

CHAPTER V
SCOTLAND AS IT IS

BY SIR JOHN ORR

LIKE MOST Scotsmen who have given the matter any thought, the author of this book feels that things are not going well with Scotland. Our contribution to the building up of the British Empire has been out of all proportion to our population, and yet our standard of living is lower than in England or the Dominions. We have had such a poor share in the prosperity of the Empire that it has been suggested that the whole of Scotland might well be scheduled as a distressed area. Many are beginning to feel a grudge against England on the ground that it takes away both our money and our ablest sons. In material prosperity we are largely dependent upon

DEPENDENCE UPON ENGLAND

England and in recent years we have lagged further and further behind. More and more London becomes the headquarters of Scottish business and administration. It has become the real capital of Scotland, with the result that our national culture languishes and we affect an English culture which is ill adapted to our national traditions and character.

This feeling of discontent with the trend of Scottish affairs finds expression in the attempt to form a national party, in the demand for a Scottish Parliament, in movements for the preservation of the Doric dialect or of the Celtic language. Efforts such as these, though well meant, deal with symbols rather than with realities. What difference would it make to the average workman or the dole drawer whether he speaks English or Doric? No Celt, whatever sentimental attachment he has for his clan, and however willing to attend clan gatherings or a Caledonian Ball in London, is willing to exchange a comfortable living in the South for a low standard of living in

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a Highland glen merely for the pleasure of speaking Gaelic instead of English. We are a very sentimental people, but we cannot live on sentiment, nor will our resentment at the greater prosperity of England be of much help in improving matters. The bleating of a national party about grievances against England is as futile as the grumblings of a man with a sore head.

This feeling of uneasiness and discontent with the present state of affairs in Scotland may well be the first step towards a national movement for the re-birth of Scotland. Mr. MacLehose has got beyond this first step. He looks not to the past or even the present, but to the future. In his vision he sees Scotsmen enjoying a fuller, healthier and happier life. He sees people at present living in the slums of our cities living on the land, developing the natural resources of the country. He sees the Highlands being repopulated with a vigorous independent race, retaining the characteristics of Highlanders and enjoying a stan-

WHAT 'SCOTLAND' MEANS

dard of living as high as the urban population of the South. He thinks that if his fellow-countrymen could see the vision as he sees it, we might have a great national movement to make his dream come true—a movement which would give our nation a purpose and an ideal which would enable it to find its soul and bring back the glory that was Scotland.

If we are going to plan to make Mr. MacLehose's dream come true, we must first be clear about what is wrong with Scotland. What is it we wish to change for the better? There would be difficulty at the present time in reaching agreement on this, because the word 'Scotland' raises a different conception in the minds of different people. Thus, for example, many wealthy people in London who have rented sporting lands in Scotland, and indeed a number of people who own land, think of Scotland as a place to get a holiday and enjoy sport. If the grouse are plentiful and strong, the rivers well stocked with salmon, and the weather good for deer stalking,

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then there is nothing wrong with Scotland so far as they are concerned. They have no immediate personal interest in the problems of Scotland's industrial belt. In the beginning of August they pass through that belt at night in first-class sleepers with the blinds drawn, to be met in the morning by ghillies and servants, who have already prepared in detail the campaign for the mimic warfare against the grouse, the salmon and the stag. Many of these people live in a world apart; some of them are engrossed with their sport, others with an aesthetic sense and a background of culture, are enjoying the incomparable beauty of mountain, moor and stream. It would be considered a little indelicate in a gathering of these people at a shooting lodge to talk about the sordid conditions of the slums of the South of Scotland, where thousands of the descendants of clansmen who once occupied the Highland glens now lead a sub-human existence.

But could we not build up the new Scot-

THE SPORTING INTERESTS

land without troubling these people? After all, they form only a very small proportion of the population. It is true they form less than one per cent. of the population, but their power is out of all proportion to their numbers. In our democratic country money is all-powerful. Indeed, in some ways democracy is the last stronghold of the power of money. These people can hire the means of moulding public opinion through the press, and by other more subtle means. Unless we are going to proceed by a revolution, we must carry these people with us. There is no insuperable reason why this should not be done. The new Scotland can be re-built without abolishing salmon fishing, or grouse shooting, or any other of the sports and pastimes of the wealthy, and without driving out the landlords, provided the wealthy and the landlords will realise that their responsibilities to the State are not discharged when they have paid their Income Tax. The ownership of land should carry the heavy

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duties and responsibilities which it originally did. A lord was originally a *hláford*, which means literally a loaf guardian. He was responsible for the food supply. He was chosen and given powers over his land so that he might be able to fulfil his duty of providing bread and all else that was necessary to enable his lands to rear and support first-class men. He was more trustee than owner. The retainment of the revenues from the land after getting rid of the duties and burdens of trusteeship which included local Government and responsibility for the welfare of the people on the land, justified the penalizing taxation on land and heavy death duties which brought ruin to the good landlord who was trying to fulfil his duties as well as to the bad who regarded the land as much his private personal possession as if he had created it.

