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Reade, W. H. V. 1872-1943.

### **Publication/Creation**

Oxford : B. H. Blackwell, 1919.

### **Persistent URL**

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**THE  
REVOLT OF LABOUR  
AGAINST  
CIVILISATION**

by  
**W. H. V. READE**

**OXFORD : B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET**



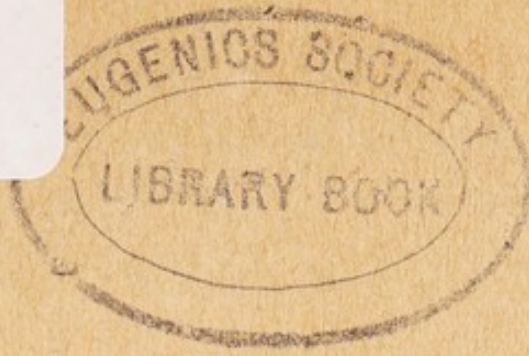


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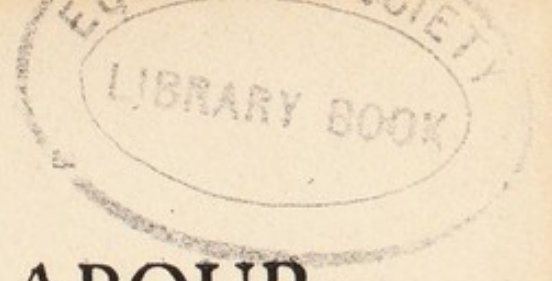
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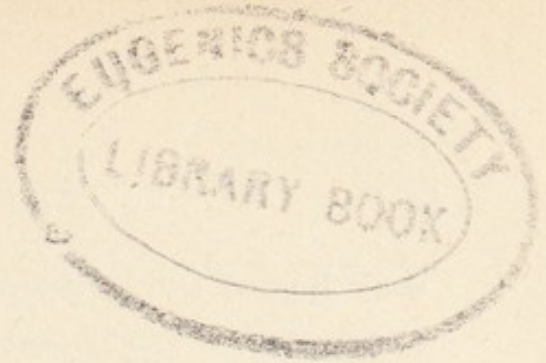
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# THE REVOLT OF LABOUR AGAINST CIVILISATION

## I

### THE WAR AND THE WAR OF IDEAS

IN every supreme conflict of humanity the true nature of the antagonism is but slowly revealed. The shrill clamour of party cries, or the deeper roll of drums and cannon, confounds the judgment; a skirmish will often be misnamed a battle; the overthrow of a spurious reputation will pass as the triumph of an immortal cause. Not unreasonably, therefore, when the world itself has been shaken by the clash of immeasurable armies, we shall wish to be assured that the downfall of Germany is indeed the achievement of peace and security, not the prelude to a wider catastrophe. From the very beginning of hostilities there has been no lack of declarations that we were engaged in a "war of ideas." Upon this thesis statesmen and professors have composed weighty discourses, and in the lighter currency of journalism the same note has jingled loudly from day to day. Nor is it difficult to formulate the antitheses of moral and political ideas in which the positions of the rival belligerents have commonly been defined. The German aspiration to mastery of the world



was based upon doctrines well recognised and publicly expressed. Their own type of civilisation was superior to all others; war, carried even to the point of extermination, was the lawful mode of imposing their will on inferior races; autocracy was the only political instrument adapted to their imperial mission. On the other side stood the propositions, announced with ever increasing fervour, that the Germanic power was a barbarous revival, that war was an intolerable way of promoting a cause or settling a dispute, that democracy alone could make liberty secure. Barbarism or civilisation; force or justice; tyranny or freedom. It certainly sounds like a conflict of first principles and a division of mankind into ultimate halves.

For me, however, the question is whether the war of nations has wholly coincided with the war of ideas, or whether the true opposition of spiritual forces may not thus far have been obscured for us by an artificial division of the combatants. Without condoning in any way the crimes of Germany, without regretting for an instant our resistance to her preposterous claims, I still am tempted to compare the terrific struggle now formally concluded to a "curtain-raiser," fitted only to distract the attention of the audience before the serious drama is presented on the stage. What the Germans, so it seems to me, have compelled us to face is not so much the final collision of good and evil as the staggering fact that sheer absurdity can deluge the world in blood. Had our age boasted a second Cervantes, the grotesque pretensions of the Teuton, his distorted philosophy, his fantastic version of history, his solemn conviction that God had selected him for the task of human regeneration, might well have been



drowned in laughter. As it is, the cost has been millions of lives.

