

**THE STRUGGLE FOR BREAD: A
REPLY TO "THE GREAT
ILLUSION" AND ENQUIRY
INTO ECONOMIC TENDENCIES**

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The struggle for bread: a reply to "The great illusion" and enquiry into economic tendencies by
Victor Wallace Germaines

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VICTOR WALLACE GERMAINS

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INTO ECONOMIC TENDENCIES**

THE STRUGGLE FOR
BREAD: A Reply to "The
Great Illusion" and Enquiry into
Economic Tendencies

By "A RIFLEMAN"

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THE STRUGGLE FOR BREAD

I

INTRODUCTORY : THE EVOLUTION OF COMMERCE

IT is an unfortunate result of our system of education that the average Englishman is sadly lacking in a sound grasp of the governing principles which regulate the commerce of our own country and of the world in general. This sounds an extraordinary statement, especially in view of the floods of diatribe and clap-trap poured upon us by the re-opening of the Fiscal Question, nevertheless it is a fact which few will deny that the average "educated" man forms his opinions rather from a few high-sounding phrases caught up from general conversation, or the pages of reviews, than from serious study of the works reviewed or of the questions dealt with. This is a busy age, our Public School system does not inculcate habits of serious systematic original thought, and thus it happens that we Englishmen are perhaps more

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than any other nation slaves to words and catch-phrases. Random expressions caught up in a hasty glance at some periodical, generally accepted conventions, and the prejudices wrought by early surroundings form and govern the ideas of our "educated" classes, with the inevitable result that these are as a whole as ignorant and prejudiced as the very illiterate classes and windy demagogues they profess to despise. The fact that a parrot talks does not give him intelligence to understand his own utterances ; the fact that a man or woman has learnt to speak of Darwin, Haeckel, Spencer, or John Stuart Mill, at a Public School or University does not imply that he has actually read the works of the great writers in question, and moreover understands them. Some people there are who cherish the somewhat Utopian ideal of a suffrage based neither upon property, sex, nor age, but upon education ; if by some miracle such a system could be brought into being : if an examination were to be taken into the education and intelligence of the inhabitants of these isles : and if by a still greater miracle it should happen that such an examination were to be intelligently conducted, one wonders which would be found to be most illiterate, the average product of our Public Schools and Universities, or that of our almost equally inefficient Secondary Schools ? It

would be a truly "sporting" question to decide. For this reason it appears to me necessary to preface the arguments which follow by a brief exposition of the fundamental principles of Political Economy. Those people who are already learned in the science are invited to pass on ; those, however, who doubt their thorough grasp of these fundamental principles, are warned that such a clear comprehension is absolutely necessary to the complete understanding of the chapters which follow.

Very well then. First, all wealth and all commerce is comprised in the possession and exchange of surplus products. The farmer exchanges his superfluous foodstuffs for such manufactured articles, clothes, boots, etc., as he requires ; the manufacturer equally exchanges his surplus of manufactured articles, and so on throughout every trade and industry. During the dawn of civilization, and even now amongst barbarous folk untouched by European influences, this exchange of products was carried on direct by barter. In those days men dwelt in scattered villages isolated by roadless forests, and each little village was a self-supporting community. The men tilled the ground, hunted the game, and fabricated their own rude weapons and agricultural implements ; the women spun their own

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rough cloth and helped with agriculture and other duties. Three ties, however, linked these scattered self-sufficing communities into a loose tribal confederacy : a common religion, a common tongue, and the influence of some great chieftain, a mighty warrior and the descendant real or fancied of some revered tribal leader half-forgotten in the mist of antiquity, idealized by generations of old men as old men love to idealize the heroes of their boyhood, and finally crowned with supernatural virtues and raised to the Pantheon of the Gods. Hard by the tomb of his mighty ancestor the tribal chieftain fixed his abode, and here at certain seasons of the year the petty village chieftains accompanied by their retainers flocked to pay worship to the tribal God, and homage to the living chieftain. Games would follow and feasting and merriment and along with all these there would be *trade*. Some of the villages might produce better pottery than others, others might be more skilled in manufacturing weapons, whilst others again might lie adjacent to richer hunting grounds and acquire wealth in pelts. So in the gathering of men and women from afar they would cast eyes at one another's belongings, exchanges would be made by the simple process of "swop," and the reign of commerce would have begun.

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What had originated as religious and political gatherings became fairs, which in some cases, outliving change of religion and loss of political significance, have survived even to the present day.

As the wealth and population of the scattered communities increased exchange by barter was found to present great difficulties. It was difficult to appraise the value of two bulky heaps of miscellaneous goods, and still more difficult to carry these about in search of a purchaser. The primitive merchant in fact found himself in a quandary, if he left his goods unprotected whilst he sought for what he wanted in exchange they would probably get stolen ; at the same time no one could come to him if he stood and guarded them for precisely the same reason, in that primitive state of society no one dared to leave his goods. The solution of this difficulty was found in the adoption of some article in general demand as a common medium of exchange. For instance, if the merchant exchanged his goods for some readily portable object in general demand, he could afterwards stroll around the fair and buy at his leisure with the certainty that this article would be promptly accepted. In just the same fashion now penny-postage stamps are often used as money simply because they are in general