

**CLASSICS TO GO**

**SOCIAL FORCES IN  
ENGLAND AND AMERICA**



**H. G. WELLS**

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# **CONTENTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
THE COMING OF BLÉRIOT	<a href="#"><u>1</u></a>
MY FIRST FLIGHT	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>
OFF THE CHAIN	<a href="#"><u>17</u></a>
OF THE NEW REIGN	<a href="#"><u>25</u></a>
WILL THE EMPIRE LIVE?	<a href="#"><u>38</u></a>
THE LABOUR UNREST	<a href="#"><u>50</u></a>
SOCIAL PANACEAS	<a href="#"><u>94</u></a>
SYNDICALISM OR CITIZENSHIP?	<a href="#"><u>102</u></a>
THE GREAT STATE	<a href="#"><u>112</u></a>
THE COMMON SENSE OF WARFARE	<a href="#"><u>155</u></a>
THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL	<a href="#"><u>173</u></a>
THE PHILOSOPHER'S PUBLIC LIBRARY	<a href="#"><u>199</u></a>
ABOUT CHESTERTON AND BELLOC	<a href="#"><u>205</u></a>
ABOUT SIR THOMAS MORE	<a href="#"><u>214</u></a>
TRAFFIC AND REBUILDING	<a href="#"><u>219</u></a>
THE SO-CALLED SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY	<a href="#"><u>224</u></a>
DIVORCE	<a href="#"><u>242</u></a>
THE SCHOOLMASTER AND THE EMPIRE	<a href="#"><u>255</u></a>
THE ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD	<a href="#"><u>268</u></a>

DOCTORS	<a href="#">275</a>
AN AGE OF SPECIALISATION	<a href="#">281</a>
IS THERE A PEOPLE?	<a href="#">287</a>
THE DISEASE OF PARLIAMENTS	<a href="#">293</a>
THE AMERICAN POPULATION	<a href="#">321</a>
THE POSSIBLE COLLAPSE OF CIVILISATION	<a href="#">383</a>
THE IDEAL CITIZEN	<a href="#">390</a>
SOME POSSIBLE DISCOVERIES	<a href="#">397</a>
THE HUMAN ADVENTURE	<a href="#">409</a>

# THE COMING OF BLÉRIOT

*(July, 1909)*

The telephone bell rings with the petulant persistence that marks a trunk call, and I go in from some ineffectual gymnastics on the lawn to deal with the irruption. There is the usual trouble in connecting up, minute voices in Folkestone and Dover and London call to one another and are submerged by buzzings and throbbings. Then in elfin tones the real message comes through: "Blériot has crossed the Channel.... An article ... about what it means."

I make a hasty promise and go out and tell my friends.

From my garden I look straight upon the Channel, and there are whitecaps upon the water, and the iris and tamarisk are all asway with the south-west wind that was also blowing yesterday. M. Blériot has done very well, and Mr. Latham, his rival, had jolly bad luck. That is what it means to us first of all. It also, I reflect privately, means that I have underestimated the possible stability of aeroplanes. I did not expect anything of the sort so soon. This is a good five years before my reckoning of the year before last.

We all, I think, regret that being so near we were not among the fortunate ones who saw that little flat shape skim landward out of the blue; surely they have an enviable memory; and then we fell talking and disputing about what that swift arrival may signify. It starts a swarm of questions.

First one remarks that here is a thing done, and done with an astonishing effect of ease, that was incredible not

simply to ignorant people, but to men well informed in these matters. It cannot be fifteen years ago since Sir Hiram Maxim made the first machine that could lift its weight from the ground, and I well remember how the clumsy quality of that success confirmed the universal doubt that men could ever in any effectual manner fly.

Since then a conspiracy of accidents has changed the whole problem; the bicycle and its vibrations developed the pneumatic tyre, the pneumatic tyre rendered a comfortable mechanically driven road vehicle possible, a motor-car set an enormous premium on the development of very light, very efficient engines, and at last the engineer was able to offer the experimentalists in gliding one strong enough and light enough for the new purpose. And here we are! Or, rather, M. Blériot is!

What does it mean for us?

One meaning, I think, stands out plainly enough, unpalatable enough to our national pride. This thing from first to last was made abroad. Of all that made it possible we can only claim so much as is due to the improvement of the bicycle. Gliding began abroad while our young men of muscle and courage were braving the dangers of the cricket field. The motor-car and its engine was being worked out "over there," while in this country the mechanically propelled road vehicle, lest it should frighten the carriage horses of the gentry, was going meticulously at four miles an hour behind a man with a red flag. Over there, where the prosperous classes have some regard for education and some freedom of imaginative play, where people discuss all sorts of things fearlessly, and have a respect for science, this has been achieved.

