

*(Expressly for the Review.)***The Outlook in Great Britain.**

The present time is, I think, auspicious for the founding of a high-class periodical devoted to the cause of international social reform. For, why does the reformer exist in the world? Because it is such a bad one. And it is mainly because the world, from the reformer's point of view, is just now as bad as I have in my comparatively limited experience, ever known it, that I think the moment opportune for the appearance of *The Single Tax Review*. Never to my mind was there greater need for preaching sound doctrines of government and social order. Never was there such a profusion of telling examples to point the moral than now. Let us hope that the new *Review* will, by steadfast adherence to those doctrines of human right advocated by Henry George, in their full, logical application throughout the domain of government, contribute in some degree to the reaction in public opinion, which must, sooner or later, succeed the reign of iniquity which we are now witnessing. The problem to be faced is to disenfranchise the individual man from the follies and allurements of aggressive patriotism and from the grievous illusions of a shallow political economy, leading, as they do, to corruption of public and international morality, and to the astonishing paradox of the twentieth century—the civilized enslavement of the human race.

Unfortunately, whoever looks at the surface of English public affairs at the present moment, and indeed for the last few years—ever since the disappearance of Gladstone from the arena of public life—will find little to encourage the belief that England is advancing towards juster ideals of human rights. The evidence will go to show that the bright beginning which was made half a century ago under the inspiration of Cobden's common-sense philosophy, and continued by Gladstone and Bright, has not been maintained; that the cry of "peace, retrenchment and reform" which then found a responsive echo in the hearts of most Englishmen, is now pooh-poohed and discredited in much the same manner as, by all accounts, the fundamental principles of the Declaration of Independence are discredited by the American expansionists of to-day. Truth to tell, the last few decades have been decades of retrogression in national morality. The contemporaries of Cobden (thanks largely to his teaching), had far sounder conceptions of human rights than the contemporaries of Chamberlain and "Lord" Milner. The individual in those days counted for something. It was felt that if the interest of the individual were conserved, it would follow, as night the day, that the nation's interests would not suffer. On this principle the Corn Laws were repealed and England became, practically, a free trade country. What do we see to-day? We see the earlier conception of individual rights and liberties everywhere condemned as a "selfish" and "false" principle and a diametrically opposite one in the ascendant. Instead of the welfare of the nation being realized through the preservation of the individual's rights, we are now taught that these latter are secondary to the "national interests," and can alone be secured through them. The moral law is thus thrown overboard to lighten the ship. Nations are practically non-moral things, and national domination of individual interests must end in sapping individual morality also. Of this fact we see ample evidence in the leniency with which every kind of sin is regarded that can array itself in a patriotic cloak. Tommy Atkins's weaknesses are admittedly great, but then he is one of the props of an empire that is becoming more and more predatory and less and less industrial, so why judge him by obsolete moral standards?

Of course such a state of things cannot last, and it is not at all universal throughout Great Britain. There is a brave minority who are trying to get a word of common-sense in John Bull's ear in spite of the bedlam of hysterical sounds which monopolise his attention, and they, too, will have their turn. "Famine," said John Bright, "against which we had warred, joined us." It took a real famine as well as torrents of oratory to break the back of the corn laws. So at this critical juncture of England's affairs, it would seem as if national

bankruptcy were about to ally itself with the forces of social reform. The increase of the income tax, which before the war was 8d. to the pound, to 1s. 2d. (an increase of 75 per cent.), ought to wake up the intelligence of the middle-class Britisher, as the protective duty on exported coal has welded the coal owners and coal workers together in opposition to this method of paying for the war. Mr. John Morley, one of the few leading Liberals who remains faithful to the old, simple, honest traditions of the Gladstonian epoch, told the House of Commons recently that he approved of the Government schemes of taxation simply because they were calculated to teach the bellicose British population a lesson on the financial aspect of war, which they sadly needed. Along this line lies the chief source of hope. The prolongation of the war beyond the wildest dreams of all the prophets—the unrivalled exploits of De Wet—and all these indications which show that the Transvaal is still unconquered and that the honors conferred upon Roberts and Milner were premature—all these are eye-openers and blessings in disguise.

“A king can mak’ a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a’ that,
A victory’s aboon his might;
Gude faith, he mauna fa’ that.”

