have already taken to achieve degradation, if they toiled half as laboriously to make anything beautiful as they toiled to make everything ugly, if they had served their God as they have served their Pork King and their Petrol King, the success of our whole Distributive democracy would stare at the world like one of their flaming sky-signs and scrape the sky like one of their crazy towers.

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III SOME ASPECTS OF THE LAND

1. The Simple Truth
2. Vows and Volunteers
3. The Real Life on the Land

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I THE SIMPLE TRUTH

All of us, or at least all those of my generation, heard in our youth an anecdote about George Stephenson, the discoverer of the Locomotive Steam-Engine. It was said that some miserable rustic raised the objection that it would be very awkward if a cow strayed on the railway line, whereupon the inventor replied, "It would be very awkward for the cow." It is supremely characteristic of his age and school that it never seemed to occur to anybody that it might be rather awkward for the rustic who owned the cow.

Long before we heard that anecdote, however, we had probably heard another and more exciting anecdote called "Jack and the Beanstalk." That story begins with the strange and startling words, "There once was a poor woman who had a cow." It would be a wild paradox in modern England to imagine that a poor woman could have a cow; but things seem to have been different in ruder and more superstitious ages. Anyhow, she evidently would not have had a cow long in the sympathetic atmosphere of Stephenson and his steam-engine. The train went forward, the cow was killed in due course; and the state of mind of the old woman was described as the Depression of Agriculture. But everybody was so happy in travelling in trains and making it awkward for cows that nobody noticed that other difficulties remained. When wars or revolutions cut us off from cows, the industrialists discovered that milk does not come originally from cans. On this fact some of us have founded the idea that the cow (and even the miserable rustic) have a use in society, and have been prepared to concede her as much as three acres. But it will be well at this stage to repeat that we do not propose that every acre should be covered with cows; and do not propose to eliminate townspeople as they would eliminate rustics. On many minor points we might have to compromise with conditions, especially at first. But even my ideal, if ever I found it at last, would be what some call a compromise. Only I think it more accurate to call it a balance. For I do not think that the sun compromises with the rain when together they make a garden; or that the rose that grows there is a compromise between green and red. But I mean that even my Utopia would contain different things of different types holding on different tenures: that as in a medieval state there were some peasants, some monasteries, some common land, some private land, some town guilds, and so on, so in my modern state there would be some things nationalized, some machines owned corporately, some guilds sharing common profits,

and so on, as well as many absolute individual owners, where such individual owners are most possible. But with these latter it is well to begin, because they are meant to give, and nearly always do give, the standard and tone of the society.

Among the things we have heard a thousand times is the statement that the English are a slow people, a cautious people, a conservative people, and so on. When we have heard a thing as many times as that, we generally either accept it as a truism, or suddenly see that it is quite untrue. And in this case it is quite untrue. The real peculiarity of England is that it is the only country on earth that has not got a conservative class. There are a large number, possibly a majority, of people who call themselves conservative. But the more they are examined, the less conservative they will appear. The commercial class that is in a special sense capitalist is in its nature the very opposite of conservative. By its own profession, it proclaims that it is perpetually using new methods and seeking for new markets. To some of us there seems to be something exceedingly stale about all that novelty. But that is because of the type of mind that is inventing, not because it does not mean to invent. From the biggest financier floating a company to the smallest tout peddling a sewing-machine, the same ideal prevails. It must always be a new company, especially after what has generally happened to the old company. And the sewing-machine must always be a new sort of sewing-machine, even if it is the sort that does not sew. But while this is obvious of the mere capitalist, it is equally true of the pure oligarch. Whatever else an aristocracy is, an aristocracy is never conservative. By its very nature it goes by fashion rather than by tradition. Men living a life of leisure and luxury are always eager for new things; we might fairly say they would be fools if they weren't. And the English aristocrats are by no means fools. They can proudly claim to have played a great part in every stage of the intellectual progress that has brought us to our present ruin.

The first fact about establishing an English peasantry is that it is establishing, for the first time for many centuries, a traditional class. The absence of such a class will be found to be a very terrible fact, if the tug really becomes between Bolshevism and the historic ideal of property. But the converse is equally true and much more comforting. This difference in the quality means that the change will begin to be effective merely by quantity. I mean that we have not been concerned so much with the strength or weakness of a peasantry, as with presence or absence of a peasantry. As the society has suffered from its mere absence, so the society will begin to change by its mere presence. It will be a somewhat different England in which the peasant has to be considered at all. It will begin to alter the look of things, even when politicians think about peasants as often as they do about doctors. They have been known even to think about soldiers.