And now our insularity is breached by the foreigner who has got ahead with flying.

It means, I take it, first and foremost for us, that the world cannot wait for the English.

It is not the first warning we have had. It has been raining warnings upon us; never was a slacking, dull people so liberally served with warnings of what was in store for them. But this event—this foreigner-invented, foreigner-built, foreigner-steered thing, taking our silver streak as a bird soars across a rivulet—puts the case dramatically. We have fallen behind in the quality of our manhood. In the men of means and leisure in this island there was neither enterprise enough, imagination enough, knowledge nor skill enough to lead in this matter. I do not see how one can go into the history of this development and arrive at any other conclusion. The French and Americans can laugh at our aeroplanes, the Germans are ten years ahead of our poor navigables. We are displayed a soft, rather backward people. Either we are a people essentially and incurably inferior, or there is something wrong in our training, something benumbing in our atmosphere and circumstances. That is the first and gravest intimation in M. Blériot's feat.

The second is that, in spite of our fleet, this is no longer, from the military point of view, an inaccessible island.

So long as one had to consider the navigable balloon the aerial side of warfare remained unimportant. A Zeppelin is little good for any purpose but scouting and espionage. It can carry very little weight in proportion to its vast size, and, what is more important, it cannot drop things without sending itself up like a bubble in soda water. An armada of navigables sent against this island would end in a dispersed, deflated state, chiefly in the seas between Orkney and Norway—though I say it who should not. But these aeroplanes can fly all round the fastest navigable that ever drove before the wind; they can drop weights, take up weights, and do all sorts of able, inconvenient things. They



are birds. As for the birds, so for aeroplanes; there is an upward limit of size. They are not going to be very big, but they are going to be very able and active. Within a year we shall have—or rather *they* will have—aeroplanes capable of starting from Calais, let us say, circling over London, dropping a hundredweight or so of explosive upon the printing machines of *The Times*, and returning securely to Calais for another similar parcel. They are things neither difficult nor costly to make. For the price of a Dreadnought one might have hundreds. They will be extremely hard to hit with any sort of missile. I do not think a large army of under-educated, undertrained, extremely unwilling conscripts is going to be any good against this sort of thing.

I do not think that the arrival of M. Blériot means a panic resort to conscription. It is extremely desirable that people should realise that these foreign machines are not a temporary and incidental advantage that we can make good by fussing and demanding eight, and saying we won't wait, and so on, and then subsiding into indolence again. They are just the first fruits of a steady, enduring lead that the foreigner has won. The foreigner is ahead of us in education, and this is especially true of the middle and upper classes, from which invention and enterprise come—or, in our own case, do not come. He makes a better class of man than we do. His science is better than ours. His training is better than ours. His imagination is livelier. His mind is more active. His requirements in a novel, for example, are not kindly, sedative pap; his uncensored plays deal with reality. His schools are places for vigorous education instead of genteel athleticism, and his home has books in it, and thought and conversation. Our homes and schools are relatively dull and uninspiring; there is no intellectual guide or stir in them; and to that we owe this new generation of nicely behaved, unenterprising sons,

who play golf and dominate the tailoring of the world, while Brazilians, Frenchmen, Americans, and Germans fly.

That we are hopelessly behindhand in aeronautics is not a fact by itself. It is merely an indication that we are behindhand in our mechanical knowledge and invention. M. Blériot's aeroplane points also to the fleet.

The struggle for naval supremacy is not merely a struggle in shipbuilding and expenditure. Much more is it a struggle in knowledge and invention. It is not the Power that has the most ships or the biggest ships that is going to win in a naval conflict. It is the Power that thinks quickest of what to do, is most resourceful and inventive. Eighty Dreadnoughts manned by dull men are only eighty targets for a quicker adversary. Well, is there any reason to suppose that our Navy is going to keep above the general national level in these things? Is the Navy *bright*?

The arrival of M. Blériot suggests most horribly to me how far behind we must be in all matters of ingenuity, device, and mechanical contrivance. I am reminded again of the days during the Boer war, when one realised that it had never occurred to our happy-go-lucky Army that it was possible to make a military use of barbed wire or construct a trench to defy shrapnel. Suppose in the North Sea we got a surprise like that, and fished out a parboiled, half-drowned admiral explaining what a confoundedly slim, unexpected, almost ungentlemanly thing the enemy had done to him.

