

IV

THE RIDDLE OF THE BRITISH

ALL the French people I met in France seemed to be thinking and talking about the English. The English bring their own atmosphere with them ; to begin with they are not so talkative, and I did not find among them anything like the same vigour of examination, the same resolve to understand the Anglo-French reaction, that I found among the French. In intellectual processes I will confess that my sympathies are undisguisedly with the French ; the English will never think nor talk clearly until they get clerical "Greek" and sham "humanities" out of their public schools and sincere study and genuine humanities in ; our disingenuous Anglican compromise is like a cold in the English head, and the higher education in England is a training in evasion. This is an always lamentable state of affairs, but just now it is particularly lamentable because quite tremendous opportunities for the good of mankind turn on the possibility of a

War and the Future

thorough and entirely frank mutual understanding between French, Italians, and English. For years there has been a considerable amount of systematic study in France of English thought and English developments. Upon almost any question of current English opinion and upon most current English social questions, the best studies are in French. But there has been little or no reciprocal activity. The English in France seem to confine their French studies to *La Vie Parisienne*. It is what they have been led to expect of French literature.

There can be no doubt in any reasonable mind that this war is binding France and England very closely together. They dare not quarrel for the next fifty years. They are bound to play a central part in the World League for the Preservation of Peace that must follow this struggle. There is no question of their practical union. It is a thing that must be. But it is remarkable that while the French mind is agog to apprehend every fact and detail it can about the British, to make the wisest and fullest use of our binding necessities, that strange English "*incuria*"—to use the new slang—attains to its most monumental in this matter.

So there is not much to say about how the British think about the French. They do not

The Riddle of the British

think. They feel. At the outbreak of the war, when the performance of France seemed doubtful, there was an enormous feeling for France in Great Britain ; it was like the formless feeling one has for a brother. It was as if Britain had discovered a new instinct. If France had crumpled up like paper, the English would have fought on passionately to restore her. That is ancient history now. Now the English still feel fraternal and fraternally proud ; but in a mute way they are dazzled. Since the German attack on Verdun began, the French have achieved a crescendo. None of us could have imagined it. It did not seem possible to very many of us at the end of 1915 that either France or Germany could hold on for another year. There was much secret anxiety for France. It has given place now to unstinted confidence and admiration. In their astonishment the British are apt to forget the impressive magnitude of their own effort, the millions of soldiers, the innumerable guns, the endless torrent of supplies that pour into France to avenge the little army of Mons. It seems natural to us that we should so exert ourselves under the circumstances. I suppose it is wonderful, but, as a sample Englishman, I do not feel that it is at all wonderful. I did not feel it wonderful even when I saw the

War and the Future

British aeroplanes lording it in the air over Martinpuich, and not a German to be seen. Since Michael would have it so, there, at last, they were.

There was a good deal of doubt in France about the vigour of the British effort, until the Somme offensive. All that had been dispelled in August when I reached Paris. There was not the shadow of a doubt remaining anywhere of the power and loyalty of the British. These preliminary assurances have to be made, because it is in the nature of the French mind to criticise, and it must not be supposed that criticisms of detail and method affect the fraternity and complete mutual confidence which is the stuff of the Anglo-French relationship.

§ 2

Now first the French have been enormously astonished by the quality of the ordinary British soldiers in our new armies. One Colonial colonel said something almost incredible to me—almost incredible as coming from a Frenchman; it was a matter too solemn for any compliments or polite exaggerations; he said in tones of wonder and conviction, "*They are as good as ours.*" It was his acme of all possible praise.

The Riddle of the British

That means any sort of British soldier. Unless he is assisted by a kilt the ordinary Frenchman is unable to distinguish between one sort of British soldier and another. He cannot tell—let the ardent nationalist mark the fact!—a Cockney from an Irishman or the Cardiff from the Essex note. He finds them all extravagantly and unquenchably cheerful and with a generosity—"like good children." There his praise is a little tinged by doubt. The British are reckless—recklessness in battle a Frenchman can understand, but they are also reckless about to-morrow's bread and whether the tent is safe against a hurricane in the night. He is struck too by the fact that they are much more vocal than the French troops, and that they seem to have a passion for bad lugubrious songs. There he smiles and shrugs his shoulders, and indeed what else can any of us do in the presence of that mystery? At any rate the legend of the "phlegmatic" Englishman has been scattered to the four winds of heaven by the guns of the western front. The men are cool in action, it is true; but for the rest they are, by the French standards, quicksilver.

But I will not expand further upon the general impression made by the English in France. Philippe Millet's *En Liaison avec les*

War and the Future

Anglais gives in a series of delightful pictures portraits of British types from the French angle. There can be little doubt that the British quality, genial, naive, plucky and generous, has won for itself a real affection in France wherever it has had a chance to display itself. . . .

