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*WAGE-SLAVERY*

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***WAGE-SLAVERY***  
***BY J. K. HEYDON***

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## FOREWORD

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THE very first word of this book will convey to the reader that it deals with its subject in relation to a comparatively small, remote, and exceptionally placed field. And if he has purchased his copy because of an interest in the subject which centres in some other field, England or America perhaps, he may experience a wave of disappointment, and even of annoyance at having received no warning from the title.

But on second thoughts I think he will realize that, after all, the Labour Problem is the Labour Problem, presenting very much the same phenomena wherever it is viewed. Differences are chiefly differences in degree, or differences in stage of evolution. And for this reason an analysis applicable to any advanced community is likely to be more or less applicable also, either immediately or within the near future, to all other communities not fundamentally different in structure. I happen

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to be an Australian, and I have thought it best to write as one, confining myself to the field which I think I understand. But if there is any sense at all in what I have written it is not conceivable that it will be wholly without a moral of interest in other Anglo-Saxon countries.

If there is any sense at all in what I have written—ay, there's the rub! Much as I should like to say, These are my opinions and they are good opinions, it is not competent for me to say such a thing; the reader must judge for himself. But it is competent for me to say, and I do say, that the reader must be careful of one thing: so far as my opinions are concerned he is at perfect liberty to disagree with them, or, if he likes, to regard me as a criminal lunatic for holding and airing them; but not everything in the book *is* mere opinion, some of it is fact; and there is no sense in disagreeing with fact.

One fact in particular I invite you to bear in mind throughout the reading of this book. It is a very awkward fact, and one that seems either not to have been much noticed or else to have been thrust out of mind as too unpleasant to dwell upon. It is this: that workmen are not working as well as they can, or as well as they used to. This

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fact is undeniable. As to its explanation, that is perhaps a matter of opinion ; but I do not see how there can really be two opinions. The working man's outlook is changing. For better or worse he no longer stands in the position of Tennyson's Northern Farmer Old Style, but is coming to occupy that of the Northern Farmer New Style. He is working for himself and not for his master. It is *quid pro quo* with him.

Whether this change of spirit is beneficial or the contrary is wholly a matter of opinion ; it may mean progress, it may mean retrogression. But, whatever it means, there it is. And to sigh for the old spirit of pride in good work will not bring it back ; it is a thing of yesterday, and yesterday does not return. So that clearly the whole literature that deals with the problems of industry upon the postulate of a continuation of that old spirit is also a thing of yesterday, an obsolete system that must be replaced by another more conformable with things as they are. Not, indeed, to found such a system, but to point out modestly the lines which in my opinion it must follow, is the purpose of these pages. The method may be disagreed with, but the alternative cannot be a reversion to the ostrich tactics of pretending that the workers are



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giving their best while they are not. If you do not agree with me, produce a better idea.

Take England's case. Now at this very moment of writing, December 7th, 1923, the voters have turned down Protection, even very much modified Protection, in a way that not even its political opponents expected. And in my opinion the voters are perfectly right. It may, no doubt, be a case of their building better than they know; for in all probability the chief motive influencing many of them has been the superficial one of fear of a rise in the cost of living—a matter that would probably adjust itself after a short period of discomfort. But there is a very real case against Protection in England, and its kernel is just this: that England is done for, finished, if she cannot maintain her position on her merits. If she finds herself hard pressed, her men must work harder, her employers must think harder, she must increase her productivity—or go under. And Protection is an effort to avoid this only real means of salvation. It is an opiate. Anti-dumping and similar measures to prevent unfair competition are another thing altogether; and so is Imperial development; but simple Protection, which is an effort to stave off in the home market the effects of more efficient

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work in other parts of the world, is an admission of defeat. That way a healthy future for England does not lie ; her way lies along a new system, towards which this little volume is supposed to be something of a finger-post, of obtaining greater efficiency in production.

It has to be admitted that England's case is a hard one. She attained a position, and a population, by virtue of an early start, which imposes upon her a severe struggle now that other countries have largely made up their lee-way. Many thousands of her employers are not making, and perhaps could not possibly make, more than slender profits even with good work and low wages. And it would be simple impertinence to wave before the eyes of men in such a position the facile suggestions applicable to Australian conditions. I do not do so. But still, on a broad view, these marginal employers and their marginal trades are not England. In the last resort it may be necessary to see some of these industries, in which England is evidently not well equipped to compete, disappear, and their employés drift either to the same trade in countries where it is more congenial or to better-paying trades at home. As to the backbone of English trade, it is still healthy, still profitable,

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still able to hold its own against the world. And to that trade I should not be surprised if every word that I have written about Australia is applicable almost without modification.

As to America, the case is different, and I would rather pass it by in silence. Perhaps the time is not ripe to make suggestions in that quarter. In England the defects of the old system have come to light on account of the stress of economic conditions, and in Australia on account of the precise opposite. But in America, occupying a midway position, the stress of conditions is sufficient to oust the labouring man from effective self-assertion, but not sufficient to force employers to seek him out and study his wants. She can, and I suppose will, carry on with a social system that presents many ugly features.

Yet it is an odd circumstance that this book owes its existence in some measure to American influence. It was in 1903, while I was a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, that I met an American workman, a moulder, and, I suppose, an agitator, who lectured me upon the injustice of the American system of industry. His eyes kindled as he thundered out a demand to know whether I agreed with what he was saying. Of

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course he expected me to disagree ; and I shall never forget his face when I said I quite agreed with him. He opened his mouth once or twice like a fish, and said, "You're an exception." And then, after he had gathered his wits together again, he proceeded to bind me to a solemn promise to remember, if ever it should be in my power, to act on the principles to which I had agreed.

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