But when we turn away, so far as now is possible, from these pasteboard supermen and their devastating folly, there is still, I believe, room for scepticism about the accepted way of presenting the war of ideas. First, as to the question of higher and lower civilisations, we repel the claim of German Kultur to universal dominion, but do we (in the light of history *can* we?) deny that a presumably higher civilisation always tends to absorb a lower, or that the more civilised nations have always regarded the extension of their authority as a privilege, a duty, and a right? I am not speaking of mere lust for domination, such as we find, perhaps, in some of the ancient oriental empires; still less of those waves of migrating peoples which have submerged Europe from time to time. I am not arguing that wars of conquest have always been inspired by the desire to civilise; but did Alexander, for instance, doubt his right to Hellenize, or Caesar his to Latinize the habitable world? And has the judgment of history condemned their ambition, however it may have criticised some parts of their performance? More significant than any examples drawn from European history is the attitude of Europe as a whole towards the East. Here we are all of us—English, French, Germans, and Italians—pretty much on a level, not indeed in methods or results, but in the main conviction that Western life represents the sole way of progress, and that when we carry our machines and our political ideas to Africa and Asia we are illuminating the darkness of ignorance and rousing the somnolent to consciousness of life. We do not advertise a



gospel of force, often enough we condemn the acts of hot-headed evangelists ; but whenever the benevolence of our intentions is misunderstood a war of conquest is all but inevitable, and sometimes, too, we have had to make the embarrassing admission that the mere proximity of Western civilisation has disastrous effects upon the simpler Oriental. Lamenting the necessity of bloodshed and the influence of our vices (or is it our virtues?) upon backward peoples, we continue to justify our efforts and to accept the incidental misfortunes as a price not too heavy to pay for the blessings that we bring.

What, then, is the difference between the general procedure of all civilising powers (to say nothing of missionary religions) and the particular attempt of the Germans? Apparently the difference lies not in the principle, but in the peculiar fatuity of the Teutonic mind. When the Romans conquered Greece they had sense enough to recognise their own limitations. They borrowed the culture of the vanquished instead of destroying it, and produced at least one emperor who was ready to profit by the Hellenic wisdom of a slave. Perhaps, too, we may claim for the Western nations in modern times something of this Roman modesty. We have discovered at least that the Chinese are artists, and that the cultivated classes of India and Persia cannot lightly be dismissed as barbarians. But to the sublime impertinence of the Pan-Germans there is no limit. All civilisation is their prerogative. Famous men nominally ascribed to other nations can be endowed, like Dante, with a Teutonic origin, or, like Shakespeare, can be nationalised in their spiritual home. There will then remain, outside the sacred fatherland, only



degenerate peoples, whom it is a positive duty to suppress.

All this, I repeat, is not the eruption of a Satanic principle, to which some other principle, embodied in the Allies, is mortally opposed. It is delirious and dangerous nonsense, but it remains a burlesque application of a principle which, historically, all the greater nations of the West have allowed. Nothing is gained, therefore, by meeting the arrogance of our enemies with rhetorical extravagance in the opposite direction. A victory of Prussianism, however disastrous for a time to the free life of France and England, would not have meant the triumph of a lower over a higher civilisation, for the simple reason that there is no radical difference in culture between Germany and Europe as a whole. For a generation or two before the war we were too easily impressed with the intellectual gifts of the Germans; in the future we shall have a keener eye for their peculiar defects; but we shall remember that the sources of their enlightenment are the same as ours, and the best of their work in philosophy, music, and letters (most of it prior to the modern German Empire) we shall continue to study as before. Richly as they have earned the name of Huns by their military conduct, it would be impossible to misinterpret the war more utterly than by comparing it to the invasions of the Roman provinces which brought ancient civilisation to an end.