Very probably the Navy is the bright exception to the British system; its officers are rescued from the dull homes and dull schools of their class while still of tender years, and shaped after a fashion of their own. But M. Blériot reminds us that we may no longer shelter and degenerate behind these blue backs. And the keenest men at sea are none the worse for having keen men on land behind them.

Are we an awakening people?

It is the vital riddle of our time. I look out upon the windy Channel and think of all those millions just over there, who seem to get busier and keener every hour. I could imagine the day of reckoning coming like a swarm of birds.

Here the air is full of the clamour of rich and prosperous people invited to pay taxes, and beyond measure bitter. They are going to live abroad, cut their charities, dismiss old servants, and do all sorts of silly, vindictive things. We seem to be doing feeble next-to-nothings in the endowment of research. Not one in twenty of the boys of the middle and upper classes learns German or gets more than a misleading smattering of physical science. Most of them never learn to speak French. Heaven alone knows what they do with their brains! The British reading and thinking public probably does not number fifty thousand people all told. It is difficult to see whence the necessary impetus for a national renaissance is to come.... The universities are poor and spiritless, with no ambition to lead the country. I met a Boy Scout recently. He was hopeful in his way, but a little inadequate, I thought, as a basis for confidence in the future of the Empire.

We have still our Derby Day, of course....

Apart from these patriotic solicitudes, M. Blériot has set quite another train of thought going in my mind. The age of natural democracy is surely at an end through these machines. There comes a time when men will be sorted out into those who will have the knowledge, nerve, and courage to do these splendid, dangerous things, and those who will prefer the humbler level. I do not think numbers are going to matter so much in the warfare of the future, and that when organised intelligence differs from the majority, the majority will have no adequate power of retort. The common man with a pike, being only sufficiently indignant and abundant, could chase the eighteenth-century

gentleman as he chose, but I fail to see what he can do in the way of mischief to an elusive chevalier with wings. But that opens too wide a discussion for me to enter upon now.

# MY FIRST FLIGHT

(EASTBOURNE, *August 5, 1912, three years later*)

Hitherto my only flights have been flights of imagination, but this morning I flew. I spent about ten or fifteen minutes in the air; we went out to sea, soared up, came back over the land, circled higher, planed steeply down to the water, and I landed with the conviction that I had had only the foretaste of a great store of hitherto unsuspected pleasures. At the first chance I will go up again, and I will go higher and further.

This experience has restored all the keenness of my ancient interest in flying, which had become a little fagged and flat by too much hearing and reading about the thing and not enough participation. Sixteen years ago, in the days of Langley and Lilienthal, I was one of the few journalists who believed and wrote that flying was possible; it affected my reputation unfavourably, and produced in the few discouraged pioneers of those days a quite touching gratitude. Over my mantel as I write hangs a very blurred and bad but interesting photograph that Professor Langley sent me sixteen years ago. It shows the flight of the first piece of human machinery heavier than air that ever kept itself up for any length of time. It was a model, a little affair that would not have lifted a cat; it went up in a spiral and came down unsmashed, bringing back, like Noah's dove, the promise of tremendous things.

That was only sixteen years ago, and it is amusing to recall how cautiously even we out-and-out believers did our prophesying. I was quite a desperate fellow; I said outright

that in my lifetime we should see men flying. But I qualified that by repeating that for many years to come it would be an enterprise only for quite fantastic daring and skill. We conjured up stupendous difficulties and risks. I was deeply impressed and greatly discouraged by a paper a distinguished Cambridge mathematician produced to show that a flying machine was bound to pitch fearfully, that as it flew on its pitching *must* increase until up went its nose, down went its tail, and it fell like a knife. We exaggerated every possibility of instability. We imagined that when the aeroplane wasn't "kicking up ahind and afore" it would be heeling over to the lightest side wind. A sneeze might upset it. We contrasted our poor human equipment with the instinctive balance of a bird, which has had ten million years of evolution by way of a start....

The waterplane in which I soared over Eastbourne this morning with Mr. Grahame-White was as steady as a motor-car running on asphalte.

Then we went on from those anticipations of swaying insecurity to speculations about the psychological and physiological effects of flying. Most people who look down from the top of a cliff or high tower feel some slight qualms of dread, many feel a quite sickening dread. Even if men struggled high into the air, we asked, wouldn't they be smitten up there by such a lonely and reeling dismay as to lose all self-control? And, above all, wouldn't the pitching and tossing make them quite horribly sea-sick?

