

IMPRESSIONS OF ENGLAND.

To the Englishman who lives abroad and is only able to go "home" from time to time, possibly the first and most striking impression that he receives on his return is that things do not change in the old country. There is a permanence, a stability, a thorough-going conservatism that is entirely lacking on this side the Atlantic except possibly in some parts of Quebec, in corners of New England and in one or two of the older states of the Union. There are surface changes of course. The hansom cab in London has given way to the taxi, sprawling suburbs continue to eat up the countryside further and further out from the heart of the metropolis, some of the South Coast residential resorts are not unworthy rivals of western Canadian towns in the growth of their population, and the privacy of the Surrey hills is more and more being invaded by the startling red bricks of the millionaire's country home. But these changes are not fundamental. They do not touch the heart of England. Still the tower on Leith Hill stands lonely, looking out to the sea. Still in the most noble county in all England there are quiet little towns basking lazily in the sunshine on summer afternoons, where time goes slowly, and all the houses are old and beautiful. Still there are no sounds on the South Downs save the swish of ripening wheat in the seawind, the hum of insects, the song of larks and the distant tinkle of sheep bells. Still there is the "dim, blue goodness of the weald" for a man to delight his eye with as he stands on the height above the Long Man, whose origin is as lost in the mist of ages as is that of Mr. Chesterton's White Horse. Still, in brief, through all the social and political changes that go on, there is the England that is the mother of us all, and to which a man turns in adoring love and delight.

The solitude of the English country-side in its mellow beauty is almost startling. Even now a man may march the whole day within fifty miles of Charing Cross and never see a soul. Between London and Liverpool, outside the big centres, there are miles of country with no visible human life. The country side seems empty. Neither does it appear likely that Mr. Lloyd George's land legislation will fill it again. That legislation has been successful in a sense, in that it has broken up some of the large estates (though that breaking-up has its disadvantages) but the general effect of it has simply been to create a state of uncertainty and suspicion that has killed the market in British land for the time being. Moreover, the complaints are universal of sharp practice, apparently on instructions from headquarters, on the part of the army of officials who are concerned with the administration of this legislation and particularly in regard to valuation. However that may be, it is certain that although the British farmer has been doing exceptionally well in recent years, nobody will invest in land at least. The outlook is too uncertain; in that quarter, at least, Lloyd Georgian finance has succeeded in destroying the confidence of the investor, probably enough to the great benefit of Canada.

In other directions the social legislation of the present government appears to be doing good work. The National Insurance Act involves a gigantic administration, and is widely regarded as a nuisance, although possibly enough the beneficiaries by it have a different tale to tell. Town-planning legislation has led to a vast deal of slum clearing and some of its provisions, it would seem, could be followed with advantage on this side the Atlantic.

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Possibly it is not appreciated on this side to what an extent the present great struggle came as a thunder-clap to the average Englishman in the street. Whatever information the Government may have had, leading them, as now appears in the light of later events, to make quiet but thorough going preparations, it is certain that to the average man the developments leading up to war came with startling rapidity. At the beginning of the last week in July the sole topic of conversation in London was the developments in the Home Rule crisis following the Sunday shooting in Dublin. It was not until Thursday in that week that the possibility of a great European struggle in which England would be engaged began to take possession of the mind of the average man. The slump in the financial markets brought home the truth to him.

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Even at the end of that last week of July in London, to the eye of the outside spectator things seemed to be running normally. Probably the most excited people in London were the American tourists who crammed the steamship offices with demands for accommodation to this side. In this respect there is a remarkable contrast between the temper of the British people at the present time and their temper in 1899 at the outset of the Boer war. They are going into the present battle soberly and clearheadedly, without hate and without greed, confident of the righteousness of their cause, to save themselves and Europe, if that be possible, from the horrible Bismarckian tradition of "blood and iron," to save themselves and Europe from a domineering arrogance that has not been equalled since Napoleon's day. They do not underestimate the strength of the enemy nor blink the fact that the end can only be achieved by terrible sacrifices of men and money. But those will be cheerfully made in the stand for freedom against tyranny by autocratic and military rule. As to the material resources for this fray, it seems probable that Great Britain is better furnished than any of the other great powers engaged. Trade has been exceptionally good for a number of years, and all classes have participated in the general prosperity which has been enjoyed. Within the memory of the present writer, in comparatively recent years, there has been a distinct raising of the standard of living of the English poorer classes, and while any sharp advance in prices will still bear hardly upon them—very hardly indeed—it is true to say that they are probably in better condition now than they were say, twenty years ago to meet those hardships and higher prices. The war will be a heavy burden, but not more than Great Britain can bear.

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