But when it comes to British methods then the polite Frenchman's difficulties begin. Translating hints into statements and guessing at reservations, I would say that the French fall very short of admiration of the way in which our higher officers set about their work, they are disagreeably impressed by a general want of sedulousness and close method in our leading. They think we economise brains and waste blood. They are shocked at the way in which obviously incompetent or inefficient men of the old army class are retained in their positions even after serious failures, and they were profoundly moved by the bad staff work and needlessly heavy losses of our opening attacks in July. They were ready to condone the blunderings and flounderings of the 1915 offensive as the necessary penalties of an "amateur" army, they had had to learn their own lesson in Champagne, but they were surprised to find how much the British had still to learn in July, 1916. The British officers excuse them-

The Riddle of the British

selves because, they plead, they are still amateurs. "That is no reason," says the Frenchman, "why they should be amateurish."

No Frenchman said as much as this to me, but their meaning was as plain as daylight. I tackled one of my guides on this matter; I said that it was the plain duty of the French military people to criticise British military methods sharply if they thought they were wrong. "It is not easy," he said. "Many British officers do not think they have anything to learn. And English people do not like being told things. What could we do? We could hardly send a French officer or so to your headquarters in a tutorial capacity. You have to do things in your own way." When I tried to draw General Castelnau into this dangerous question by suggesting that we might borrow a French general or so, he would say only, "There is only one way to learn war, and that is to make war." When it was too late, in the lift, I thought of the answer to that. There is only one way to make war, and that is by the sacrifice of incapables and the rapid promotion of able men. If old and tried types fail now, new types must be sought. But to do that we want a standard of efficiency. We want a conception of intellectual quality in performance that is still lacking. . . .

War and the Future

M. Joseph Reinach, in whose company I visited the French part of the Somme front, was full of a scheme, which he has since published, for the breaking up and recomposition of the French and British armies into a series of composite armies which would blend the magnificent British manhood and material with French science and military experience. He pointed out the endless advantages of such an arrangement; the stimulus of emulation, the promotion of intimate fraternal feeling between the peoples of the two countries. "At present," he said, "no Frenchman ever sees an Englishman except at Amiens or on the Somme. Many of them still have no idea of what the English are doing. . . ."

"Have I ever told you the story of compulsory Greek at Oxford and Cambridge?" I asked abruptly.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Or how two undistinguished civil service commissioners can hold up the scientific education of our entire administrative class?"

M. Reinach protested further.

"Because you are proposing to loosen the grip of a certain narrow and limited class upon British affairs, and you propose it as though it were a job as easy as rearranging railway fares or sending a van to Calais. That is the

The Riddle of the British

problem that every decent Englishman is trying to solve to-day, every man of that Greater Britain which has supplied these five million volunteers, these magnificent temporary officers and all this wealth of munitions. And the oligarchy is so invincibly fortified! Do you think it will let in Frenchmen to share its controls? It will not even let in Englishmen. It holds the class schools; the class universities; the examinations for our public services are its class shibboleths; it is the church, the squirearchy, the permanent army class, permanent officialdom; it makes every appointment, it is the fountain of honour; what it does not know is not knowledge, what it cannot do must not be done. It rules India ignorantly and obstructively; it will wreck the empire rather than relinquish its ascendancy in Ireland. It is densely self-satisfied and instinctively monopolistic. It is on our backs, and with it on our backs we common English must bleed and blunder to victory. . . . And you make this proposal!"

§ 3

The antagonistic relations of the Anglican oligarchy with the greater and greater-spirited Britain that thrusts behind it in this war are probably paralleled very closely in Germany,

War and the Future

probably they are exaggerated in Germany with a bigger military oligarchy and a relatively lesser civil body under it. This antagonism is the oddest outcome of the tremendous *de-militarisation* of war that has been going on. In France it is probably not so marked because of the greater flexibility and adaptability of the French culture.

All military people—people, that is, professionally and primarily military—are inclined to be conservative. For thousands of years the military tradition has been a tradition of discipline. The conception of the common soldier has been a mechanically obedient, almost de-humanised man, of the officer a highly trained autocrat. In two years all this has been absolutely reversed. Individual quality, inventive organisation and industrialism will win this war. And no class is so innocent of these things as the military caste. Long accustomed as they are to the importance of moral effect they put a brave face upon the business; they save their faces astonishingly, but they are no longer guiding and directing this war, they are being pushed from behind by forces they never foresaw and cannot control. The aeroplanes and great guns have bolted with them, the tanks begotten of naval and civilian wits, shove them to victory in spite of themselves.

The Riddle of the British

Wherever I went behind the British lines the officers were going about in spurs. These spurs got at last upon my nerves. They became symbolical. They became as grave an insult to the tragedy of the war as if they were false noses. The British officers go for long automobile rides in spurs. They walk about the trenches in spurs. Occasionally I would see a horse ; I do not wish to be unfair in this matter, there were riding horses sometimes within two or three miles of the ultimate front, but they were rarely used.