The primary case for the peasant is of a stark and almost savage simplicity. A man in England might live on the land, if he did not have rent to pay to the landlord and wages to pay to the labourer. He would therefore be better off, even on a small scale, if he were his own landlord and his own labourer. But there are obviously certain further considerations, and to my mind certain common misconceptions, to which the following notes refer roughly in their order. In the first place, of course, it is one

thing to say that this is desirable, and another that it is desired. And in the first place, as will be seen, I do not deny that if it is to be desired, it can hardly be as a mere indulgence is desired; there will undoubtedly be required a certain spirit of effort and sacrifice for the sake of an acute national necessity, if we are to ask any landlord to do without rent or any farmer to do without assistance. But at least there really is a crisis and a necessity; to such an extent that the squire would often be only remitting a debt which he has already written off as a bad debt, and the employer only sacrificing the service of men who are already on strike. Still, we shall need the virtues that belong to a crisis; and it will be well to make the fact clear. Next, while there is all the difference between the desirable and the desired, I would point out that even now this normal life is more desired than many suppose. It is perhaps subconsciously desired; but I think it worth while to throw out a few suggestions that may bring it to the surface. Lastly, there is a misconception about what is meant by "living on the land"--and I have added some suggestions about how much more desirable it is than many suppose.

I shall consider these separate aspects of agricultural distributism more or less in the order in which I have just noted them; but here in the preliminary note I am concerned only with the primary fact. If we could create a peasantry we could create a conservative populace; and he would be a bold man who should undertake to tell us how the present industrial deadlock in the great cities is to produce a conservative populace. I am well aware that many would call the conservatism by coarser names; and say that peasants are stupid and stick-in-the-mud and tied to dull and dreary existence. I know it is said that a man must find it monotonous to do the twenty things that are done on a farm, whereas, of course, he always finds it uproariously funny and festive to do one thing hour after hour and day after day in a factory. I know that the same people also make exactly the contrary comment; and say it is selfish and avaricious for the peasant to be so intensely interested in his own farm, instead of showing, like the proletarians of modern industrialism, a selfless and romantic loyalty to somebody else's factory, and an ascetic self-sacrifice in making profits for somebody else. Giving each of these claims of modern capitalism their due weight, it is still permissible to say that in so far as the peasant proprietor is certainly tenacious of the peasant property, is concentrated on the interest or content with the dullness, as the case may be, he does, in fact, constitute a solid block of private property which can be counted on to resist Communism; which is not only more than can be said of the proletariat, but is very much more than any capitalists say of them. I do not believe that the proletariat is honeycombed with Bolshevism (if honey be an apt metaphor for that doctrine), but if there is any truth in the newspaper fears on that subject it would certainly seem that large properties cannot prevent the thing happening, whereas small properties can. But, as a matter of fact, all experience is against the assertion that peasants are dreary and degraded savages, crawling about on all fours and eating grass like the beasts of the field. All over the world, for instance, there are peasant dances; and the dances of peasants are like dances of kings and queens. The popular dance is much more stately and ceremonial and full of human dignity than is the aristocratic dance. In many a modern countryside the countryfolk may still be found on high festivals wearing caps like crowns and using gestures like a religious ritual,

while the castle or chateau of the lords and ladies is already full
of people waddling about like monkeys to the noises made by negroes.
All over Europe peasants have produced the embroideries and
the handicrafts which were discovered with delight by artists
when they had long been neglected by aristocrats. These people
are not conservative merely in a negative sense; though there is
great value in that which is negative when it is also defensive.
They are also conservative in a positive sense; they conserve
customs that do not perish like fashions, and crafts less ephemeral
than those artistic movements which so very soon cease to move.
The Bolshevists, I believe, have invented something which they
call Proletarian Art, upon what principle I cannot imagine;
save that they seem to have a mysterious pride in calling themselves
a proletariat when they claim to be no longer proletarian.
I rather think it is merely the reluctance of the half-educated
to relinquish the use of a long word. Anyhow, there never
has been in this world any such thing as Proletarian Art.
But there has most emphatically been such a thing as Peasant Art.

I suppose that what is really meant is Communist Art; and that
phrase alone will reveal much. I suppose a truly communal art
would consist in a hundred men hanging on to one huge paint-brush
like a battering-ram, and steering it across some vast canvas with
the curves and lurches and majestic hesitations that would express,
in darkly outlined forms, the composite mind of the community.
Peasants have produced art because they were communal but not communist.
Custom and a corporate tradition gave unity to their art; but each
man was a separate artist. It is that satisfaction of the creative
instinct in the individual that makes the peasantry as a whole
content and therefore conservative. A multitude of men are standing
on their own feet, because they are standing on their own land.
But in our country, alas, the landowners have been standing upon nothing,
except what they have trampled underfoot.