Must we first have land nationalisation before the natural resources of our country can be exploited for the benefit of the people? As a matter of fact, we have already gone far in

RESPONSIBILITY OF LANDLORDS

taking the control of the land out of the hand of landlords. But we must have leaders to rule and direct, and a beneficent landlord who realises his duties and responsibilities and takes a pleasure in carrying them out, is more in accordance with our tradition than a bureaucracy which can be as stupid and tyrannical as a bad landlord. It is not so much a new system we need as the spiritual revival to which Mr. MacLehose refers which will enable us to work the present system better. If it cannot be done without nationalisation, then nationalisation must come; but let us see first whether or not the overwhelming majority of landowners are not willing to take their place as the leaders in the movement for the new Scotland. Many of them are first-class men of outstanding ability, who would be the leaders no matter what the system of land tenure was. These men are already carrying out the duties of a landlord, improving their lands in the interests of farmers and farm workers, and doing the work of local

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government with the respect and goodwill of the whole community. There are a few who still believe in the 'divine right', and act as if the land and the people on it are there merely to be exploited. These are the kind who would prohibit people keeping poultry on their land for fear the poultry might interfere with the pheasants, and are quite indifferent as to whether the people of Scotland need more eggs, or whether there are families on the land who might make a good living by keeping poultry. Landlords of that type are mostly of the older generation and out of touch with modern social and economic developments. They are survivals from the last century and should be allowed to die out in peace. Let us have a national awakening, and the great majority of landlords will rally to the movement for the new Scotland and be found amongst its leaders.

To another group of people absorbed in money-making the word 'Scotland' means the industries and trade of Scotland. If trade

THE MONEY-MAKING INTERESTS

is doing well, Scotland is doing well. They are interested to see unemployment figures going down, not so much because that means a higher standard of living for the men who were formerly unemployed as because it is an indication that business is good, more money is in circulation and better profits are being made. In the early nineteenth century our ruthless industrial leaders developed our coal fields, our iron and steel industries, our factories, our shipbuilding, and all the trade and business and money-making that arose from these, with a single eye to the making of money. That the common people of Scotland should share in this prosperity was no concern of theirs. They imported work people from Poland and from Ireland, who were accustomed to a very low standard of living and were therefore willing to work for low wages. That ruthless exploitation of the natural resources of Scotland in the selfish interests of a few has left us our legacy of desolation to be found in the industrial belts of Scot-

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land and the embitterment of the submerged working classes in the industrial areas. The gifts of money made to the Church and to charities is poor compensation for the damage done to the Scottish people. If in 1837 there had been a national plan for Scotland, we might have had all the wealth we have to-day with, in addition, a high standard of living for the Scottish people, and the people with wealth of money or of land would have enjoyed in security all the luxuries they have with the respect and goodwill of the people of Scotland. The smouldering discontent of the poorer classes and the more dangerous feeling of indignation among the youth of the better-educated classes, has its origin in the *laissez faire* doctrine of the early nineteenth century, according to which the general community existed to be exploited and the accumulation of wealth carried no responsibility other than occasional donations for religion, learning or charity.

But this worship of money and the

RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS

subservience of everything to money-making which reached its peak in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and made that period possibly the most degrading in the whole of the history of our country, has already begun to pass. In England, probably more than in Scotland, industrial leaders have begun to recognise their responsibilities. Many firms now realise that even from the commercial point of view it pays to have well-paid, well-fed and well-housed work-people. The good employers no longer regard their men as mere 'hands', but as human beings, and public conscience now demands that the first charge on any industry should be the adequate remuneration of workers.

We need our industrial leaders, and we need a system of competition which will enable the men with the qualities of leadership to rise to the top; but these men must have a wider vision than merely accumulating wealth for themselves. They must realise that our

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trade and our industries are national property to be run for the good of the country as a whole. This wider objective will not worsen the position of our industrial leaders. Scotsmen know a good man when they see him. They find it difficult to be servile: but what man, except someone with an inferiority complex, wishes servility? Leaders of the type we need will not only get all the emoluments they have, but in addition the loyal service and affection of their work-people.

Then there is a patriotic class far more numerous than the big landlords or the industrial and commercial magnates, to whom the word 'Scotland' is associated with the real or imaginary glories of the past. These are the enthusiasts who run the Burns Clubs, the Caledonian Clubs and Scottish societies for preserving the Doric or the Gaelic or promoting some other patriotic object. Every real Scotsman feels a glow of pleasure in the company of these people, who have a homely, honest enthusiasm and a pride of race which

PATRIOTIC SENTIMENTS

carries us back to the tales and sentiments of our childhood days. They render invaluable service by keeping the national spirit alive. But there is a danger of the patriotic fervour evaporating in mere sentiment. Harping on the past with no plans for the future is too suggestive of national senile decay. It may become too much like the old man, out of touch with the present, mumbling about the glories of his departed youth.