I do not say that the horse is entirely obsolete in this war. In war nothing is obsolete. In the trenches men fight with sticks. In the Pasubio battle the other day one of the Alpini silenced a machine gun by throwing stones. In the West African campaign we have employed troops armed with bows and arrows, and they have done very valuable work. But these are exceptional cases. The military use of the horse henceforth will be such an exceptional case. It is ridiculous for these spurs still to clink about the modern battlefield. What the gross cost of the spurs and horses and trappings of the British army amount to, and how many men are grooming and tending horses who might just as well be ploughing and milking at home, I cannot guess ; it must be a total

War and the Future

so enormous as seriously to affect the balance of the war.

And these spurs and their retention are only the outward and visible symbol of the obstinate resistance of the Anglican intelligence to the clear logic of the present situation. It is not only the external equipment of our leaders that falls behind the times; our political and administrative services are in the hands of the same desolatingly inadaptably class. The British are still wearing spurs in Ireland; they are wearing them in India; and the age of the spur has passed. At the outset of this war there was an absolute cessation of criticism of the military and administrative castes; it is becoming a question whether we may not pay too heavily in blundering and waste, in military and economic lassitude, in international irritation and the accumulation of future dangers in Ireland, Egypt, India, and elsewhere, for an apparent absence of internal friction. These people have no gratitude for tacit help, no spirit of intelligent service, and no sense of fair play to the outsider. The latter deficiency indeed they call *esprit de corps* and prize it as if it were a noble quality.

It becomes more and more imperative that the foreign observer should distinguish between this narrower, older official Britain and the

The Riddle of the British

greater newer Britain that struggles to free itself from the entanglement of a system outgrown. There are many Englishmen who would like to say to the French and the Irish and the Italians and India, who indeed feel every week now a more urgent need of saying, "Have patience with us." The Riddle of the British is very largely solved if you will think of a great modern liberal nation seeking to slough an exceedingly tough and tight skin. . . .

Nothing is more illuminating and self-educational than to explain one's home politics to an intelligent foreigner enquirer; it strips off all the secondary considerations, the allusiveness, the merely tactical considerations. One sees the forest not as a confusion of trees but as something with a definite shape and place. I was asked in Italy and in France, "Where does Lord Northcliffe come into the British system—or Lloyd George? Who is Mr. Redmond? Why is Lloyd George a Minister, and why does not Mr. Redmond take office? Isn't there something called an ordnance department, and why is there a separate ministry of munitions? Can Mr. Lloyd George remove an incapable general? . . ."

I found M. Joseph Reinach particularly penetrating and persistent. It is an amusing but rather difficult exercise to recall what I

War and the Future

tried to convey to him by way of a theory of Britain. He is by no means an uncritical listener. I explained that there is an "inner Britain," official Britain, which is Anglican or official Presbyterian, which at the outside in the whole world cannot claim to speak for twenty million Anglican and Presbyterian communicants, which monopolises official positions, administration and honours in the entire British empire, dominates the court, and, typically, is spurred and red-tabbed. (It was just at this time that the spurs were most on my nerves.)

This inner Britain, I went on to explain, holds tenaciously to its positions of advantage, from which it is difficult to dislodge it without upsetting the whole empire, and it insists upon treating the rest of the four hundred millions who constitute that empire as outsiders, foreigners, subject races and suspected persons.

"To you," I said, "it bears itself with an appearance of faintly hostile, faintly contemptuous apathy. It is still so entirely insular that it shudders at the thought of the Channel Tunnel. This is the Britain which irritates and puzzles you so intensely—that you are quite unable to conceal these feelings from me. Unhappily it is the Britain you see

The Riddle of the British

most of. Well, outside this official Britain is 'Greater Britain'—the real Britain with which you have to reckon in future." (From this point a faint flavour of myticism crept into my dissertation. I found myself talking with something in my voice curiously reminiscent of those liberal Russians who set themselves to explain the contrasts and contradictions of "official" Russia and "true" Russia.) "This Greater Britain," I asserted, "is in a perpetual conflict with official Britain, struggling to keep it up to its work, shoving it towards its ends, endeavouring in spite of its tenacious mischievousness of the privileged to keep the peace and a common aim with the French and Irish and Italians and Russians and Indians. It is to that outer Britain that those Englishmen you found so interesting and sympathetic, Lloyd George and Lord Northcliffe, for example, belong. It is the Britain of the great effort, the Britain of the smoking factories and the torrent of munitions, the Britain of the men and subalterns of the new armies, the Britain which invents and thinks and achieves, and stands now between German imperialism and the empire of the world. I do not want to exaggerate the quality of greater Britain. If the inner set are narrowly educated, the outer set is often crudely educated.