But what of militarism? Were we not bound to contest the doctrine which scoffs at the sanctity of treaties and declares the right of superior force to override all moral obligations? Undoubtedly we were. Yet here, too, it is possible to exaggerate the danger



and to misconceive the point. The principles known as Machiavellian (especially, perhaps, to those who have omitted to read Machiavelli) carry within them the seeds of their own defeat. Rooted in contradiction, they proclaim at once the absolute right of established force and the absolute right of rebellion whenever there is a chance of success. No such principles will ever achieve and retain the mastery of the world. I doubt, however, whether German militarism can be reduced to the naked logic of force. If its apostles meant rather that outrage and treachery were the proper and legitimate weapons of a higher civilisation, we pass from the Machiavellian to the Jesuitical style, and have to scrutinise the difficult relation of means to ends. I cannot enter here into that venerable controversy. Let us grant that the German principles were infamous, but let us not imagine that, even so, the moral is plain. For, the more we insist on the badness of the German case, the better must the case of their opponents appear, and the more clearly do we point to the inference that war itself is not wholly to be condemned. Fundamentally, what impels men and nations to fight is not bad causes, but causes which they believe to be good ; and for this reason all who profess a faith, and will not in the last resort (be they soldiers or conscientious objectors) give their lives for it, must expect to be branded as impostors. There is not even much to be gained by answering that the German cause at least was indefensible ; for, relatively to the origin of wars, a cause that is good and another that is only *believed* to be good are identical. The real obstacle to the success of any League of Nations is man's sense of the difference between right and



wrong. We return, therefore, to the mental blindness of the Germans. They believed in their right to supremacy, they believed that triumphant force vindicates itself, and that "frightfulness" is the way to swift and certain victory; and because their beliefs were false and their principles self-destructive they were doomed from the first to fail.

There remains the antithesis of autocratic and popular government. It will scarcely be alleged that this was a primary issue at the opening of the war. Even the Germans were not consciously and openly advocating the principle of autocracy, and it is certain that we did not enter the lists with the avowed object of liberating any people from its masters. If the Turks or the Germans preferred despotism to democracy it was (and is) no possible business of ours. We accepted, too, the powerful aid of Russia, and should have been glad enough to number either Turkey or Bulgaria among our allies. At a later stage in the war, with the collapse of Russia and the intervention of America, it became evident that all the autocrats were on one side and all the democracies on the other; and thus by degrees we arrived at the conviction that our higher aim was "to make the world safe for democracy."

I shall not deny that this was a genuine movement of thought, but, before deciding that it fully discovers the inward meaning of the war, we ought to advance with some caution. So far as the Germans believed in autocracy as a military expedient, it seems that, after all, we agreed with them. For we established at last a single command on the western front, and in politics we suspended constitutional government and entrusted our fortunes to a small cabal, which came more and



more to resemble a dictatorship. These, of course, were only temporary measures, but, even when we take a wider view of the question, the historical connection between militarism and autocracy may be variously explained. In some instances autocracy does not of itself produce militarism, but military genius, combined with other qualities, carries an individual to absolute power. Julius Caesar and Napoleon would, I suppose, be the most illustrious examples. Men of that stature are inspired with the invincible self-confidence of greatness; the condition of the world provides them with opportunity, and they follow their star to its autocratic destination. In a larger number of instances, however, another interpretation of the facts is required. When Spinoza tells us that every monarchy is a concealed aristocracy, we may expand a little the sense of his words, and take him to mean that the nominal autocrat is rarely more than the cloak and sword of his ministers. It will thus be not the strength of kings and emperors but their weakness that threatens the world with disaster. So it was with the late Tsar, with the Sultan and, I should venture to add, with the Kaiser. The Kaiser, indeed, was not ostensibly weak like Nicholas. He could strut about finely on his gorgeous stage, twirling his sceptre in the style of a drum-major and bidding the spectators applaud or perish. In his youth he could even get rid of Bismarck. Nevertheless, his stupendous vanity and almost insane belief in his own omnipotence made him the perfect instrument of the cool-headed schemers who formed the oligarchy behind the throne. Divested at last of kingly garments, no man can ever have looked less of a king. He had



spent his life in inflating himself, and then, at the hour of crisis, the gas, like its owner, escaped. Militarism, one might thus plausibly argue, is not produced by autocracy, but either produces or uses it according as the autocrat is a reality or a sham.