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II VOWS AND VOLUNTEERS

We have sometimes been asked why we do not admire advertisers quite
so much as they admire themselves. One answer is that it is of their
very nature to admire themselves. And it is of the very nature
of our task that people must be taught to criticize themselves;
or rather (preferably) to kick themselves. They talk about Truth
in Advertising; but there cannot be any such thing in the sharp
sense in which we need truth in politics. It is impossible to put
in the cheery terms of "publicity" either the truth about how bad
things are, or the truth about how hard it will be to cure them.
No advertiser is so truthful as to say, "Do your best with our
rotten old typewriter; we can't get anything better just now."
But we have really got to say, "Do your best with your rotten old
machine of production; don't let it fall to pieces too suddenly."
We seldom see a gay and conspicuous hoarding inscribed,
"You are in for a rough time if you use our new kitchen-range."
But we have really got to say to our friends, "You are in for a rough
time if you start new farms on your own; but it is the right thing."
We cannot pretend to be offering merely comforts and conveniences.
Whatever our ultimate view of labour-saving machinery, we cannot offer
our ideal as a labour-saving machine. There is no more question of
comfort than there is for a man in a fire, a battle, or a shipwreck.

There is no way out of the danger except the dangerous way.

The sort of call that must be made on the modern English is the sort of call that is made before a great war or a great revolution. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound--but it must be unmistakably the sound of a trumpet. The megaphone of mere mercantile self-satisfaction is merely loud and not in the least clear. In its nature it is saying smooth things, even if it is roaring them; it is like one whispering soft nothings, even if its whisper is a horrible yell. How can advertisement bid men prepare themselves for a battle? How can publicity talk in the language of public spirit? It cannot say, "Buy land at Blinkington-on-Sea and prepare yourself for the battle with stones and thistles." It cannot give a certain sound, like the old tocsin that rang for fire and flood, and tell the people of Puddleton that they are in danger of famine. To do men justice, no man did announce the needs of Kitchener's Army like the comforts of the kitchen-range. We did not say to the recruits, "Spend your holiday at Mons." We did not say, "Try our trenches; they are a treat." We made some sort of attempt to appeal to better things. We have to make that appeal again; and in the face of worse things. It is this that is made so difficult by the whole tone of advertisement. For the next thing we have to consider is the need of independent individual action on a large scale. We want to make the need known, as the need for recruits was made known. Education was too commercial in origin, and has allowed itself to be largely swamped by commercial advertisement. It came too much from the town; and now it is nearly driven from the town. Education really meant the teaching of town things to country people who did not want to learn them. I suggest that education should now mean the teaching of country things to town people who do want to learn them. I quite admit it would be much better to begin at least with those who really want it. But I also maintain that there are really a great many people in town and country who do really want it.

Whether we look forward to an Agrarian Law or no, whether our notion of distribution is rigid or rough and ready, whether we believe in compensation or confiscation, whether we look for this law or that law, we ought not to sit down and wait for any law at all. While the grass grows the steed has got to show that he wants grass: the steed has got to explain that he is really a graminivorous quadruped. The fulfilment of parliamentary promises grows rather slower than grass; and if nothing is done before the completion of what is called a constitutional process, we shall be about as near to Distributism as a Labour politician is to Socialism. It seems to me first necessary to revive the medieval or moral method, and call for volunteers.

The English could do what the Irish did. They could make laws by obeying them. If we are, like the original Sinn Feiners, to anticipate legal change by social agreement, we want two sorts of volunteers, in order to make the experiment on the spot. We want to find out how many peasants there are, actual or potential, who would take over the responsibility of small farms, for the sake of self-sufficiency, of real property, and of saving England in a desperate hour. We want to know how many landlords there are who would now give or sell cheaply their land to be cut up into a number of such farms. Honestly, I think the landlord would have the best of the bargain. Or rather I think that the peasant would have the hardest

and most heroic part of the bargain. Sometimes it would
practically pay the landlord to chuck the land altogether,
since he is paying out to something that does not pay him back.
But in any case, everybody has got to realize that the situation is,
in no cant phrases, one for heroic remedies. It is impossible
to disguise that the man who gets the land, even more than the man
who gives up the land, will have to be something of a hero.
We shall be told that heroes do not grow on every hedgerow,
that we cannot find enough to defend all our hedges. We raised
three million heroes with the blast of a bugle but a few years ago;
and the trumpet we hear to-day is in a more terrible sense
the trump of doom.

We want a popular appeal for volunteers to save the land;
exactly as volunteers in 1914 were wanted to save the country.
But we do not want the appeal weakened by that weak-minded,
that wearisome, that dismal and deplorable thing that the newspapers
call Optimism. We are not asking babies to look pleasant while their
photographs are taken; we are asking grown men to meet a crisis
as grave as a great war. We are not asking people to cut a coupon
out of a newspaper, but to carve a farm out of a trackless waste;
and if it is to be successful, it must be faced in something
of the stubborn spirit of the old fulfilment of a vow.
St. Francis showed his followers the way to a greater happiness;
but he did not tell them that a wandering and homeless life would
mean Everything as Nice as Mother Makes It; nor did he advertise it
on hoardings as a Home From Home. But we live in a time when it
is harder for a free man to make a home than it was for a medieval
ascetic to do without one.