War and the Future

If the inner set is so close knit as to seem like a conspiracy, the outer set is so loosely knit as to seem like a noisy confusion. Greater Britain is only beginning to realise itself and find itself. For all its crudity there is a giant spirit in it feeling its way towards the light. It has quite other ambitions for the ending of the war than some haggled treaty of alliance with France and Italy; some advantage that will invalidate German competition; it begins to realise newer and wider sympathies, possibilities of an amalgamation of interests and a community of aim that it is utterly beyond the habits of the old oligarchy to conceive, beyond the scope of that tawdry word 'Empire' to express. . . ."

I descended from my rhetoric to find M. Reinach asking how and when this greater Britain was likely to become politically effective.

V

THE SOCIAL CHANGES IN PROGRESS

§ 1

"NOTHING will be the same after the war." This is one of the consoling platitudes with which people cover over voids of thought. They utter it with an air of round-eyed profundity. But to ask in reply, "Then how will things be different?" is in many cases to rouse great resentment. It is almost as rude as saying, "Was that thought of yours really a thought?"

Let us in this chapter confine ourselves to the social-economic processes that are going on. So far as I am able to distinguish among the things that are being said in these matters, they may be classified out into groups that centre upon several typical questions. There is the question of "How to pay for the war?" There is the question of the behaviour of labour after the war. "Will there be a Labour Truce or a violent labour struggle?" There is the question of the reconstruction of European industry after the war in the face of an America

War and the Future

in a state of monetary and economic repletion through non-intervention. My present purpose in this chapter is a critical one; it is not to solve problems but to set out various currents of thought that are flowing through the general mind. Which current is likely to seize upon and carry human affairs with it, is not for our present speculation.

There seem to be two distinct ways of answering the first of the questions I have noted. They do not necessarily contradict each other. Of course the war is being largely paid for immediately out of the accumulated private wealth of the past. We are buying off the "hold-up" of the private owner upon the material and resources we need, and paying in paper money and war loans. This is not in itself an impoverishment of the community. The wealth of individuals is not the wealth of nations; the two things may easily be contradictory when the rich man's wealth consists of land or natural resources or franchises or privileges the use of which he reluctantly yields for high prices. The conversion of held-up land and material into workable and actively used material in exchange for national debt may be indeed a positive increase in the wealth of the community. And what is happening in all the belligerent countries is the taking over

The Social Changes in Progress

of more and more of the realities of wealth from private hands and, in exchange, the contracting of great masses of debt to private people. The nett tendency is towards the disappearance of a reality holding class and the destruction of realities in warfare, and the appearance of a vast *rentier* class in its place. At the end of the war much material will be destroyed for evermore, transit, food production and industry will be everywhere enormously socialised, and the country will be liable to pay every year in interest, a sum of money exceeding the entire national expenditure before the war. From the point of view of the state, and disregarding material and moral damages, that annual interest is the annual instalment of the price to be paid for the war.

Now the interesting question arises whether these great belligerent states may go bankrupt, and if so to what extent. States may go bankrupt to the private creditor without repudiating their debts or seeming to pay less to him. They can go bankrupt either by a depreciation of their currency or—without touching the gold standard—through a rise in prices. In the end both these things work out to the same end; the creditor gets so many loaves or pairs of boots or workman's hours of labour for his pound *less* than he would have got

War and the Future

under the previous conditions. One may imagine this process of price (and of course wages) increase going on to a limitless extent. Many people are inclined to look to such an increase in prices as a certain outcome of the war, and just so far as it goes, just so far will the burthen of the *rentier* class, their call, that is, for goods and services, be lightened. This expectation is very generally entertained, and I can see little reason against it. The intensely stupid or dishonest "labour" press, however, which in the interests of the common enemy misrepresents socialism and seeks to misguide labour in Great Britain, ignores these considerations, and positively holds out this prospect of rising prices as an alarming one to the more credulous and ignorant of its readers.

But now comes the second way of meeting the after-the-war obligations. This second way is by increasing the wealth of the state and by increasing the national production to such an extent that the payment of the *rentier* class will not be an overwhelming burthen. Rising prices bilk the creditor. Increased production will check the rise in prices and get him a real payment. The outlook for the national creditor seems to be that he will be partly bilked and partly paid; how far he will be bilked and how far paid depends almost entirely upon this

The Social Changes in Progress

possible increase in production ; and there is consequently a very keen and quite unprecedented desire very widely diffused among intelligent and active people, holding War Loan scrip and the like, in all the belligerent countries, to see bold and hopeful schemes for state enrichment pushed forward. The movement towards socialism is receiving an impulse from a new and unexpected quarter, there is now a *rentier* socialism, and it is interesting to note that while the *London Times* is full of schemes of great state enterprises, for the exploitation of Colonial state lands, for the state purchase and wholesaling of food and many natural products, and for the syndication of shipping and the great staple industries into vast trusts into which not only the British but the French and Italian governments may enter as partners, the so-called socialist press of Great Britain is chiefly busy about the draughts in the cell of Mr. Fenner Brockway and the refusal of Private Scott Duckers to put on his khaki trousers. *The New Statesman* and the Fabian Society, however, display a wider intelligence.

