

**OLD WORLDS FOR NEW;  
A STUDY OF THE POST-  
INDUSTRIAL STATE**

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Old worlds for new; a study of the post-industrial state by Arthur J. Penty

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**ARTHUR J. PENTY**

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# Old Worlds for New

*A Study of the Post-Industrial State*

By

Arthur J. Penty

Author of "The Restoration of the Guild System"



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## PREFACE

THE scope of this volume is suggested by its title: *Old Worlds for New; a Study of the Post-Industrial State*, for it suggests at once the paradox which lies at the centre of our social life—that in order to go forward it is necessary to look back. This truth, which was apparent to many in the period before the war, is more apparent to-day. It needs little insight into social and political questions to realize that the war marks the close of an era in our civilization, and that the task of social reconstruction can no longer be delayed. After the war, when the artificial and unnatural prosperity which we now enjoy is over, all the glaring contradictions of our civilization will stand out before us, naked in their ugliness, and woe betide us if in that supreme crisis the mind of the nation is still unprepared. For no despot alone, however great, can save society. The success of any measures which he might initiate for the public good is conditioned and limited in every direction by the general level of thought and intelligence of the community.

Recognizing, then, the extreme gravity of the

situation and the importance of meeting the impending crisis with well ascertained and clearly defined principles, I am seeking now, by the publication in book form of a series of articles written for the *Daily Herald* in the months immediately preceding the outbreak of war, to secure a wider recognition for certain fundamental principles of social organization which in our day have fallen into desuetude. Their revival, I am convinced, must precede the task of social reconstruction. The experience of the war has not shaken, but has confirmed, my belief in their truth ; indeed, the war itself I cannot but regard as evidence in support of them. It is the inevitable catastrophic ending of a society which has chosen to deny the law of its own being.

Though the text of the articles has been revised for publication in a more permanent form, it remains substantially unaltered. Owing to the outbreak of the war the series came to a premature end ; and in consequence the last four now appear for the first time. As the reader will gather from the first article, they were written as an attempt to formulate a new policy for that section of the Socialist movement which was losing its faith in the all-sufficiency of the gospel of Collectivism. As such they failed in their more immediate purpose. By general consent a system of Local Guilds which I advocated was deemed not immediately practicable. With that decision I am in full accord. Nowadays I can see only too clearly that the gulf which separates such a

system from practical politics is, at the moment, too wide to be bridged, and that the National Guild policy, with its demand for the abolition of the Wage System, is the one for to-day. But National Guilds can have no finality about them. Once the workers find themselves in the possession of industry the fundamental contradictions which underlie industrialism will demand a solution, and that demand will set us on the road to Local Guilds. "The old ideas," once said Mr. Chesterton, "are coming in again; but they are coming in walking backwards." That is the way in which the Guild idea advances to-day. Under the guise of National Guilds, a step backward is being taken by men who for the most part fail to realize that industrialism is doomed to dissolution and decay.

For my changed attitude on this issue the war is responsible. Hitherto I had supposed that society was to be reconstructed by peaceable means—at any rate under the normal conditions which peace presupposes—for though I recognized the possibility of revolution, it did not appear to me to be in any way imminent. Under such conditions the National Guild proposal, to carry the citadel of capitalism by assault, appeared to me to be rather impracticable. Capitalism, I thought, would have to be undermined; it would never yield to a frontal attack. But the war has altered the factors of the problem. Capitalism no longer appears impregnable. Indeed, I feel the war by its reactions will break it up, and in all proba-