The quarrel about the Limehouse slums was a working model of the problem--
if we can talk of a working model of something that does not work,
and something on which only a madman would model anything.
The slum-dwellers actually and definitely say that they prefer their
slums to the blocks of flats provided as a refuge from the slums.
And they prefer them, it is stated, because the old homes had
backyards in which they could pursue "their hobbies of bird-fancying
and poultry-rearing." When offered other opportunities on some scheme
of allotment, they had the hideous depravity to say that they
liked fences round their private yards. So awful and overwhelming
is the Red torrent of Communism as it boils through the brains
of the working classes.

Now, of course, it might conceivably be necessary, in some wild
congestion and convulsion, for people's houses to be piled on
top of each other for ever, in the form of a tower of flats.
And so it might be necessary for men to climb on other men's shoulders
in a flood or to get out of a chasm cloven by an earthquake.
And it is logically conceivable, and even mathematically correct,
that we might thin the crowds in the London streets, if we
could thus arrange men vertically instead of horizontally.
If there were only some expedient by which a man might walk
about with another man standing above him, and another
above that, and so on, it would save a great deal of jostling.
Men are arranged like that in acrobatic performances; and a course
of such acrobatics might be made compulsory in all the schools.
It is a picture that pleases me very much, as a picture.
I look forward (in spirit of art for art's sake) to seeing such
a living tower moving majestically down the Strand. I like to think

of the time of true social organization, when all the clerks of Messrs. Boodle & Bunkham shall no longer come up in their present random and straggling fashion, each from his little suburban villa. They shall not even, as in the immediate and intermediary stage of the Servile State, march in a well-drilled column from the dormitory in one part of London, to the emporium in the other. No, a nobler vision has arisen before me into the very heights of heaven. A toppling pagoda of clerks, one balanced on the top of another, moves down the street, perhaps making acrobatic patterns in the air as it moves, to illustrate the perfect discipline of its social machinery. All that would be very impressive; and it really would, among other things, economize space. But if one of the men near the top of that swaying tower were to say that he hoped some day to be able to revisit the earth, I should sympathize with his sense of exile. If he were to say that it is natural to man to walk on the earth, I should find myself in agreement with his school of philosophy. If he were to say that it was very difficult to look after chickens in that acrobatic attitude and altitude, I should think his difficulty a real one. At first it might be retorted that bird-fancying would be even more appropriate to such an airy perch, but in practice those birds would be very fancy birds. Finally, if he said that keeping chickens that laid eggs was a worthy and valuable social work, much more worthy and valuable than serving Messrs. Boodle & Bunkham with the most perfect discipline and organization, I should agree with that sentiment most of all.

Now the whole of our modern problem is very difficult, and though in one way the agricultural part of it is much the simplest, in another way it is by no means the least difficult. But this Limehouse affair is a vivid example of how we make the difficulty more difficult. We are told again and again that the slum-dwellers of the big towns cannot merely be turned loose on the land, that they do not want to go on the land, that they have no tastes or turn of thought that could make them by any process into a people interested in the land, that they cannot be conceived as having any pleasures except town pleasures, or even any discontents except the Bolshevism of the towns. And then when a whole crowd of them want to keep chickens, we force them to live in flats. When a whole crowd of them want to have fences, we laugh and order them off into communal barracks. When a whole population wishes to insist on palings and enclosures and the traditions of private property, the authorities act as if they were suppressing a Red riot. When these very hopeless slum-dwellers do actually set all their hopes on a rural occupation, which they can still practise even in the slums, we tear them away from that occupation and call it improving their condition. You pick a man up who has his head in a hen-coop, forcibly set him on giant stilts a hundred feet high where he cannot reach the ground, and then say you have saved him from misery. And you add that a man like that can only live on stilts and would never be interested in hens.

Now the very first question that is always asked of those advocating our sort of agricultural reconstruction is this question, which is fundamental because it is psychological. Whatever else we may or may not need for a peasantry, we do certainly need peasants. In the present mixture and muddle of more or less urbanized civilization, have we even the first elements or the first possibilities? Have we peasants, or even potential peasants? Like all questions of this sort, it cannot be answered by statistics.