There is a great variety of suggestions for this increase of public wealth and production. Many of them have an extreme reasonableness. The extent to which they will be adopted depends, no doubt, very largely upon the politician

War and the Future

and permanent official, and both those classes are prone to panic in the presence of reality. In spite of its own interest in restraining a rise in prices, the old official "salaried" is likely to be obstructive to any such innovations. It is the resistance of spurs and red tabs to military innovations over again. This is the resistance of quills and red tape. On the other hand the organisation of Britain for war has "officialised" a number of industrial leaders, and created a large body of temporary and adventurous officials. They may want to carry on into peace production the great new factories the war has created. At the end of the war, for example, every belligerent country will be in urgent need of cheap automobiles for farmers, tradesmen, and industrial purposes generally. America is now producing such automobiles at a price of eighty pounds. But Europe will be heavily in debt to America, her industries will be disorganised, and there will therefore be no sort of return payment possible for these hundreds of thousands of automobiles. A country that is neither creditor nor producer cannot be an importer. Consequently though those cheap tin cars may be stacked as high as the Washington Monument in America, they will never come to Europe. On the other hand the great shell factories of Europe will be stand-

The Social Changes in Progress

ing idle and ready, their staffs disciplined and available, for conversion to the new task. The imperative common sense of the position seems to be that the European governments should set themselves straight away to out-Ford Ford, and provide their own people with cheap road transport.

But here comes in the question whether this common-sense course is inevitable. Suppose the mental energy left in Europe after the war is insufficient for such a constructive feat as this. There will certainly be the obstruction of official pedantry, the hold-up of this vested interest and that, the greedy desire of "private enterprise" to exploit the occasion upon rather more costly and less productive lines, the general distrust felt by ignorant and unimaginative people of a new way of doing things. The process after all may not get done in the obviously wise way. This will not mean that Europe will buy American cars. It will be quite unable to buy American cars. It will be unable to make anything that America will not be able to make more cheaply for itself. But it will mean that Europe will go on without cheap cars, that is to say it will go on more sluggishly and clumsily and wastefully at a lower economic level. Hampered transport means hampered production of other things, and an increasing

War and the Future

inability to buy abroad. And so we go down and down.

It does not follow that because a course is the manifestly right and advantageous course for the community that it will be taken. I am reminded of this by a special basket in my study here, into which I pitch letters, circulars, pamphlets and so forth as they come to hand from a gentleman named Gattie, and his friends Mr. Adrian Ross, Mr. Roy Horniman, Mr. Henry Murray and others. His particular project is the construction of a Railway Clearing House for London. It is an absolutely admirable scheme. It would cut down the heavy traffic in the streets of London to about one-third; it would enable us to run the goods traffic of England with less than half the number of railway trucks we now employ; it would turn over enormous areas of valuable land from their present use as railways goods yards and sidings; it would save time in the transit of goods and labour in their handling. It is a quite beautifully worked out scheme. For the last eight or ten years this group of devoted fanatics has been pressing this undertaking upon an indifferent country with increasing vehemence and astonishment at that indifference. The point is that its adoption, though it would be of enormous general benefit, would be of

The Social Changes in Progress

no particular benefit to any leading man or highly placed official. On the other hand it would upset all sorts of individuals who are in a position to obstruct it quietly—and they do so. Meaning no evil. I dip my hand in the accumulation and extract a leaflet by the all too zealous Mr. Murray. In it he denounces various public officials by name as cheats and scoundrels, and invites a prosecution for libel.

In that fashion nothing will ever get done. There is no prosecution, but for all that I do not agree with Mr. Murray about the men he names. These gentlemen are just comfortable gentlemen, own brothers to these old generals of ours who will not take off their spurs. They are probably quite charming people except that they know nothing of that Fear of God which searches the heart. Why should they bother?

So many of these after-the-war problems bring one back to the question how far the war has put the Fear of God into the hearts of responsible men. There is really no other reason in existence that I can imagine why they should ask themselves the question, "Have I done my best?" and that still more important question, "Am I doing my best now?" And so while I hear plenty of talk about the great reorganisations that are to come after the war, while there is the stir of doubt among the

War and the Future

rentiers whether, after all, they will get paid, while the unavoidable stresses and sacrifices of the war are making many people question the rightfulness of much that they did as a matter of course, and of much that they took for granted, I perceive there is also something dull and not very articulate in this European world, something resistant and inert, that is like the obstinate rolling over of a heavy sleeper after he has been called upon to get up. "Just a little longer. . . . Just for *my* time."

One thought alone seems to make these more intractable people anxious. I thrust it in as my last stimulant when everything else has failed. "There will be *frightful* trouble with labour after the war," I say.

They try to persuade themselves that military discipline is breaking in labour. . . .