I have always been a little haunted by that last dread. It gave a little undertow of funk to the mood of lively curiosity with which I got aboard the waterplane this morning—that sort of faint, thin funk that so readily invades one on the verge of any new experience; when one tries one's first dive, for example, or pushes off for the first time down an ice run. I thought I should very probably be sea-sick—or, to be more precise, air-sick; I thought also that I might be

very giddy, and that I might get thoroughly cold and uncomfortable. None of those things happened.

I am still in a state of amazement at the smooth steadfastness of the motion. There is nothing on earth to compare with that, unless—and that I can't judge—it is an ice yacht travelling on perfect ice. The finest motor-car in the world on the best road would be a joggling, quivering thing beside it.

To begin with, we went out to sea before the wind, and the plane would not readily rise. We went with an undulating movement, leaping with a light splashing pat upon the water, from wave to wave. Then we came about into the wind and rose, and looking over I saw that there were no longer those periodic flashes of white foam. I was flying. And it was as still and steady as dreaming. I watched the widening distance between our floats and the waves. It wasn't by any means a windless day; there was a brisk, fluctuating breeze blowing out of the north over the downs. It seemed hardly to affect our flight at all.

And as for the giddiness of looking down, one does not feel it at all. It is difficult to explain why this should be so, but it is so. I suppose in such matters I am neither exceptionally steady-headed nor is my head exceptionally given to swimming. I can stand on the edge of cliffs of a thousand feet or so and look down, but I can never bring myself right up to the edge nor crane over to look to the very bottom. I should want to lie down to do that. And the other day I was on that Belvedere place at the top of the Rotterdam sky-scraper, a rather high wind was blowing, and one looks down through the chinks between the boards one stands on upon the heads of the people in the streets below; I didn't like it. But this morning I looked directly down on a little fleet of fishing boats over which we passed, and on the crowds assembling on the beach, and on the bathers who stared up at us from the breaking surf, with an

entirely agreeable exaltation. And Eastbourne, in the early morning sunshine, had all the brightly detailed littleness of a town viewed from high up on the side of a great mountain.

When Mr. Grahame-White told me we were going to plane down I will confess I tightened my hold on the sides of the car and prepared for something like the down-going sensation of a switchback railway on a larger scale. Just for a moment there was that familiar feeling of something pressing one's heart up towards one's shoulders, and one's lower jaw up into its socket and of grinding one's lower teeth against the upper, and then it passed. The nose of the car and all the machine was slanting downwards, we were gliding quickly down, and yet there was no feeling that one rushed, not even as one rushes in coasting a hill on a bicycle. It wasn't a tithe of the thrill of those three descents one gets on the great mountain railway in the White City. There one gets a disagreeable quiver up one's backbone from the wheels, and a real sense of falling.

It is quite peculiar to flying that one is incredulous of any collision. Some time ago I was in a motor-car that ran over and killed a small dog, and this wretched little incident has left an open wound upon my nerves. I am never quite happy in a car now; I can't help keeping an apprehensive eye ahead. But you fly with an exhilarating assurance that you cannot possibly run over anything or run into anything—except the land or the sea, and even those large essentials seem a beautifully safe distance away.

I had heard a great deal of talk about the deafening uproar of the engine. I counted a headache among my chances. There again reason reinforced conjecture. When in the early morning Mr. Travers came from Brighton in this Farman in which I flew I could hear the hum of the great insect when it still seemed abreast of Beachy Head, and a good two miles away. If one can hear a thing at two



miles, how much the more will one not hear it at a distance of two yards? But at the risk of seeming too contented for anything I will assert I heard that noise no more than one hears the drone of an electric ventilator upon one's table. It was only when I came to speak to Mr. Grahame-White, or he to me, that I discovered that our voices had become almost infinitesimally small.

And so it was I went up into the air at Eastbourne with the impression that flying was still an uncomfortable, experimental, and slightly heroic thing to do, and came down to the cheerful gathering crowd upon the sands again with the knowledge that it is a thing achieved for everyone. It will get much cheaper, no doubt, and much swifter, and be improved in a dozen ways—we *must* get self-starting engines, for example, for both our aeroplanes and motor-cars—but it is available to-day for anyone who can reach it. An invalid lady of seventy could have enjoyed all that I did if only one could have got her into the passenger's seat. Getting there was a little difficult, it is true; the waterplane was out in the surf, and I was carried to it on a boatman's back, and then had to clamber carefully through the wires, but that is a matter of detail. This flying is indeed so certain to become a general experience that I am sure that this description will in a few years seem almost as quaint as if I had set myself to record the fears and sensations of my First Ride in a Wheeled Vehicle. And I suspect that learning to control a Farman waterplane now is probably not much more difficult than, let us say, twice the difficulty in learning the control and management of a motorbicycle. I cannot understand the sort of young man who won't learn how to do it if he gets half a chance.