Statistics are artificial even when they are not fictitious,
for they always assume the very fact which a moral estimate
must always deny; they assume that every man is one man.
They are based on a sort of atomic theory that the individual is
really individual, in the sense of indivisible. But when we are dealing
professedly with the proportion of different loves or hates or hopes
or hungers, this is so far from being a fact that can be assumed,
it is the very first that must be denied. It is denied by all
that deeper consideration which wise men used to call spiritual,
but which fools were frightened out of calling spiritual, till they
ventured to say it in Greek and call it psychical or psychological.
In one sense the highest spirituality insists, of course, that one
man is one. But in the sense here involved, the spiritual view has
always been that one man was at least two, and the psychological
view has shown some taste for turning him into half a dozen.
It is no good, therefore, to discuss the number of peasants who are
nothing else but peasants. Very probably there are none at all.
It is no good asking how many complete and compact yeomen or yokels are
waiting all ready in smock-frocks or blouses, their spades and hay-forks
clutched in their hand, in the neighbourhood of Brompton or Brixton;
waiting for us to give the signal to rush back to the land.
If anybody is such a fool as to expect that sort of thing,
the fool is not to be found in our small political party.
When we are dealing with a matter of this kind, we are dealing
with different elements in the same class, or even in the same man.
We are dealing with elements which should be encouraged or educated or
(if we must bring the word in somewhere) evolved. We have to
consider whether there are any materials out of which to make
peasants to make a peasantry, if we really choose to try.
Nowhere in these notes have I suggested that there is the faintest
possibility of it being done, if we do not choose to try.

Now, using words in this sensible sense, I should maintain that there
is a very large element still in England that would like to return
to this simpler sort of England. Some of them understand it better
than others, some of them understand themselves better than others;
some would be prepared for it as a revolution; some only cling to it
very blindly as a tradition; some have never thought of it as anything
but a hobby; some have never heard of it and feel it only as a want.
But the number of people who would like to get out of the tangle
of mere ramifications and communications in the town, and get back
nearer to the roots of things, where things are made directly out
of nature, I believe to be very large. It is probably not a majority,
but I suspect that even now it is a very large minority. A man does
not necessarily want this more than everything else at every moment
of his life. No sane person expects any movement to consist entirely
of such monomaniacs. But a good many people want it a good deal.
I have formed that impression from experience, which is of all things
the most difficult to reproduce in controversy. I guess it from
the way in which numberless suburbans talk about their gardens.
I guess it from the sort of things that they really envy in the rich;
one of the most notable of which is merely empty space. I notice
it in all the element that desires the country, even if it defaces
the country. I notice it in the profound popular interest everywhere,
especially in England, in the breeding or training of any kind of animal.
And if I wanted a supreme, a symbolic, a triumphant example
of all that I mean, I could find it in the case I have quoted
of these men living in the most miserable slums of Limehouse,
and reluctant to leave them because it would mean leaving behind

a rabbit in a rabbit-hutch or a chicken in a hen-coop.

Now if we were really doing what I suggest, or if we really knew what we were doing, we should seize on these slum dwellers as if they were infant prodigies or (even more lucrative) monsters to be exhibited in a fair. We should see that such people have a natural genius for such things. We should encourage them in such things. We should educate them in such things. We should see in them the seed and living principle of a real spontaneous revival of the countryside. I repeat that it would be a matter of proportion and therefore of tact. But we should be on their side, being confident that they are on our side and on the side of the countryside. We should reconstruct our popular education so as to help these hobbies. We should think it worth while to teach people the things they are so eager to teach themselves. We should teach them; we might even, in a burst of Christian humility, occasionally allow them to teach us. What we do is to bundle them out of their houses, where they do these things with difficulty, and drag them shrieking to new and unfamiliar places where they cannot do them at all. This example alone would show how much we are really doing for the rural reconstruction of England.

Though much could be done by volunteers, and by a voluntary bargain between the man who really could do the work and the man who frequently cannot get the rent, there is nothing in our social philosophy that forbids the use of the State power where it can be used. And either by the State subsidy or some large voluntary fund, it seems to me that it would still be possible at least to give the other man something as good as the rent that he does not get. In other words, long before our Communists come to the controversial ethics of confiscation, it seems to me within the resources of civilization to enable Brown to buy from Smith what is now of very little value to Smith and might be of very great value to Brown. I know the current complaint against subsidy, and the general argument that applies equally to subscription; but I do think that a subsidy to restore agriculture would find more repayment in the future than a subsidy to patch up the position of coal; just as I think that in its turn more defensible than half a hundred salaries that we pay to a mob of nobodies for plaguing the poor with sham science and petty tyranny. But there are, as I have already hinted, other ways by which even the State could help in the matter. So long as we have State education, it seems a pity that it can never at any moment be determined by the needs of the State. If the immediate need of the State is to pay some attention to the existence of the earth, there really seems no reason why the eyes of the schoolmasters and schoolboys, staring at the stars, should not be turned in the direction of that planet. At present we have education, not indeed for angels, but rather for aviators. They do not even understand a man's wish to remain tied to the ground. There is in their ideal an insanity that may be truly called unearthly.