§ 2

What does British labour think of the outlook after the war?

As a distinctive thing British labour does not think. "Class-conscious labour," as the Marxists put it, scarcely exists in Britain. The only convincing case I ever met was a bath-chairman of literary habits at Eastbourne. The only people who are, as a class, class-conscious

The Social Changes in Progress

in the British community are the Anglican gentry and their fringe of the genteel. Everybody else is "respectable." The mass of British workers find their thinking in the ordinary halfpenny papers or in *John Bull*. The so-called labour papers are perhaps less representative of British Labour than any other section of the press; the *Labour Leader*, for example, is the organ of such people as Bertrand Russell, Vernon Lee, Morel, academic *rentiers* who know about as much of the labour side of industrialism as they do of cock-fighting. All the British peoples are racially willing and good-tempered people, quite ready to be led by those they imagine to be abler than themselves. They make the most cheerful and generous soldiers in the whole world, without insisting upon that democratic respect which the Frenchman exacts. They do not criticise and they do not trouble themselves much about the general plan of operations, so long as they have confidence in the quality and good will of their leading. But British soldiers will hiss a general when they think he is selfish, unfeeling, or a muff. And the socialist propaganda has imported ideas of public service into private employment. Labour in Britain has been growing increasingly impatient of bad or selfish industrial leadership. Labour trouble in Great Britain

War and the Future

turns wholly upon the idea crystallised in the one word "profiteer." Legislation and regulation of hours of labour, high wages, nothing will keep labour quiet in Great Britain if labour thinks it is being exploited for private gain.

Labour feels very suspicious of private gain. For that suspicion a certain rather common type of employer is mainly to blame. Labour believes that employers as a class cheat workmen as a class, plan to cheat them of their full share in the common output, and drive hard bargains. It believes that private employers are equally ready to sacrifice the welfare of the nation and the welfare of the workers for mere personal advantage. It has a traditional experience to support these suspicions.

In no department of morals have ideas changed so completely during the last eighty years as in relation to "profits." Eighty years ago everyone believed in the divine right of property to do what it pleased with its advantages, a doctrine more disastrous socially than the divine right of kings. There was no such sense of the immorality of "holding up" as pervades the public conscience to-day. The worker was expected not only to work, but to be grateful for employment. The property owner held his property and handed it out for use and development or not, just as he thought

The Social Changes in Progress

fit. These ideas are not altogether extinct to-day. Only a few days ago I met a magnificent old lady of seventy-nine or eighty, who discoursed upon the wickedness of her gardener in demanding another shilling a week because of war prices.

She was a valiant and handsome personage. A face that had still a healthy natural pinkness looked out from under blond curls, and an elegant and carefully tended hand tossed back some fine old lace to gesticulate more freely. She had previously charmed her hearers by sweeping aside certain invasion rumours that were drifting about.

"Germans invade *Us!*" she cried. "Who'd let 'em, I'd like to know? Who'd *let* 'em?"

And then she reverted to her grievance about the gardener.

"I told him that after the war he'd be glad enough to get anything. Grateful! They'll all be coming back after the war—all of 'em, glad enough to get anything. Asking for another shilling indeed!"

Everyone who heard her looked shocked. But that was the tone of everyone of importance in the dark years that followed the Napoleonic wars. That is just one survivor of the old tradition. Another is Blight the solicitor, who goes about bewailing the fact that we

War and the Future

writers are "holding out false hopes of higher agricultural wages after the war." But these are both exceptions. They are held to be remarkable people even by their own class. The mass of property owners and influential people in Europe to-day no more believe in the sacred right of property to hold up development and dictate terms than do the more intelligent workers. The ideas of collective ends and of the fiduciary nature of property, had been soaking through the European community for years before the war. The necessity for sudden and even violent co-operations and submersions of individuality in a common purpose, which this war has produced, is rapidly crystallising out these ideas into clear proposals.

War is an evil thing, but people who will not learn from reason must have an ugly teacher. This war has brought home to everyone the supremacy of the public need over every sort of individual claim.

One of the most remarkable things in the British war press is the amount of space given to the discussion of labour developments after the war. This is in its completeness peculiar to the British situation. Nothing on the same scale is perceptible in the press of the Latin allies. A great movement on the part of capitalists and business organisers is manifest to assure

The Social Changes in Progress

the worker of a change of heart and a will to change method. Labour is suspicious, not foolishly but wisely suspicious. But labour is considering it.

“National industrial syndication,” say the business organisers.

“Guild socialism,” say the workers.

There is also a considerable amount of talking and writing about “profit-sharing” and about giving the workers a share in the business direction. Neither of these ideas appeals to the shrewder heads among the workers. So far as direction goes their disposition is to ask the captain to command the ship. So far as profits go, they think the captain has no more right than the cabin boy to speculative gains; he should do his work for his pay whether it is profitable or unprofitable work. There is little balm for labour discontent in these schemes for making the worker also an infinitesimal profiteer.