The development of these waterplanes is an important step towards the huge and swarming popularisation of flying which is now certainly imminent. We ancient survivors of those who believed in and wrote about flying

before there was any flying used to make a great fuss about the dangers and difficulties of landing and getting up. We wrote with vast gravity about "starting rails" and "landing stages," and it is still true that landing an aeroplane, except upon a well-known and quite level expanse, is a risky and uncomfortable business. But getting up and landing upon fairly smooth water is easier than getting into bed. This alone is likely to determine the aeroplane routes along the line of the world's coast-lines and lake groups and waterways. The airmen will go to and fro over water as the midges do. Wherever there is a square mile of water the waterplanes will come and go like hornets at the mouth of their nest. But there are much stronger reasons than this convenience for keeping over water. Over water the air, it seems, lies in great level expanses; even when there are gales it moves in uniform masses like the swift, still rush of a deep river. The airman, in Mr. Grahame-White's phrase, can go to sleep on it. But over the land, and for thousands of feet up into the sky, the air is more irregular than a torrent among rocks; it is—if only we could see it—a waving, whirling, eddying, flamboyant confusion. A slight hill, a ploughed field, the streets of a town, create riotous, rolling, invisible streams and cataracts of air that catch the airman unawares, make him drop disconcertingly, try his nerves. With a powerful enough engine he climbs at once again, but these sudden downfalls are the least pleasant and most dangerous experience in aviation. They exact a tiring vigilance.

Over lake or sea, in sunshine, within sight of land, this is the perfect way of the flying tourist. Gladly would I have set out for France this morning instead of returning to Eastbourne. And then coasted round to Spain and into the Mediterranean. And so by leisurely stages to India. And the East Indies....

I find my study unattractive to-day.

# OFF THE CHAIN

(December, 1910)

I was ill in bed, reading Samuel Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*, and noting how much the world can change in seventy years.

I had just got to the journey of Titmouse from London to Yorkshire in that ex-sheriff's coach he bought in Long Acre—where now the motor-cars are sold—when there came a telegram to bid me note how a certain Mr. Holt was upon the ocean, coming back to England from a little excursion. He had left London last Saturday week midday; he hoped to be back by Thursday; and he had talked to the President in Washington, visited Philadelphia, and had a comparatively loitering afternoon in New York. What had I to say about it?

Firstly, that I wish this article could be written by Samuel Warren. And failing that, I wish that Charles Dickens, who wrote in his "American Notes" with such passionate disgust and hostility about the first Cunarder, retailing all the discomfort and misery of crossing the Atlantic by steamship, could have shared Mr. Holt's experience.

Because I am chiefly impressed by the fact not that Mr. Holt has taken days where weeks were needed fifty years ago, but that he has done it very comfortably, without undue physical exertion, and at no greater expense, I suppose, than it cost Dickens, whom the journey nearly killed.

If Mr. Holt's expenses were higher, it was for the special trains and the sake of the record. Anyone taking ordinary

trains and ordinary passages may do what he has done in eighteen or twenty days.

When I was a boy, *Around the World in Eighty Days* was still a brilliant piece of imaginative fiction. Now that is almost an invalid's pace. It will not be very long before a man will be able to go round the world if he wishes to do so ten times in a year. And it is perhaps forgivable if those who, like Jules Verne, saw all these increments in speed, motor-cars, and airships, aeroplanes, and submarines, wireless telegraphy and what not, as plain and necessary deductions from the promises of physical science, should turn upon a world that read and doubted and jeered with "I told you so. *Now will you respect a prophet?*"

It was not that the prophets professed any mystical and inexplicable illumination at which a sceptic might reasonably mock; they were prepared with ample reasons for the things they foretold. Now, quite as confidently, they point on to a new series of consequences, high probabilities that follow on all this tremendous development of swift, secure, and cheapened locomotion, just as they followed almost necessarily upon the mechanical developments of the last century.

Briefly, the ties that bind men to place are being severed; we are in the beginning of a new phase in human experience.

For endless ages man led the hunting life, migrating after his food, camping, homeless, as to this day are many of the Indians and Esquimaux in the Hudson Bay Territory. Then began agriculture, and for the sake of securer food man tethered himself to a place. The history of man's progress from savagery to civilisation is essentially a story of settling down. It begins in caves and shelters; it culminates in a wide spectacle of farms and peasant villages, and little towns among the farms. There were wars, crusades, barbarous invasions, set-backs, but to that state all Asia,

Europe, North Africa worked its way with an indomitable pertinacity. The enormous majority of human beings stayed at home at last; from the cradle to the grave they lived, married, died in the same district, usually in the same village; and to that condition, law, custom, habits, morals have adapted themselves. The whole plan and conception of human society is based on the rustic home and the needs and characteristics of the agricultural family. There have been gipsies, wanderers, knaves, knights-errant, and adventurers, no doubt, but the settled permanent rustic home and the tenure of land about it, and the hens and the cow, have constituted the fundamental reality of the whole scene.