Now I suggest such a peasantry of volunteers primarily as a nucleus, but I think it will be a nucleus of attraction. I think it will stand up not only as a rock but as a magnet. In other words, as soon as it is admitted that it can be done, it will become important when a number of other things can no longer be done. When trade is increasingly bad, this will be counted better even by those who count it a second best. When we speak of people leaving the countryside and flocking to the towns,

we are not judging the case fairly. Something may be allowed for a social type that would always prefer cinemas and picture post cards even to property and liberty. But there is nothing conclusive in the fact that people prefer to go without property and liberty, with a cinema, to going without property and liberty without a cinema. Some people may like the town so much that they would rather be sweated in the town than free in the country. But nothing is proved by the mere fact that they would rather be sweated in the town than sweated in the country. I believe, therefore, that if we created even a considerable patch of peasantry, the patch would grow. People would fall back on it as they retired from the declining trades. At present the patch is not growing, because there is no patch to grow; people do not even believe in its existence, and can hardly believe in its extension.

So far, I merely propose to suggest that many peasants would now be ready to work alone on the land, though it would be a sacrifice; that many squires would be ready to let them have the land, though it would be a sacrifice; that the State (and for that matter any other patriotic corporation) could be called upon to help either or both in these actions, that it might not be an intolerable or impossible sacrifice. In all this I would remind the reader that I am only dealing with immediately practicable action and not with an ultimate or complete condition; but it seems to me that something of this sort might be set about almost at once. I shall next proceed to consider a misunderstanding about how a group of peasants could live on the land.

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III THE REAL LIFE ON THE LAND

We offer one among many proposals for undoing the evil of capitalism, on the ground that ours is the only one that really is a proposal for undoing it. The others are all proposals for overdoing it. The natural thing to do with a wrong operation is to reverse it. The natural action, when property has fallen into fewer hands, is to restore it to more numerous hands. If twenty men are fishing in a river in such a crowd that their fishing-lines all get entangled into one, the normal operation is to disentangle them, and sort them out so that each fisherman has his own fishing-line. No doubt a collectivist philosopher standing on the bank might point out that the interwoven lines were now practically a net; and might be trailed along by a common effort so as to drag the river-bed. But apart from his scheme being doubtful in practice, it insults the intellectual instincts even in principle. It is not putting things right to take a doubtful advantage of their being wrong; and it does not even sound like a sane design to exaggerate an accident. Socialism is but the completion of the capitalist concentration; yet that concentration was itself effected blindly like a blunder. Now this naturalness, in the idea of undoing what was ill done would appeal, I think, to many natural people who feel the long-winded sociological schemes to be quite unnatural. For that reason I suggest in this section that many ordinary men, landlords and labourers, Tories and Radicals, would probably help us in this task, if it were separated from party politics and from the pride and pedantry of the intellectuals.

But there is another aspect in which the task is both more easy

and more difficult. It is more easy because it need not be crushed
by complexities of cosmopolitan trade. It is harder because it is
a hard life to live apart from them. A Distributist for whose work
(on a little paper defaced, alas, with my own initials)
I have a very lively gratitude, once noted a truth often neglected.
He said that living on the land was quite a different thing from living
by carting things off it. He proved, far more lucidly than I could,
how practical is the difference in economics. But I should like
to add here a word about a corresponding distinction in ethics.
For the former, it is obvious that most arguments about the inevitable
failure of a man growing turnips in Sussex are arguments about
his failing to sell them, not about his failing to eat them.
Now as I have already explained, I do not propose to reduce all citizens
to one type, and certainly not to one turnip-eater. In a greater
or less degree, as circumstances dictated, there would doubtless
be people selling turnips to other people; perhaps even the most
ardent turnip-eater would probably sell some turnips to some people.
But my meaning will not be clear if it be supposed that no more
social simplification is needed than is implied in selling turnips
out of a field instead of top-hats out of a shop. It seems to me
that a great many people would be only too glad to live on the land,
when they find the only alternative is to starve in the street.
And it would surely modify the modern enormity of unemployment,
if any large number of people were really living on the land, not merely
in the sense of sleeping on the land but of feeding on the land.
There will be many who maintain that this would mean a very dull life
compared with the excitements of dying in a workhouse in Liverpool;
just as there are many who insist that the average woman is made
to drudge in the home, without asking whether the average man exults
in having to drudge in the office. But passing over the fact that we
may soon be faced with a problem at least as prosaic as a famine,
I do not admit that such a life is necessarily or entirely prosaic.
Rustic populations, largely self-supporting, seem to have amused
themselves with a great many mythologies and dances and decorative arts;
and I am not convinced that the turnip-eater always has a head like a
turnip or that the top-hat always covers the brain of a philosopher.
But if we look at the problem from the point of view of the community
as a whole, we shall note other and not uninteresting things.
A system based entirely on the division of labour is in one sense
literally half-witted. That is, each performer of half of an operation
does really use only half of his wits. It is not a question
in the ordinary sense of intellect, and certainly not in the sense
of intellectualism. But it is a question of integrity, in the strict
sense of the word. The peasant does live, not merely a simple life,
but a complete life. It may be very simple in its completeness,
but the community is not complete without that completeness.
The community is at present very defective because there
is not in the core of it any such simple consciousness;
any one man who represents the two parties to a contract.
Unless there is, there is nowhere a full understanding of those terms:
self-support, self-control, self-government. He is the only unanimous
mob and the only universal man. He is the one half of the world
which does know how the other half lives.

