

**A
COMMENTARY**

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A commentary by John Galsworthy

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BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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A COMMENTARY

THE old man whose call in life was to warn the public against the dangers of the steam-roller held a small red flag in his remaining hand, for he had lost one arm. His brown face, through whose leathery skin white bristles showed, had a certain dignity; so had his square up-standing figure. And his light grey eyes, with tiny pupils, gazed with a queer intentness, as if he saw beyond you. His clothes were old, respectable, and stained with grease; his smile shrewd and rather sweet, and his voice—of one who loved to talk, but whose profession kept him silent—was deliberate and sonorous, with a whistling lisp in it, because he had not many teeth.

“What ’s your opinion?” he said one summer morning. “I ’ll tell you *my* experience: a lot o’ them that ’s workin’ on road jobs like this are fellers that the

Vestries takes on, makin' o' work for them—the lowest o' the low. You can't do nothing with them; here to-day and gone to-morrow. Lost dogs I call 'em. Most of them goes on the drink the moment they gets a chance, and the language that they 'll use—oh dear! But you can't blame them 's far as I can see—they 're born tired. They ain't up to what 's wanted of 'em nowadays. You might just as well put their 'eads under this steam-roller and 'ave done with it."

Then lowering his voice as though imparting information of a certain value: "And that 's just what I think 's 'appened to them already; that great thing"—he pointed to the roller—"that great thing goes on, and on, and on—it 's gone over them! Life nowadays has got no more feelin' for a man than for a beetle. See the way the poor live—like pigs, crowded all together; to any one who knows, it 's awful! An' morals—something dreadful! How can you have morals when you 've got to live like that—let alone humanity? You can't, it stands

to reason. Talk about democracy—government by the people? There 's no sense in it; the people 's kept like pigs; all they 've got 's like pig-wash thrown 'em. They know there 's no hope for them. Why, when all 's done, a working-man can't save enough to keep 'imself in his old age. Look at me! I 've lost my arm, all my savin's was spent when I was gettin' well; I 've got this job now, an' very glad to get it—but the time 'll come when I 'll be too old to stand about all weathers; what 'll happen? I 'll either 'ave to starve or go into the 'Ouse—well, that 's a miserable ending for a man. But then you say, what can you do? That 's just it—what *can* you do? Where 's the money to come from? People say Parliament ought to find it, but I 've not much 'opes of them; they 're very slow. All my life I 've noticed that. Very slow! Them fellers in Parliament, they 've got their positions and one thing and another to consider, the same as any other people; they 're bound to be cautious, they don't want to take no risks, it stands to reason.

Well, that 's all against reforms, I think. All they do, why it 's no more than following after this 'ere roller, treadin' in the stones."

He paused, looking dubiously at the roller, now close at hand. "See what a lot o' things the money 's wanted for. It 's not only old-age pensions, there 's illness! When I lost my arm, and lay there in the 'orspital, it worried me to think what I should do when I got out—put me in such a stew; well, there 's thousands like that—people with consumption, people with bad blood—'undreds an' thousands, that 's got nothin' to fall back on; they 're in fear all their time."

He came closer, and his voice seemed to whistle more than ever. "It 's a dreadful thing, is fear. I thought that I 'd come out a log, an' just 'ave to rot away. I 've got no family—but them fellers in consumption with families an' all, it 's an awful thing for them. Here 's a carriage—I must n't get to talking!"

He moved forward to the barrier, and stood there holding up his flag. A ba-