Now, the really wonderful thing in this astonishing development of cheap, abundant, swift locomotion we have seen in the last seventy years—in the development of which *Mauretanas*, aeroplanes, mile-a-minute expresses, tubes, motor-buses and motor-cars are just the bright, remarkable points—is this: that it dissolves almost all the reason and necessity why men should go on living permanently in any one place or rigidly disciplined to one set of conditions. The former attachment to the soil ceases to be an advantage. The human spirit has never quite subdued itself to the laborious and established life; it achieves its best with variety and occasional vigorous exertion under the stimulus of novelty rather than by constant toil, and this revolution in human locomotion that brings nearly all the globe within a few days of any man is the most striking aspect of the unfettering again of the old restless, wandering, adventurous tendencies in man's composition.

Already one can note remarkable developments of migration. There is, for example, that flow to and fro across the Atlantic of labourers from the Mediterranean. Italian workmen by the hundred thousand go to the United States in the spring and return in the autumn. Again, there is a

stream of thousands of prosperous Americans to summer in Europe. Compared with any European country, the whole population of the United States is fluid. Equally notable is the enormous proportion of the British prosperous which winters either in the high Alps or along the Riviera. England is rapidly developing the former Irish grievance of an absentee propertied class. It is only now by the most strenuous artificial banking back that migrations on a far huger scale from India into Africa, and from China and Japan into Australia and America, are prevented.

All the indications point to a time when it will be an altogether exceptional thing for a man to follow one occupation in one place all his life, and still rarer for a son to follow in his father's footsteps or die in his father's house.

The thing is as simple as the rule of three. We are off the chain of locality for good and all. It was necessary heretofore for a man to live in immediate contact with his occupation, because the only way for him to reach it was to have it at his door, and the cost and delay of transport were relatively too enormous for him to shift once he was settled. *Now* he may live twenty or thirty miles away from his occupation; and it often pays him to spend the small amount of time and money needed to move—it may be half-way round the world—to healthier conditions or more profitable employment.

And with every diminution in the cost and duration of transport it becomes more and more possible, and more and more likely, to be profitable to move great multitudes of workers seasonally between regions where work is needed in this season and regions where work is needed in that. They can go out to the agricultural lands at one time and come back into towns for artistic work and organised work in factories at another. They can move from rain and darkness into sunshine, and from heat into the coolness of

mountain forests. Children can be sent for education to sea beaches and healthy mountains.

Men will harvest in Saskatchewan and come down in great liners to spend the winter working in the forests of Yucatan.

People have hardly begun to speculate about the consequences of the return of humanity from a closely tethered to a migratory existence. It is here that the prophet finds his chief opportunity. Obviously, these great forces of transport are already straining against the limits of existing political areas. Every country contains now an increasing ingredient of unenfranchised Uitlanders. Every country finds a growing section of its home-born people living largely abroad, drawing the bulk of their income from the exterior, and having their essential interests wholly or partially across the frontier.

In every locality of a Western European country countless people are found delocalised, uninterested in the affairs of that particular locality, and capable of moving themselves with a minimum of loss and a maximum of facility into any other region that proves more attractive. In America political life, especially State life as distinguished from national political life, is degraded because of the natural and inevitable apathy of a large portion of the population whose interests go beyond the State.

Politicians and statesmen, being the last people in the world to notice what is going on in it, are making no attempt whatever to readapt this hugely growing floating population of delocalised people to the public service. As Mr. Marriott puts it in his novel, "*Now*," they "drop out" from politics as we understand politics at present. Local administration falls almost entirely—and the decision of Imperial affairs tends more and more to fall—into the hands of that dwindling and adventurous moiety which sits tight in one place from the cradle to the grave. No one has yet

invented any method for the political expression and collective direction of a migratory population, and nobody is attempting to do so. It is a new problem....

Here, then, is a curious prospect, the prospect of a new kind of people, a floating population going about the world, uprooted, delocalised, and even, it may be, denationalised, with wide interests and wide views, developing, no doubt, customs and habits of its own, a morality of its own, a philosophy of its own, and yet, from the point of view of current politics and legislation, unorganised and ineffective.