During my journey in Italy and France I met several men who were keenly interested in business organisation. Just before I started my friend N, who has been the chief partner in the building up of a very big and very extensively advertised American business, came to see me on his way back to America. He is as interested in his work as a scientific specialist, and

War and the Future

as ready to talk about it to any intelligent and interested hearer. He was particularly keen upon the question of continuity in the business, when it behoves the older generation to let in the younger to responsible management and to efface themselves. He was a man of five-and-forty. Incidentally he mentioned that he had never taken anything for his private life out of the great business he had built up but a salary, "a good salary," and that now he was going to grant himself a pension. "I shan't interfere any more. I shall come right away and live in Europe for a year so as not to be tempted to interfere. The boys have got to run it some day, and they had better get their experience while they're young and capable of learning by it. I did."

I like N's ideas. "Practically," I said, "you've been a public official. You've treated your business like a public service."

That was his idea.

"Would you mind if it was a public service?"

He reflected, and some disagreeable memory darkened his face. "Under the politicians?" he said.

I took the train of thought N had set going abroad with me next day. I had the good luck to meet men who were interesting indus-

The Social Changes in Progress

trially. Captain Pirelli, my guide in Italy, has a name familiar to every motorist; his name goes wherever cars go, spelt with a big long capital P. Lieutenant de Tessin's name will recall one of the most interesting experiments in profit-sharing to the student of social science. I tried over N's problem on both of them. I found in both their minds just the same attitude as he takes up towards his business. They think any businesses that are worthy of respect, the sorts of businesses that interest them, are public functions. Money-lenders and speculators, merchants and gambling gentlefolk may think in terms of profit; capable business directors certainly do nothing of the sort.

I met a British officer in France who is also a landowner. I got him to talk about his administrative work upon his property. He was very keen upon new methods. He said he tried to do his duty by his land.

"How much land?" I asked.

"Just over nine thousand acres," he said.

"But you could manage forty or fifty thousand with little more trouble."

"If I had it. In some ways it would be easier."

"What a waste!" I said. "Of course you ought not to *own* these acres; what you ought to be is the agricultural controller of just as

War and the Future

big an estate of the public lands as you could manage—with a suitable salary.”

He reflected upon that idea. He said he did not get much of a salary out of his land as it was, and made a regrettable allusion to Mr. Lloyd George. “When a man tries to do his duty by the land,” he said . . .

But here running through the thoughts of the Englishman and the Italian and the Frenchman and the American alike one finds just the same idea of a kind of officialism in ownership. It is an idea that pervades our thought and public discussion to-day everywhere, and it is an idea that is scarcely traceable at all in the thought of the early half of the nineteenth century. The idea of service and responsibility in property has increased and is increasing, the conception of “hold-up,” the usurer’s conception of his right to be bought out of the way, fades. And the process has been enormously enhanced by the various big-scale experiments in temporary socialism that have been forced upon the belligerent powers. Men of the most individualistic quality are being educated up to the possibilities of concerted collective action. My friend and fellow-student Y, inventor and business organiser, who used to make the best steam omnibuses in the world, and who is now making all sorts of things for

The Social Changes in Progress

the army, would go pink with suspicious anger at the mere words "inspector" or "socialism" three or four years ago. He does not do so now.

A great proportion of this sort of man, this energetic directive sort of man in England, is thinking socialism to-day. They may not be saying socialism, but they are thinking it. When labour begins to realise what is adrift it will be divided between two things: between appreciative co-operation, for which guild socialism in particular has prepared its mind, and traditional suspicion. I will not offer to guess here which will prevail.

§ 3

The impression I have of the present mental process in the European communities is that while the official class and the *rentier* class is thinking very poorly and inadequately and with a merely obstructive disposition; while the churches are merely wasting their energies in futile self-advertisement; while the labour mass is suspicious and disposed to make terms for itself rather than come into any large schemes of reconstruction that will abolish profit as a primary aim in economic life, there is still a very considerable movement towards such a reconstruction. Nothing is so misleading as

War and the Future

a careless analogy. In the dead years that followed the Napoleonic wars, which are often quoted as a precedent for expectation now, the spirit of collective service was near its minimum ; it was never so strong and never so manifestly spreading and increasing as it is to-day.

But service to what ?

