordid chronicle of crime, and that it is a solemn school of righteousness. The one is not true and the other false; the truth is the Whole, which I am trying thus schematically to bring before your mind and mine.

*Stuart*. Well, and then?

*Martin*. And then, you see, it follows that it is difficult to avoid, if one is sensitive, a constant oscillation between a brutal realism and a blind idealism. For if we observe, day after day, the masses of modern men, walk their mean streets, enter their squalid houses, note them, by myriads, shot at birth into a world so base, peering and peeping in ways of life so narrow and so obscure, and bribed by an impulse of passionate youth to tie the fatal knot that binds them for life to the whirring wheel of drudgery; or if from them we turn to those who seem to be the more fortunate few, and see them too, though they might look up, blind to the sun and the stars, toiling none the less like slaves, or idling like idiots, and ready to shriek with fear and rage if one lift a corner of the veil that shuts out the light from their palaces; if thus regarding this hive of ants, so busy, so mean, so futile, we then turn inward to find in ourselves the swarming fears and needs that explain, though they do not justify, the spectacle; while far above, dim and remote, flickers the flame of the ideal which alone enables us thus to behold and judge; then I confess, in such a mood and under such an obsession, it is impossible not to believe that the ideal is but an idea, and that to attribute power to it is as idle as to suppose that it is the love of perfection that holds the stars constant in their courses. And more and more, in our time, historians and men of letters, and still more those who call themselves men of the world, as indeed they are men of this world, are coming to take and express that view, looking back with a kind of contempt on poets like Goethe or Carlyle, who thought that history was a bible and Nature the garment of God.

*Stuart*. As you, too, think?

*Martin*. As I too think, when I am myself. For those who look closer and with a more genial vision find that, in the midst of the evil and squalor there is also something else, working obscurely and

\*See review on another page of this Public.

leavening the whole, an impulse of love, however brief, a stress of duty however circumscribed; that a sap is flowing through wood that seems so dead; and that the faint and flickering lamp of the ideal is lit from fire that burns at the heart of the world. That fire kindles history. Natural facts, economic facts, instincts, needs and desires are the fuel it transmits into a spiritual essence. Always, even in times called of peace, it is gnawing at the roots of society. For it is the never-satisfied; and one of its names is Justice. It is the greatest of all energies; and men of the world call it a dream! It made the French Revolution; it is making revolution now in Russia; it is undermining the whole fabric of western society. One by one it is detaching from the building the buttresses of conviction, and leaving the mere walls of fact that strain and crack to their fall. It is not only, not even chiefly, the working classes that are the strength of that great movement of revolt we call broadly Socialism. Its strength is the weakness of the ruling class, the scepticism of the rich and the powerful, the slow, half-unconscious detachment of all of them who have intelligence and moral force from the interest and the active support of their class. Nay, those who deny Socialism are most under its power; their hollow cries of rage and desperation, their intellectual play with the idea of force, betray their bitter sense of a lost cause. Justice is a power; and if it cannot create it will at least destroy. So that the question for the future is not, shall there be revolution, but shall it be beneficent or disastrous?

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## THE CRUX OF THE BRITISH BUDGET.

Herbert Adams Gibbons, Writing From London to the *New York Independent*. Published in the *Independent* for January 20.

The only innovations in the Budget are the taxes on land values, etc., and on petrol, involving hardly £1,000,000 in the estimates. The additional yield is in the increase of existing taxation. Particular interests are opposed to the increased taxation. The liquor trade declares its additional burdens are more than can be borne, and will end in an enormous reduction of revenue. Protest against other increased duties is merely such as generally meets a Budget, and does not have great political importance because the increases are not such as affect the bulk of the electorate. The most bitter and widespread opposition to the Budget, the real ground upon which the general election is to be fought, is reduced to the £600,000 which the Chancellor of the Exchequer asks to be provided by a tax on land values, reversion of leases and mining royalties. There is no question but that the House of Lords would have passed the Budget had it not con-

tained these obnoxious provisions. Indeed I believe the reversion of leases and mining royalty taxes could have passed the Upper House. As far as the Budget of 1909 goes, the real struggle is over an amount hardly in excess of £400,000.

The "nigger in the wood pile" is the land taxes. The money accruing from them this year is insignificant. Mr. Lloyd George could have found his millions to meet this year's deficiency without them. Those upon whom they will fall can pay them. It is as absurd to think that the Budget of 1909 would seriously embarrass a landed proprietor as it is to suppose the tobacco tax would deprive a man of his after-dinner cigar. Every time I talk to a British elector on the Budget, the boiled-down result of the conversation is either "I believe in land taxes" or "I think the land taxes are wrong." We may have discussed the danger to revenue of imposing an additional burden upon beer and spirits, the justice or injustice of making automobilists pay for road improvements and the discrimination against the gasoline-driven cars, the grading of death and inheritance duties, the circumventions of income taxes, but we always end by saying, "Well, now, about those land taxes." . . .

England seems to be drifting inevitably toward land taxation. The people have to choose between the land, the food, and the imports. Everything else is almost "up to the hilt" now. A Conservative and Unionist Cabinet cannot stay long in power, unless they devise temporary expedients and refuse to meet the issue of a constructive and permanent financial policy. Mr. Lloyd George may not be a great statesman, or even a skillful politician, but he has pointed out the necessary, even if unpalatable, taxation policy for England.

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## THE BREWER AND THE FEUDAL LORD.

(With Apologies to the Late Lewis Carroll.)

C. J. Hogarth in *Liberal Opinion*, of London, for [December 18, 1909.

The Brewer and the Feudal Lord

Were walking hand in hand.

They wept like anything to see

Some Liberals in the land.

"If these were only cleared away,"

They said, "It would be grand!"

"If Tory vans, with gramophones,

Spouted for half a year,

Do you suppose," the Brewer said,

"They'd make the people hear?"

"I doubt it," said the Feudal Lord,

"Unless you add free beer."

"O voters, come and drink with us,"

The Brewer did beseech.

"A pleasant talk on Chinese pork

Will show you what we teach—

That since your food will cost you more

There'll be more food for each."