Most of the forces of international finance and international business enterprise will be with it. It will develop its own characteristic standards of art and literature and conduct in accordance with its new necessities. It is, I believe, the mankind of the future. And the last thing it will be able to do will be to legislate. The history of the immediate future will, I am convinced, be very largely the history of the conflict of the needs of this new population with the institutions, the boundaries, the laws, prejudices, and deep-rooted traditions established during the home-keeping, localised era of mankind's career.

This conflict follows as inevitably upon these new gigantic facilities of locomotion as the *Mauretania* followed upon the discoveries of steam and steel.



# OF THE NEW REIGN

*(June, 1911)*

The bunting and the crimson vanish from the streets. Already the vast army of improvised carpenters that the Coronation has created set themselves to the work of demolition, and soon every road that converges upon Central London will be choked again with great loads of timber—but this time going outward—as our capital emerges from this unprecedented inundation of loyalty. The most elaborately conceived, the most stately of all recorded British Coronations is past.

What new phase in the life of our nation and our Empire does this tremendous ceremony inaugurate? The question is inevitable. There is nothing in all the social existence of men so full of challenge as the crowning of a King. It is the end of the overture; the curtain rises. This is a new beginning-place for histories.

To us, the great mass of common Englishmen, who have no place in the hierarchy of our land, who do not attend Courts nor encounter uniforms, whose function is at most spectacular, who stand in the street and watch the dignitaries and the liveries pass by, this sense of critical expectation is perhaps greater than it is for those more immediately concerned in the spectacle. They have had their parts to play, their symbolic acts to perform, they have sat in their privileged places, and we have waited at the barriers until their comfort and dignity were assured. I can conceive many of them, a little fatigued, preparing now for social dispersal, relaxing comfortably into gossip,

discussing the detail of these events with an air of things accomplished. They will decide whether the Coronation has been a success and whether everything has or has not passed off very well. For us in the great crowd nothing has as yet succeeded or passed off well or ill. We are intent upon a King newly anointed and crowned, a King of whom we know as yet very little, but who has, nevertheless, roused such expectation as no King before him has done since Tudor times, in the presence of gigantic opportunities.

There is a conviction widespread among us—his own words, perhaps, have done most to create it—that King George is inspired, as no recent predecessor has been inspired, by the conception of kingship, that his is to be no rôle of almost indifferent abstinence from the broad processes of our national and imperial development. That greater public life which is above party and above creed and sect has, we are told, taken hold of his imagination; he is to be no crowned image of unity and correlation, a layer of foundation-stones and a signature to documents, but an actor in our drama, a living Prince.

Time will test these hopes, but certainly we, the innumerable democracy of individually unimportant men, have felt the need for such a Prince. Our consciousness of defects, of fields of effort untilled, of vast possibilities neglected and slipping away from us for ever, has never really slumbered again since the chastening experiences of the Boer war. Since then the national spirit, hampered though it is by the traditions of party government and a legacy of intellectual and social heaviness, has been in uneasy and ineffectual revolt against deadness, against stupidity and slackness, against waste and hypocrisy in every department of life. We have come to see more and more clearly how little we can hope for from politicians, societies, and organised movements in these essential

things. It is this that has invested the energy and manhood, the untried possibilities, of the new King with so radiant a light of hope for us.

Think what it may mean for us all—I write as one of that great ill-informed multitude, sincerely and gravely patriotic, outside the echoes of Court gossip and the easy knowledge of exalted society—if our King does indeed care for these wider and profounder things! Suppose we have a King at last who cares for the advancement of science, who is willing to do the hundred things that are so easy in his position to increase research, to honour and to share in scientific thought. Suppose we have a King whose head rises above the level of the Court artist, and who not only can but will appeal to the latent and discouraged power of artistic creation in our race. Suppose we have a King who understands the need for incessant, acute criticism to keep our collective activities intelligent and efficient, and for a flow of bold, unhampered thought through every department of the national life, a King liberal without laxity and patriotic without pettiness or vulgarity. Such, it seems to us who wait at present almost inexpressively outside the immediate clamours of a mere artificial loyalty, are the splendid possibilities of the time.