I have my own very strong preconceptions here, and since my temperament is sanguine they necessarily colour my view. I believe that this impulse to collective service can satisfy itself only under the formula that mankind is one state of which God is the undying king, and that the service of men's collective needs is the true worship of God. But eagerly as I would grasp at any evidence that this idea is being developed and taken up by the general consciousness, I am quite unable to persuade myself that anything of the sort is going on. I do perceive a search for large forms into which the prevalent impulse to devotion can be thrown. But the organised religious bodies, with their creeds and badges and their instinct for self-preservation at any cost, stand between men and their spiritual growth in just the same way the forestallers stand between men and food. Their activities at present are an almost intolerable nuisance. One cannot say

The Social Changes in Progress

"God" but some tout is instantly seeking to pluck one into his particular cave of flummery and orthodoxy. What a rational man means by God is just God. The more you define and argue about God the more he remains the same simple thing. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, modern Hindu religious thought, all agree in declaring that there is one God, master and leader of all mankind, in unending conflict with cruelty, disorder, folly and waste. To my mind, it follows immediately that there can be no king, no government of any sort, which is not either a subordinate or a rebel government, a local usurpation, in the kingdom of God. But no organised religious body has ever had the courage and honesty to insist upon this. They all pander to nationalism and to powers and princes. They exist so to pander. Every organised religion in the world exists only to exploit and divert and waste the religious impulse in man.

This conviction that the world kingdom of God is the only true method of human service, is so clear and final in my own mind, it seems so inevitably the conviction to which all right-thinking men must ultimately come, that I feel almost like a looker-on at a game of blind-man's buff as I watch the discussion of synthetic political ideas. The blind man thrusts

War and the Future

his seeking hands into the oddest corners, he clutches at chairs and curtains, but at last he must surely find and hold and feel over and guess the name of the plainly visible quarry.

Some of the French and Italian people I talked to said they were fighting for "Civilisation." That is one name for the kingdom of God, and I have heard English people use it too. But much of the contemporary thought of England still wanders with its back to the light. Most of it is pawing over jerry-built, secondary things. I have before me a little book, the joint work of Dr. Grey and Mr. Turner, of an ex-public schoolmaster and a manufacturer, called *Eclipse or Empire?* (The title *World Might or Downfall?* had already been secured in another quarter.) It is a book that has been enormously advertised; it has been almost impossible to escape its column-long advertisements; it is billed upon the hoardings, and it is on the whole a very able and right-spirited book. It calls for more and better education, for more scientific methods, for less class suspicion and more social explicitness and understanding, for a franker and fairer treatment of labour. But why does it call for these things? Does it call for them because they are right? Because in accomplishing them one serves God?

Not at all. But because otherwise this

The Social Changes in Progress

strange sprawling empire of ours will drop back into a secondary place in the world. These two writers really seem to think that the slack workman, the slacker wealthy man, the negligent official, the conservative schoolmaster, the greedy usurer, the comfortable obstructive, confronted with this alternative, terrified at this idea of something or other called the Empire being "eclipsed," eager for the continuance of this undefined glory over their fellow-creatures called "Empire," will perceive the error of their ways and become energetic, devoted, capable. They think an ideal of that sort is going to change the daily lives of men. . . . I sympathise with their purpose, and I deplore their conception of motives. If men will not give themselves for righteousness, they will not give themselves for a geographical score. If they will not work well for the hatred of bad work, they will not work well for the hatred of Germans. This "Empire" idea has been cadging about the British empire, trying to collect enthusiasm and devotion, since the days of Disraeli. It is, I submit, too big for the mean-spirited, and too tawdry and limited for the fine and generous. It leaves out the French and the Italians and the Belgians and all our blood brotherhood of allies. It has no compelling force in it. We British are not naturally

War and the Future

Imperialist ; we are something greater—or something less. For two years and a half now we have been fighting against Imperialism in its most extravagant form. It is a poor incentive to right living to propose to parody the devil we fight against.

The blind man must lunge again.

For when the right answer is seized it answers not only the question why men should work for their fellow-men but also why nation should cease to arm and plan and contrive against nation. The social problem is only the international problem in retail, the international problem is only the social one in gross.

My bias rules me altogether here. I see men in social, in economic and in international affairs alike, eager to put an end to conflict, inexpressibly weary of conflict and the waste and pain and death it involves. But to end conflict one must abandon aggressive or uncordial pretensions. Labour is sick at the idea of more strikes and struggles after the war, industrialism is sick of competition and anxious for service, everybody is sick of war. But how can they end any of these clashes except by the definition and recognition of a common end which will establish a standard for the trial of every conceivable issue, to which, that is, every other issue can be subordinated ; and

The Social Changes in Progress

what common end can there be in all the world except this idea of the world kingdom of God? What is the good of orienting one's devotion to a firm, or to class solidarity, or *La République Française*, or Poland, or Albania, or such love and loyalty as people profess for King George or King Albert or the Duc d'Orleans—it puzzles me why—or any such intermediate object of self-abandonment? We need a standard so universal that the platelayer may say to the barrister or the duchess, or the Red Indian to the Limehouse sailor, or the Anzac soldier to the Sinn Feiner or the Chinaman, "What are we two doing for it?" And to fill the place of that "it," no other idea is great enough or commanding enough, but only the world kingdom of God.

However long he may have to hunt, the blind man who is seeking service and an end to bickerings will come to that at last, because of all the thousand other things he may clutch at, nothing else can satisfy his manifest need.