This patriotic sentiment might be turned to still better account if, instead of being so much absorbed with Burns and the life and literature of the past, it was more concerned with the problems of the present and the future. 'Bruce, Wallace and other Scottish heroes' is a favourite toast at St. Andrew dinners. These were great heroes, but the fight they fought is past and done with. We should remember them only as an inspiration for the heroes of to-day and to-morrow, who must fight if Scotland is to be made a land worthy of their descendants. Scotland has a great heritage of

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personal freedom and liberty of thought and speech. It is well that we should recall the leaders of the past and praise these great men and our fathers who begat us, but they should be recalled only as an inspiration for us, their sons, to emulate their great deeds. At Scottish gatherings our eyes should be on the future more than on the past. A suitable toast for Scottish gatherings would be 'The Scotland of 1957'.

We have spoken on some of the conceptions which the word 'Scotland' raises in the minds of different people. For our purpose when considering the future of Scotland, we will think in terms of the Scottish Nation which includes all classes, even the unemployed in the slums. Indeed, we must give these special consideration, because if we are going to plan for the improvement of our people, we should concentrate our efforts on where improvement is most needed. We must build the new Scotland from the bottom

THE PEOPLE'S WELFARE

upwards. We will assume that in national planning the natural resources of the country should be developed in the interest of the people of the country and that industry and trade must have as its ultimate objective the welfare of the people as a whole.

Now when we consider the condition of the people it may be difficult for many people to realise that there is any cause for uneasiness or discontent with the present state of Scotland. The standard of living of the people, even of the poorest, has been rising steadily, and rising faster in the last ten years than in any previous decade. Our people are better housed than they were; our children are better fed than their parents when they were children; the average length of life has been prolonged probably by as much as five or six years in the last decade; and social measures such as unemployment benefit and outdoor relief have taken the worst edge off poverty. There is much, therefore, to support the view that things are going well, and that it is only

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fanatics and fussy busybodies who talk about the need for a national movement for a new and better Scotland.

But we should compare the present conditions of life in Scotland not with the past, but with what they might be in the future. The conditions in all countries are improving. We might first see whether conditions in Scotland are improving as fast as conditions in other countries. Nearly all European countries have had for a number of years national schemes for raising the standard of living of the poor. Progress is being made more rapidly in some countries than in Scotland. If we compare Scotland not with the best but with its nearest neighbour, we find that, according to the Report of the Department of Health for 1936, the proportion of houses unfit for human habitation in Scotland is six times as great as in England. In Scotland 16·2 per cent. of the work-people are unemployed compared with 9·2 per cent. in England, and the number of people on outdoor relief is

HOUSES AND PHYSIQUE

proportionately greater. Hence, poverty is worse in Scotland than in England.

This poverty is reflected in both bad housing, to which I have referred, and in bad feeding. The bad housing and the poor feeding is reflected in the health of the people. Probably the best indication we have of the health and vigour of a race is the ability of its women to rear their children. Infant mortality rate in Scotland last year was 82 compared with 57 per thousand in England. Taking all the European countries, Scotland stands fourteenth on the list. The idea held by many people that compared with other races we Scots are a hardy race of outstanding physique is no longer true. At one time we probably were outstanding in physique, and though we have improved, other races have improved so much more rapidly that we are now far down the list. The extent to which England has shot ahead of us in recent years is shown by the fact that although our infant mortality rate is now 50 per cent. higher than in

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England, in 1900 it was actually 15 per cent. lower.

There is no need to continue the rather distressing comparison of the standard of living and the health and physique of Scotland with England or Scandinavian countries, where the standard is even higher than it is in England. Let any person walk through the slums of our cities and look at what Mr. Elliot referred to the other day in the House of Commons as 'the heaped up castles of misery', where human beings are huddled together, and consider the kind of life that must be led, under conditions where the income is insufficient to purchase sufficient food to rear healthy children, where three or four families have only one w.c. among them. Let him look at the children there and compare them with the children of the well-to-do. Let him look at the women of between thirty and forty and compare them with women of the same age among the well-to-do. That is the fate of a large proportion of the Highland population

DESCENDANTS OF CLANSMEN

which was drained into the cities in the nineteenth century. Under these conditions we find the descendants of clansmen, while the homesteads of their grandfathers in the Highland glens are crumbling to ruins. It is under these conditions that about a third of the children of Scotland are being reared. We cannot regard Scotland as prosperous while these conditions last. This is not the Scotland we wish to hand on to our sons.