Many must have quoted the stately tag from Virgil which says,
"Happy were he who could know the causes of things," without remembering
in what context it comes. Many have probably quoted it because the others
have quoted it. Many, if left in ignorance to guess whence it comes,
would probably guess wrong. Everybody knows that Virgil, like Homer,

ventured to describe boldly enough the most secret councils of the gods.
Everybody knows that Virgil, like Dante took his hero into Tartarus
and the labyrinth of the last and lowest foundations of the universe.
Every one knows that he dealt with the fall of Troy and the rise of Rome,
with the laws of an empire fitted to rule all the children of men,
with the ideals that should stand like stars before men committed
to that awful stewardship. Yet it is in none of these connections,
in none of these passages, that he makes the curious remark about human
happiness consisting in a knowledge of causes. He says it, I fancy,
in a pleasantly didactic poem about the rules for keeping bees.
Anyhow, it is part of a series of elegant essays on country pursuits,
in one sense, indeed, trivial, but in another sense almost technical.
It is in the midst of these quiet and yet busy things that the great
poet suddenly breaks out into the great passage, about the happy man
whom neither kings nor mobs can cow; who, having beheld the root
and reason of all things, can even hear under his feet, unshaken,
the roar of the river of hell.

And in saying this, the poet certainly proves once more the two
great truths: that a poet is a prophet, and that a prophet is a
practical man. Just as his longing for a deliverer of the nations
was an unconscious prophecy of Christ, so his criticism of town
and country is an unconscious prophecy of the decay that has come
on the world through falling away from Christianity. Much may be said
about the monstrosity of modern cities; it is easy to see and perhaps
a little too easy to say. I have every sympathy with some wild-haired
prophet who should lift up his voice in the streets to proclaim
the Burden of Brompton in the manner of the Burden of Babylon.
I will support (to the extent of sixpence, as Carlyle said)
any old man with a beard who will wave his arms and call down fire
from heaven upon Bayswater. I quite agree that lions will howl in
the high places of Paddington; and I am entirely in favour of jackals
and vultures rearing their young in the ruins of the Albert Hall.
But in these cases, perhaps, the prophet is less explicit than the poet.
He does not tell us exactly what is wrong with the town;
but merely leaves it to our own delicate intuitions, to infer from
the sudden appearance of wild unicorns trampling down our gardens,
or a shower of flaming serpents shooting over our heads through
the sky like a flight of arrows, or some such significant detail,
that there probably is something wrong. But if we wish in another
mood to know intellectually what it is that is wrong with the city,
and why it seems to be driving on to dooms quite as unnatural
and much more ugly, we shall certainly find it in that profound
and piercing irrelevancy of the Latin line.

What is wrong with the man in the modern town is that he does
not know the causes of things; and that is why, as the poet says,
he can be too much dominated by despots and demagogues. He does not
know where things come from; he is the type of the cultivated Cockney
who said he liked milk out of a clean shop and not a dirty cow.
The more elaborate is the town organization, the more elaborate even is
the town education, the less is he the happy man of Virgil who knows
the causes of things. The town civilization simply means the number
of shops through which the milk does pass from the cow to the man;
in other words, it means the number of opportunities of wasting the milk,
of watering the milk, of poisoning the milk, and of swindling the man.
If ever he protests against being poisoned or swindled, he will
certainly be told that it is no good crying over spilt milk;
or, in other words, that it is reactionary sentimentalism

to attempt to undo what is done or to restore what is perished.
But he does not protest very much, because he cannot; and he cannot
because he does not know enough about the causes of things--
about the primary forms of property and production, or the points
where man is nearest to his natural origins.