For England is no exhausted or decaying country. It is rich with an unmeasured capacity for generous responses. It is a country burthened indeed, but not overwhelmed, by the gigantic responsibilities of Empire, a little relaxed by wealth, and hampered rather than enslaved by a certain shyness of temperament, a certain habitual timidity, slovenliness and insincerity of mind. It is a little distrustful of intellectual power and enterprise, a little awkward and ungracious to brave and beautiful things, a little too tolerant of dull, well-meaning and industrious men and arrogant old women. It suffers hypocrites gladly, because its criticism is poor, and it is wastefully harsh to frank

unorthodoxy. But its heart is sound if its judgments fall short of acuteness and if its standards of achievement are low. It needs but a quickening spirit upon the throne, always the traditional centre of its respect, to rise from even the appearance of decadence. There is a new quality seeking expression in England like the rising of sap in the spring, a new generation asking only for such leadership and such emancipation from restricted scope and ungenerous hostility as a King alone can give it....

When in its turn this latest reign comes at last to its reckoning, what will the sum of its achievement be? What will it leave of things visible? Will it leave a London preserved and beautified, or will it but add abundantly to the lumps of dishonest statuary, the scars and masses of ill-conceived rebuilding which testify to the æsthetic degradation of the Victorian period? Will a great constellation of artists redeem the ambitious sentimentalities and genteel skilfulness that find their fitting mausoleum in the Tate Gallery? Will our literature escape at last from pretentiousness and timidity, our philosophy from the foolish cerebrations of university "characters" and eminent politicians at leisure, and our starved science find scope and resources adequate to its gigantic needs? Will our universities, our teaching, our national training, our public services, gain a new health from the reviving vigour of the national brain? Or is all this a mere wild hope, and shall we, after perhaps some small flutterings of effort, the foundation of some ridiculous little academy of literary busybodies and hangers-on, the public recognition of this or that sociological pretender or financial "scientist," and a little polite jobbery with picture-buying, relapse into lassitude and a contented acquiescence in the rivalry of Germany and the United States for the moral, intellectual, and material leadership of the world?

The deaths and accessions of Kings, the changing of names and coins and symbols and persons, a little force our minds in the marking off of epochs. We are brought to weigh one generation against another, to reckon up our position and note the characteristics of a new phase. What lies before us in the next decades? Is England going on to fresh achievements, to a renewed and increased predominance, or is she falling into a secondary position among the peoples of the world?

The answer to that depends upon ourselves. Have we pride enough to attempt still to lead mankind, and if we have, have we the wisdom and the quality? Or are we just the children of Good Luck, who are being found out?

Some years ago our present King exhorted this island to "wake up" in one of the most remarkable of British royal utterances, and Mr. Owen Seaman assures him in verse of an altogether laureate quality that we are now

Free of the snare of slumber's silken bands,

though I have not myself observed it. It is interesting to ask, Is England really waking up? and if she is, what sort of awakening is she likely to have?

It is possible, of course, to wake up in various different ways. There is the clear and beautiful dawn of new and balanced effort, easy, unresting, planned, assured, and there is also the blundering-up of a still half-somnolent man, irascible, clumsy, quarrelsome, who stubs his toe in his first walk across the room, smashes his too persistent alarm clock in a fit of nerves, and cuts his throat while shaving. All patriotic vehemence does not serve one's country. Exertion is a more critical and dangerous thing than inaction, and the essence of success is in the ability to develop those qualities which make action effective, and without which strenuousness is merely a clumsy and noisy protest against inevitable defeat. These necessary qualities,

without which no community may hope for pre-eminence to-day, are a passion for fine and brilliant achievement, relentless veracity of thought and method, and richly imaginative fearlessness of enterprise. Have we English those qualities, and are we doing our utmost to select and develop them?

I doubt very much if we are. Let me give some of the impressions that qualify my assurance in the future of our race.

I have watched a great deal of patriotic effort during the last decade, I have seen enormous expenditures of will, emotion and material for the sake of our future, and I am deeply impressed, not indeed by any effect of lethargy, but by the second-rate quality and the shortness and weakness of aim in very much that has been done. I miss continually that sharply critical imaginativeness which distinguishes all excellent work, which shines out supremely in Cromwell's creation of the New Model, or Nelson's plan of action at Trafalgar, as brightly as it does in Newton's investigation of gravitation, Turner's rendering of landscape, or Shakespeare's choice of words, but which cannot be absent altogether if any achievement is to endure. We seem to have busy, energetic people, no doubt, in abundance, patient and industrious administrators and legislators; but have we any adequate supply of really creative ability?

Let me apply this question to one matter upon which England has certainly been profoundly in earnest during the last decade. We have been almost frantically resolved to keep the empire of the sea. But have we really done all that could have been done? I ask it with all diffidence, but has our naval preparation been free from a sort of noisy violence, a certain massive dullness of conception? Have we really made anything like a sane use of our resources? I do not mean of our resources in money or stuff. It is manifest that the next naval war will be beyond all