

## THE CRYING NEED

THE truth of the crisis upon which England is entering is becoming clear to a growing number of people. In that fact lies the hope of her ultimate regeneration.

Let us summarize the position.

A little more than a century and a half ago, England—or rather her governing classes—plumped for industrialism. That is to say they deliberately set themselves to destroy what was then in the main a land of peasants, owning and cultivating their patches of land and sharing the advantages of the commons, and to convert it into a commercial unit based upon factories and overseas trade. The immediate pecuniary advantages to *a limited number* of people were striking. We had a start of the world, and our expanding dominions provided us with an abundance of markets. The richness of the land itself in coal and iron ore accelerated the success of the experiment. The English developed a machine-sense and a money-mind, and the gradual disappearance of her agriculture was compensated for by the large profits made (by the controlling minority) from the sale of manufactured goods. Banks and a huge system of credit grew apace; for they were the life-blood of the new enterprise. The directness of local production of food and clothing for local consumption and use gave way to the dazzling indirectness of a network of exchanges, in which each mesh of the net gave opportunity to the manipulator to squeeze out his little bit of usury. We became the carrying and banking centre of the world.

For those in control and their immediate adherents all seemed well, always provided that the growing proletariat who worked their machines could be kept in proper subjection. There were ugly rumblings in the revolts of 1820 and later in the Chartist troubles of

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the '40's. Force, followed by the Reform Bill, quieted the former; the Repeal of the Corn Laws and the rise of the Trades Unions gave hope after the latter. But the system by then was ingrained, and the principle of it accepted even by those who suffered under it. The strikes of more recent years have been nothing more than an effort to shift, and perhaps loosen, the bonds that galled: the imprisonment has been taken for granted.

But from the beginning there was a canker in the root of this gilded flower. Time, and not the struggles of human misery, was to bring it to light. The whole repulsive plant was foredoomed to decay and perish. And the nature of the canker was this.

As a result of the fact that the energies of an industrialised nation necessarily pass from the production of its own prime needs to the making of money through commercial enterprises overseas, two things are bound to happen: agriculture must diminish and become a subsidiary adjunct to big business, and, secondly, money—always concentrating in fewer and fewer hands—must, as soon as the first flush of undisputed success has faded, be used continuously in de-development abroad and the building up there of new markets for manufactured goods. Food will have to be imported, as well as raw materials for the factories. But these imports will grow to be, more and more, merely the interest on capital invested in the foreign countries, and consequently exchange, in the form of manufactured goods exported from home, will be less and less required. In other words, the markets for such goods will continuously diminish. But the product of factories only feeds a nation indirectly by exchanging it for the necessities of life. Hence, unless new markets can be found, the industrialized country will starve. For the mere interchange of raw materials and manufactured goods does not provide food.

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This inevitable result, moreover, is accelerated by the fact that the newly developed countries, when they have passed a certain stage of development, themselves take up manufacture in one form or another (there is irony in the fact that England has largely financed this process), and this tends further to diminish the vanishing markets.

Meanwhile the nature of the industrialised country has become such that a return to self-support is rendered difficult. The great mass of the population has become uneducated in the provision of necessary things; they have been herded into towns where there can be no real production, only a modification or an exchange of commodities; they have come to think of money, and not things, as wealth; and, owing to the constant cutting of prices of manufactured goods in order to find markets, they have become more and more impoverished, and an increasing number of them thrown out of work altogether.

So much for the canker. It has now destroyed the flower of English industrialism, and we must act.

It is of little use to prophesy the form that the collapse will take. The decline is full upon us: let us pray that it be not a sudden and devastating crash! The action to be taken is the important thing, and in its broad outlines it is clear.

We shall need food. We must therefore set about to produce food without delay. Not next year; not after interminable enquiries by an industrialised government, but here and now. Each and all of us who have the smallest bit of land under our control must produce something. Potatoes, wheat (a mere patch of it perhaps), eggs, pork, and milk (no matter whether from cows or goats). Thousands of us can produce in one or several of these ways. Let us get away, as far as it is possible in the welter of financiers and town-

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bred ways of thought, from the ruling idea of money : that money feeds us. It will not feed us if food is not there to be bought.

Then, too, in the matter of our clothes, let us, wherever opportunity offers, breed sheep and learn to spin and weave the wool ourselves. So many of us have come to half-believe that clothes are produced by Selfridge's or Hope Brothers; but Selfridge's and Hope Brothers—aye and Woolworth himself—will empty as the factories fail; and the factories will fail—are failing to-day—in proportion as the making of goods means loss instead of gain.

But, I shall be told, 'this is pure panicking; things will re-adjust themselves; there is plenty—indeed a surplus—of food in the world; our present difficulties are the result of an acute instance of recurrent trade depressions; starvation in England is unthinkable.' 'Unthinkable' only because we have grown into such a habit of not thinking. Things may indeed re-adjust themselves temporarily, by the adoption of wider units of control, by a step nearer to the complete Servile State, or by the juggling of usurious national liabilities by the usurers. They may. Or they may not. Our financial rulers do not seem over-confident. But supposing they do, and we are allowed another lease of life for vulgar luxury and its concomitant lack of liberty, the crash in the end will be all the more severe. If we do not produce *things*, and if we cannot pay for *things*, we can only live on the bounty of other nations; and do they love us so much that they will rush in to keep our forty million people alive in perpetuum?

Again, it will no doubt be argued, 'granting the necessity for increased agriculture and the production of primary necessities, this spasmodic, hand-to-mouth production by a few individuals is powerless to avert a catastrophe. There must be a national scheme, a

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vast reorganisation by the State with modern mechanical appliances and the necessary capital.' God knows it may come to that, if the crash is sudden and the starvation of millions imminent! But it is a hair of the dog that has bitten us: it is all of a piece with decaying commercialism and the era of the merchant. The only real cure is to begin from the other end, however slow the process may be. To adopt any other course is simply to spread the poison. The smallness of the beginning is the best earnest of sound vitality, provided that the growth comes from the soil itself, which is the only source of wealth, and is tended by the people, for whose benefit and happiness it springs. For in a very real sense the transition from financial credits to food realities is a transition from what is big to what is small; from vast wealth (and correspondingly vast penury) to a small competence; from prolonged processes of exchange to direct consumption of produce; from long-distance transport to local markets; from big business to small properties.

Let each individual and family produce in any practical way open to them some at least of the necessities of life, and co-operate as far as may be with others in their locality. If this will not stem a sudden crash, it will at all events lay open the only way towards the re-creation of a peasantry, without which a country cannot continue to live long. It will be a dependence upon realities instead of illusions, and it will allow men to learn by degrees to think sanely.

The Government of England, at the moment I write these lines, are racking their brains to find a way of raising money to balance the budget. One thing is certain: they must take it from somewhere. Whatever happens, the majority of us are bound to be the poorer. Why not sow our poverty on soil which cannot fail to give increase, not of poverty, but of wealth? For the peasant possesses real wealth, whereas the

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stock-and-share millionaire often has little and never produces any.

We shall have to be content to forgo many luxuries to which we have become accustomed. Our manner of life, and still more the trappings of it, will have to change. But is it such a disadvantage to be rid of the slavery of the office and the factory, and the aching worry of 'keeping up appearances'?

Happiness has been long absent from England. We bid her depart nearly four hundred years ago when we flung aside the Truth for money. And money since then has built up the toppling tower of industrialism. Let us invite her back under the only conditions in which she can live.

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