

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE PEOPLE

05	In looking back through the history of our country, there is one period when by common consent men and women who worked with their hands were better off than at any time before or since. It may be doubted
10	indeed whether any European community ever enjoyed such rough plenty as the English yeomen, craftsmen, and labourers of the fifteenth century. These days of well-being for the mass of the people lasted from the end of the fourteenth until the first quarter of the
15	sixteenth century. [...] Great risings of the peasantry had obtained or confirmed for the people the freedom from personal slavery, and the security of their own property, which made the English of the fifteenth
20	century the envy of Europe. Merry England it was then in spite of all drawbacks; and the conditions of life which gave the workers such comfort // and prosperity were not upset by any of the troubles of the time. Defeat abroad and pestilence at home, civil wars, and
25	formidable insurrections did not seriously affect the general welfare. The main body of the workers fought their own fights, and returned peaceably to their towns or homesteads, looking on with the calmest indifference whilst the barons and their retainers cut one another's throats for the cause of York or
30	Lancaster. [...] The homes of the people were filthy, [N: Not worse, however, than the cottages of our agricultural labourers to-day in any respect. See Chapter X.] and much that we now hold to be necessary for health was
35	thought quite useless; nevertheless the finest buildings in these islands are of this date, whilst the stone-carving and woodwork, the stained glass and tapestry which remain, testify to taste and training of a very high order. As to the labourers, they ate, drank, and worked well, and foreigners gazed in wonder at the rich clothing, sturdy frames, and independent mien of our English common men.

Pp. 1-2 in HYNDMAN, H.M., *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883, xii+492 p.