

ENGLAND UNDER RECONSTRUCTION

(By A. W. P., special correspondent of The Toronto Globe.)

London, Jan. 22.—After ten years' absence from my native country, England, I returned from Canada just two months back. During that period an opportunity has been afforded me of looking into the present conditions of the country, both from an economic and worldly standpoint, and comparing them with those existing in 1910. Let me at once say that, bad as were trade and labor conditions in the latter year, they were almost a millennium when compared with the results of today. To put it plainly, England at the present moment is in a bad way, but to use Lord Rosebery's famous phrase, "She will wade through somehow."

First of all, let me deal with the labor problem and try to compare it with the situation existing in Canada. In 1910 English labor was only a young man, but today he is grown into full manhood and is demanding an elder son's portion. The worker, although still true to his trades unionism has in a large degree renounced his father (the trades union leader) and is prepared to act more on his own initiative than on the considered advice of his elected leader. In short, the worker's leader seems to have lost grip of a large body of the workers, with the result that labor generally is running amuck. If this is not quickly stopped trades unionism will either die an untimely death or the Reds will get the upper hand, with the result that we shall see here a repetition of the Winnipeg strike, which Mr. Robinson called "sheer revolution."

Where the Follower Leads.

It is a non-contradictable fact that English labor leaders have not the command or respect of the men in the same degree as their Canadian counterparts. In Toronto, for instance, the trades unionists usually follow the advice of their elected leaders, with the result that capital and labor get along fairly well together and even if there is a strike little bad feeling is engendered. Canadian leaders seem to grip the situation and lead their forces sensibly and gradually toward the ultimate end in view. Not so, however, with the present labor leader in England. He is only the servant of his trades union members, and they do not fail to let him know it. Today he does not lead as did Burns, Thomas, Tillet, Wilson and Orbell in the old days. Such men were the brains of trades unionism and their decisions were usually always upheld by their followers. Today a leader's considered opinion, if he does not provide for serving the big apple, no matter how rotten it may be at the core is just cast aside by the trades unionist, who then acts on his own initiative. The result of all this is pandemonium. The leader, to keep his job, plays to the gallery, and becomes just the mouthpiece of the advanced section of labor; in fact, the servant and not the leader. Looking at the question all round the Canadian labor leader is a peer in organization and authority as compared with his English brother.

Unemployment Serious.

The unemployment question is one of great seriousness here, and will have to be dealt with by a strong yet gloved hand. It cannot be played with, or bad constitutional results may ensue. To a great extent trades union selfishness is responsible for the present dearth of work. The unions, hoping to keep up the present high rate of wages, have refused resolutely to absorb any further membership into their ranks, with the result that manufacturers have been unable to obtain orders to keep the works going, as the prices they are compelled to quote are out of all proportion to the value of the article. On the other hand, some manufacturers have seemingly deliberately closed down their works with a view of forcing wages down to a workable living rate. There are plenty of non-union men in England who would willingly undertake at a reduced wage a trades unionist's job. But the danger—the trades unions are a strong body, and might, if the powers of their organizations are threatened, unite down tools and thus irreparably ruin the trade of the country. Students of English trades unionism are of opinion that a big, short and stiff struggle is about due between the unions and capital. When the fight is over wages will be reduced, and then only those will old England begin once more to raise her trade head above that of all the other nations in the world.

Caste Remains.

Although the moral conditions of the country have deteriorated during the war period, the social conditions are little changed, despite the prophecy that after the armistice there would be only two classes instead of three. The three classes still survive in all their distinctive elements. Subsidiary still exists. The worker in the country still touches his hat to those above him in the social scale and says "Sir." The railway porter "Sirs" the butcher or grocer who tips him for conveying his baggage from a taxi to a train. The school mists in the country still curtsy to the squire and the clergyman. In short the so-called upper classes still hold their distinctive place; the middle class, and the workman is still the worker. The old saying that an Englishman dearly loves a lord is as manifest today as it was 40 years back.

The moral state of England is an entirely different matter from that of the social. As the effects of the war wear off perhaps the old moral status may be revived, but at present the subject is one severely worrying the law judges and all thinking men who have some regard for the purity of the nation. Mothers seem to have lost control over their daughters, and fathers no longer exercise the vigilant supervision of their sons at the critical period of their upbringing. The divorce courts are working overtime, and the space given by the Press to the unsavory portions of a case, and which are eagerly read by youth and maidens of the country, should be a matter of serious investigation. The deductions arrived at from the reading of these cases are not beneficial to the minds of young people, who unfortunately think it good form, although probably unmarred, to follow the example of their elders. I am afraid that the old brag of "moral England" is today practically non-existent when applied to the younger generations. The older people try to put their foot down on the present vogue but unfortunately youth rules the world today. A few years, however, may—and let us hope it will—restore to us the balance of purity.

On the Up-grade Physically.

Apart, however, from the moral state, I am glad to observe that the virtue of youth is greater than ever. The present young generation and the coming generation are undoubtedly a more healthy, well-built and maintained body of boys and girls than those of the 1910 and 1912 periods. These children were well looked after during the war and today one sees healthy, strong and upright youth, fond of the outdoor life, instead of the pale stay-at-home, cheap-novel, ette-reading youth of ten years back. The war has undoubtedly improved the manhood of the nation, which is a good augury for the future.

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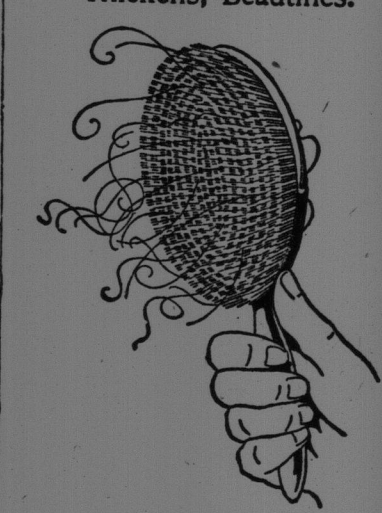
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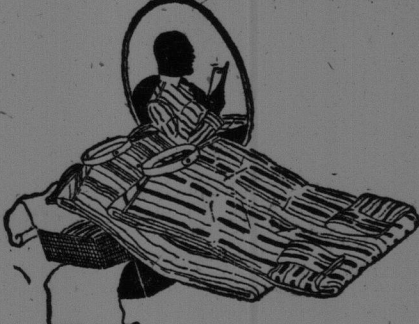
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