

THE ENGLAND OF TO-DAY

(From the Portuguese)



“As Others See Us”

Edited by JOSEPH JACOBS

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I

THE ENGLAND OF TO-DAY

‘AS OTHERS SEE US’

THE opinion of foreign contemporaries is said to be a foretaste of posthumous fame in the case of men. But with a nation foreign opinion is the only kind of reputation it can enjoy. Its own self-praise is no recommendation to other people; quite otherwise. If, then, we want to know how England stands in the eyes of the world, we can obviously only do so by looking through foreign spectacles. What a man's neighbours think of him forms the moral atmosphere of his life. Nor can he fail practically, if not explicitly, to learn how he is looked upon by his neighbours at almost every stage of his existence. But with nations it is different; they live a self-centred life. Only when the war-dogs are straining at the leash do they need to trouble themselves about what other nations think of them. Now it is just in the peaceful interludes that the misconceptions arise which lead to the horrors of war. England has only recently learnt how she is regarded abroad, and the revelation was a startling one. Her very ignorance was her danger.

Here, then, was an opportunity for doing a work

ENGLAND OF TO-DAY

FROM THE PORTUGUESE OF
OLIVEIRA MARTINS

TRANSLATED BY
C. J. WILLDEY



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highly organised on the Continent than in this country, and German and French criticism of our military, and even of our naval, system may be of exceptional interest and utility.

But the pen has now-a-days a double function for our instruction: it can write and it can draw. A few touches of black and white can often convey as much meaning—and as much misconception—as a whole chapter. It is hoped to include in this series a volume containing foreign caricatures of English life and contemporary history, which will not form the least amusing contribution from which we can learn how others see us.

It is possible that the present century will be the last in the world's history during which national types will remain distinct, at least so far as the more highly developed nationalities are concerned. Closer communication corrupts national peculiarities. Already national dress has practically disappeared in Western Europe, and what has happened with head-gear will soon follow with what it covers. Whether this process is for good or ill who shall say? but it is an inevitable one under the present system of commercialism. Still, the process is not yet complete, and meanwhile we have a final opportunity of seeing ourselves as others see us.

JOSEPH JACOBS.

of even national importance. There was danger in England's ignorance of the light in which other nations view her. Let us remove that ignorance, and one source of danger at least will disappear: that is the idea of the present series. It is to consist of recent books written by competent continental visitors to our shores: from them at least we may learn to see ourselves as others see us.

It will easily be understood that books like these will contain many errors of detail, many misconceptions of the English national character, but therein lies their value. It is by allowing for these misconceptions that we can understand, explain, and pardon. Englishmen have certain ideas of themselves, of their own character, which at many points will be found to conflict strongly with the idea formed abroad. The contrast is often as great as that between Mr. Punch's picture of John Bull and the comic Englishman of the continental caricaturist. But that very example may remind us that our conception of the English character may be as far removed from the truth as any foreign one. Who ever saw *Punch's* John Bull walking on English soil now-a-days?

For these reasons no attempt has been made to point out errors in the books of this series. It is not these that are instructive. But one can learn a little from the mistakes of the ignorant. Great care has been taken that the observers, whose names are in an English dress, shall be known, and our will be made to prevent

a further source of error slipping in during the process of translation, but for this the individual translators are responsible.

From what countries shall we select our continental critics? The larger the nation now-a-days, the more closely the type and ideal of national character approximates to a common form. It is probable, therefore, that we shall get less misconception, and therefore less instruction—and amusement—from French or German books on England than from the natives of other countries. The smaller nations, too, have less conscious rivalry with England, and are likely to report more impartially. Search has been made among them, and early volumes of the series will contain reports of Portuguese and Swedish sojourners among them. But French and German opinion will not be excluded, and it may be hoped that from half-a-dozen volumes an adequate idea will be obtained of what Europe thinks of England.

What applies to the national life in general has almost equal application to special departments of it. From time to time monographs appear by skilled continental critics contrasting their own with our system of education, of land tenure, of taxation, and even of art, for the Continent is j waking up to the fact that there is such a thing as English Art. Here we cannot hope for instruction from the unconscious errors of the foreign reports; for in this direction we need experience. In particular, the science of

CONTENT

I.	SOUTHAMPTON—THE LANDSCAPE	8
II.	LEAVING THE COUNTRY—ARRIVAL IN LONDON	20
III.	VIEW OF BABYLON	27
IV.	LONDON ARCHITECTURE	36
V.	THE PEOPLE	42
VI.	THE TYPES	49
VII.	HORSES AND WOMEN	57
VIII.	RICHMOND—HAMPTON COURT	65
IX.	SYDENHAM: A FESTIVAL—HURLINGHAM: A CLUB	73
X.	INSIDE A GENTLEMAN'S HOUSE	82
XI.	ST. PAUL'S — WESTMINSTER — BRITISH CITIZENSHIP	89
XII.	RELIGIONS	96
XIII.	THE VICAR OF BRAY AND HENRY VIII.	103
XIV.	PAINTERS	109
XV.	THE BRITISH MUSEUM—ENGLISH INTEL- LIGENCE	117
XVI.	THE STOCK EXCHANGE	124
XVII.	ENGLISH WEALTH	132
XVIII.	GREENWICH—SHIPPING	139
XIX.	EMIGRATION	146
XX.	BUFFALO BILL AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE	

		page
	KEY TO ASCOT	55
	61
	RTS	169
	MINSTER AND THE LAW-	
	176
	-HOME RULE	183
	NTAL QUESTIONS	190
	THE WORKING CLASSES—TRADES UNIONS	199
VIII.	THE NEW UNIONISM	206
XXIX.	MODERN HISTORY OF STRIKES	215
XXX.	CONTINUATION	228
XXXI.	ECONOMY OF THE OPERATIVE—ACTUAL	
	SOCIALISM	235
XXXII.	VISIT TO WHITECHAPEL	249
XXXIII.	POVERTY	257
XXXIV.	CRISIS OF CAPITALISM—INVENTIONS OF	
	SPECULATION	266
XXXV.	STOCK EXCHANGE OPERATIONS AND	
	CRISES	281
XXXVI.	PAST AND FUTURE OF CAPITALISM	293
XXXVII.	THE SALVATION ARMY	309
XXXVIII.	SPIRITUALISM	324

PREFATORY NOTE

THE following pages are a translation of the Portuguese work *A Inglaterra de Hoje* of Oliveira Martins, which was published at Lisbon in 1893, and contains an account of a visit paid by the author to England in the preceding summer.

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