Turning from British failure in war to British failure in industry we see that things cannot go on in this way indefinitely. A patient study of the import and export statistics will show that she is becoming less and less the workshop of the world, and that honor—if it be an honor—is likely to be transferred to the other side of the Atlantic. But from the free trade and single tax standpoint the loss of any particular industry does not matter so long as some other industry takes its place. We may therefore ask what industry, if any, is taking the place of the undoubtedly waning manufactures of England? Alas, none that we can discover. Agriculture has decayed much more rapidly than manufactures. It is estimated that in the thirty years from 1869 to 1899 no less than 4,000,000 acres of arable land have gone out of cultivation. How, then (putting the case in its most aggressive form, for the sake of clearness) is a nation to exist whose food supply must come from abroad, but whose manufactures will no longer exchange for that food supply? Nations, like individuals, must, as Carlyle says, either work, beg, or steal, and if England is to become less of a working country, as these indications show, she must, to make things even, become more of a begging or stealing country. Stealing other people’s land was at one time a safe and popular game, and England played it with conspicuous success, but when men defend their own with the inflexible obstinacy of the Boers, it looks as though a policy more in accord with honesty will be followed in future. Bankruptcy and beggary seem to be staring Great Britain in the face just now. A writer in the *Contemporary Review* for May, in an exhaustive analysis of the British commercial situation, comes to the conclusion that England is now living on her capital; not, be it remembered, on the interest of her capital, but on the principal itself. The statement may be exaggerated, but all observers just now are shaking their heads and declaring “that there is something rotten in the State of Denmark”—something which spells anxiety and alarm if nothing worse, and coming at a time when England has assumed obligations on account of the war amounting to £13,000,000 a year, equal (in Mr. Morley’s opinion), to an addition of £470,000,000 to the national debt, the lookout is bluer than it has ever been within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Still one has to allow that the resources of England are far from being exhausted. Her land at home has not diminished in quantity, nor has its productive power lessened. The return of corn per acre is still 50 per cent. higher than it is in other parts of Europe. The rent of land in towns continues to go up, with greater population and greater demand. Is it not singular that in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s recent search for fresh objects of taxation he forgot the one source from which, Single Taxers think, all taxation should be raised, viz.,

land values? He did not see it, I suppose, for the same reason that Dickens's magistrate did not see the ink-pot; because it was right before him. But there are some encouraging influences which, though not at present powerful enough to sway the main current of public opinion, are daily gaining weight. Chief amongst these is the bill called the *Site Values* bill, which the London County Council is having introduced into Parliament and which proposes to tax, for administrative purposes, the land values within its "sphere of influence," to the extent of one-tenth its annual figure. That such a bill should be championed by such a body is a proof that the movement is making many converts—converts who are leaders of opinion and carry crowds of other converts along with them. The City Council of Liverpool, Tory though it is, has lately made a move in the same direction, under the leadership of Glasgow, and these facts at least go to show that Municipal England is waking up to a sense of its rights.

The recent census (which in Great Britain and Ireland is taken every ten years) does not present any very startling features. The continued depopulation of Ireland does not excite surprise; Irishmen cannot be at home and in America at the same time. Scotland is now before Ireland in point of population, whereat she is justly elated. Irish emigration, it need hardly be remarked, does not now result from political causes, to any appreciable extent; the causes are economic, whatever politicians may say to the contrary, and they are largely the same causes which account for the depopulation of rural England. The prices of agricultural produce in Ireland continue to go down, and the Land Commission Court, that unique Gladstonian make-shift tribunal, still fixes landlords' rents without regard to competition. There is also a loud demand just now for the buying out of the landlords and the substitution of a peasant proprietary system. None of the present land agitators, any more than their predecessors of the early eighties, appear to have got at the true conception of land nationalization. They advocate the breaking up of grazing farms on which cattle and sheep are reared, and the division of the land into tillage farms—a good proposal in its way, but obviously incomplete and pettifogging. The Irish race are, indeed, like most races, largely influenced by habit, and in asking for peasant proprietary they are unconsciously seeking to exchange one species of landlordism for another. The scientific basis of land nationalization has no attractions for them, at least in their present stage of enlightenment. The same thing is probably true of farming communities everywhere, and for sufficiently obvious reasons.

Our great hope is in the towns and cities. There public curiosity has been aroused, and once aroused conviction and agitation spread quickly. The big towns may be said to have been already won, so far as the principle of taxing land values is concerned. An act empowering municipalities to tax land values is likely to be passed within the next couple of years. The extent of the taxation will probably not be much at first, but the recognition of the principle will be in itself a great victory, for it will habituate the popular mind to the vital distinction between land and other forms of property; a distinction long obliterated by the labyrinthine treachery of the British fiscal system. This municipal awakening is one of the healthiest signs of an unhealthy time. No wonder we should like to dwell upon it. With England baffled in her ignoble enterprise of annexation, ready to turn her back on free trade, and to adopt conscription like her continental neighbors, one is thankful for some spark of righteous fire—some indication of returning sanity—something to convince us that there is another England besides the England that curses Kruger, applauds robbery and ennobles the robbers—the England that venerates the shades of Peel, Cobden and Gladstone, and believes in self-reform as the first step towards reforming the world.

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