So far the fundamental fact is clear enough; and by this time
this side of the truth is even fairly familiar. A few people
are still ignorant enough to talk about the ignorant peasant.
But obviously in the essential sense it would be far truer to talk
about the ignorant townsman. Even where the townsman is equally
well employed, he is not in this sense equally well informed.
Indeed, we should see this simple fact clearly enough, if it
concerned almost anything except the essentials of our life.
If a geologist were tapping with a geological hammer on the bricks
of a half-built house, and telling the bricklayers what the clay
was and where it came from, we might think him a nuisance;
but we should probably think him a learned nuisance.
We might prefer the workman's hammer to the geologist's hammer;
but we should admit that there were some things in the geologist's head
that did not happen to be in the workman's head. Yet the yokel, or young
man from the country, really would know something about the origin
of our breakfasts, as does the professor about the origin of our bricks.
Should we see a grotesque medieval monster called a pig hung
topsy-turvy from a butcher's hook, like a huge bat from a branch,
it will be the young man from the country who will soothe our fears
and still our refined shrieks with some account of the harmless
habits of this fabulous animal, and by tracing the strange and secret
connection between it and the rashers on the breakfast table.
If a thunderbolt or meteoric stone fell in front of us in the street,
we might have more sympathy with the policeman who wanted to remove
it from the thoroughfare than with the professor who wished to stand
in the middle of the thoroughfare, lecturing on the constituent
elements of the comet or nebula of which it was a flying fragment.
But though the policeman might be justified in exclaiming
(in the original Greek) "What are the Pleiades to me?" even he would
admit that more information about the soil and strata of the
Pleiades can be obtained from a professor than from a policeman.
So if some strange and swollen monstrosity called a vegetable
marrow surprises us like a thunderbolt, let us not imagine that it
is so strange to the man who grows marrows as it is to us,
merely because his field and work seem to be as far away as the Pleiades.
Let us recognize that he is, after all, a specialist on these mysterious
marrows and prehistoric pigs; and treat him like a learned man come
from a foreign university. England is now such a long way off from
London that its emissaries might at least be received with the respect
due to distinguished visitors from China or the Cannibal Islands.
But, anyhow, we need no longer talk of them as merely ignorant,
in talking of the very thing of which we are ignorant ourselves.
One man may think the peasant's knowledge irrelevant, as another may
think the professor's irrelevant; but in both cases it is knowledge;
for it is knowledge of the causes of things.

Most of us realize in some sense that this is true; but many
of us have not yet realized that the converse is also true.
And it is that other truth, when we have understood it, that leads
to the next necessary point about the full status of the peasant.
And the point is this: that the peasant also will have but a partial
experience if he grows things in the country solely in order to sell

them to the town. Of course, it is only a joke to represent either the ignorance of town or country as being so grotesque as I have suggested for the sake of example. The townsman does not really think that milk is rained from the clouds or that rashers grow on trees, even when he is a little vague about vegetable marrows. He knows something about it; but not enough to make his advice of much value. The rustic does not really think that milk is used as whitewash or marrows as bolsters, even if he never actually sees them used. But if he is a mere producer and not a consumer of them, his position does become as partial as that of any Cockney clerk; nearly as narrow and even more servile. Given the wonderful romance of the vegetable marrow, it is a bad thing that the peasant should only know the beginning of the story, as it is a bad thing that the clerk should only know the end of it.

I insert here this general suggestion for a particular reason. Before we come to the practical expediency of the peasant who consumes what he produces (and the reason for thinking it, as Mr. Heseltine has urged, much more practicable than the method by which he only sells what he produces), I think it well to point out that this course, while it is more expedient, is not a mere surrender to expediency. It seems to me a very good thing, in theory as well as practice, that there should be a body of citizens primarily concerned in producing and consuming and not in exchanging. It seems to me a part of our ideal, and not merely a part of our compromise, that there should be in the community a sort of core not only of simplicity but of completeness. Exchange and variation can then be given their reasonable place; as they were in the old world of fairs and markets. But there would be somewhere in the centre of civilization a type that was truly independent; in the sense of producing and consuming within its own social circle. I do not say that such a complete human life stands for a complete humanity. I do not say that the State needs only the man who needs nothing from the State. But I do say that this man who supplies his own needs is very much needed. I say it largely because of his absence from modern civilization, that modern civilization has lost unity. It is nobody's business to note the whole of a process, to see where things come from and where they go to. Nobody follows the whole winding course of the river of milk as it flows from the cow to the baby. Nobody who is in at the death of the pig is responsible for realizing that the proof of the pig is in the eating. Men throw marrows at other men like cannon balls; but they do not return to them like boomerangs. We need a social circle in which things constantly return to those that threw them; and men who know the end and the beginning and the rounding of our little life.

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IV SOME ASPECTS OF MACHINERY

1. The Wheel of Fate
2. The Romance of Machinery
3. The Holiday of the Slave
4. The Free Man and the Ford Car

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I THE WHEEL OF FATE