
Introduction to Robert Blatchford's Book,
Merrie England

Chicago, Dec. 1, 1897.

In giving to the world *Merrie England*, Robert Blatchford has rendered a service of inestimable value to humanity.ⁱ It has been read, and is being read, and will continue to be read by millions. No book has done so much to convert the masses to socialism.

The secret of the author's success is his rare power to make himself understood by the common people.

To read this practical exposition of the social question is to be convinced that the author has given it careful and thorough study and that he not only diagnoses correctly the nature of the malady that afflicts the social world, but that he has the only true remedy and knows how to apply it.

For the purposes of this edition, Chapter IV, which deals with the question, "Can England Feed Herself?" has been eliminated. Some references and footnotes not adapted to American conditions have also been omitted, and the whole edition has been carefully edited and arranged to suit the special demands of our readers.

Nothing like a review of the book need be attempted in this introduction. The book speaks for itself and this and succeeding editions are designed to place it within the reach of all.ⁱⁱ

The workingman who has not read *Merrie England* should do so at once. He will thank us for the suggestion. And he who has read it should see to it, so far as he is able, that it reaches those who are still in the dark. It contains a message of hope to the despondent, of comfort to the heavy-laden, and of good cheer to all mankind.

Here in America there is urgent need that this masterful production of Robert Blatchford, the inspired evangel of Social Emancipation, be widely read, and if each of our readers will aid in extending its circulation, the cause of socialism will be rapidly advanced, and the Social Democracy of America will be triumphant soon after the sun of the twentieth century lights the world.

Published in Robert Blatchford. *Merrie England*. Social Democracy Edition. Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1897; pg. 2.

ⁱ Robert Blatchford (1851-1943) was a British journalist who turned to the Fabian socialist movement late in the 1880s. He founded the socialist weekly *The Clarion* in 1891 and it was in the pages of that publication that *Merrie England*, a work of political fiction, was first serialized. The chapters were collected and published as a book in 1894, which was in turn adapted for an American audience and published in the United States beginning in 1895. The book stands with Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, Edward Belamy's *Looking Backward*, and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* as the most influential socialist propaganda works of the 1890s in the English-speaking world.

ⁱⁱ The 190-page "Social Democracy Edition," of which Debs speaks, was printed on inexpensive paper and bore a cover price of just six cents per copy, with quantity discounts available that could lower the cost to as little as three cents per unit.