Yet, even if that interpretation of history be accepted, we do not get rid of the celebrated formula which seems to stake the whole fortunes of humanity upon the establishment of democracy throughout the world. Upon questions so intricate as the nature of freedom and happiness, and the relation of either to particular modes of government, it is the privilege of journalists and street-orators to make dogmatic pronouncements. Within the scope of this pamphlet I must be content to observe that the political events of the last four years, unforeseen as they were by all the belligerents, will not easily be explained in language made familiar by old disputations about the best form of constitution. Autocracy may be indefensible, democracy may be all that its admirers declare ; but what is the value of such convictions when we look upon the face of Europe to-day ? Why, Germany herself is an avowed convert to democratic idealism, and the " war of ideas " would appear to have ended in a general agreement that a brighter age is dawning for mankind ! For some of us, however, the dawn is clouded with reflections. The story of Russia is still unfinished. We have witnessed there the overthrow of one tyranny, followed almost immediately by the rise of another infinitely more terrible. Between the first and the second the image of democracy was flashed for one instant on the screen, only to be whirled away into darkness. Unless we are blind to every visible omen, we must now per-



ceive that, not democracy alone, but all the tabulated categories of government, all conventional distinctions and antitheses have been overwhelmed in the same torrent of revolution. Russia, not Germany, has given the signal for the war of ideas ; Russia, not Germany, has forced upon us the tremendous question whether civilisation is to survive or to perish. If that much is recognised already, what remains is to interpret the meaning and divine the future of this mysterious frenzy. Were it certainly of Muscovite origin, or were its operations confined within the bounds of a vanishing empire, the rest of the world might have hoped to suffer no more than a passing spasm of horror and disgust. The truth is rather that, as it is the nature of all evil things to detect and follow the line of least resistance, so the European country where barbarism lay nearest to the surface has been the first to give way before the flood of reactionary ideas which long has pressed against the barriers of the civilised world. No military defeat of Bolshevism will remove the danger, for a destructive force of that kind is likely to be least formidable when it takes the shape of armies in the field.



## II

### THE LAW OF CIVILISATION

LIKE everything else of importance, civilisation cannot be defined. When not used wholly at random, the term should indicate the prevalence in a community of a certain mental refinement and subtlety which it takes many centuries to produce. There is no such thing as a new civilisation. There are "new" countries, where fragments of an older civilisation are carefully preserved, and countries, new and old, where other fragments, mostly in the shape of mechanical devices, have been adopted with intemperate ardour. Nothing, indeed, so constantly hinders a clear understanding of the subject as the ease with which the toys and dodges of civilised man can be separated from all his deeper traditions. Nothing, too, so painfully exposes the mental sterility of our modern Utopians as their preoccupation with mechanical contrivances. The men of the future are invariably represented as whizzing about at a stupendous pace from one part of the globe to another, but why they leave the one, or what they propose to do when they get to the other, is seldom revealed. *Caelum non animum mutant* seems to be inscribed on all their migrations.

In point of fact, there is no outward and visible test of civilisation. Even the fine arts, far as we may



rank them above any machine, are unsatisfactory. Uncertain in origin, fitful in duration, they seem often to touch and decline from their zenith long before general progress in a particular age or country is arrested. Yet despite this lack of a definite criterion, despite, too, the greater differences which divide ancient civilisation from modern, or Eastern from Western, and the minor diversities which give to every civilised people its peculiar quality, I believe it is possible to reduce to a single doctrine the fundamental law of civilisation.

The transition of human society from the primitive to the civilised state is effected by the division of labour. Men learn by degrees to specialise in particular kinds of work ; crafts and professions acquire a recognised identity, and on this basis all manner of social castes and classes eventually are fashioned. Every community, at every stage in its development, thus displays a specific character, determined by the comparative values attributed to its manifold occupations. With every advance in organisation it becomes more apparent that some kinds of work must be subordinate to others, and the further man removes himself from the primitive struggle with Nature the less disposed is he to hold in peculiar honour the kinds that procure for him the first necessities of existence. As ease and plenty drive away the memory of old perils, sheer utility falls into the second place. Man begins now to make things in the hope that they will be beautiful, and seeks knowledge in order that he may know. The artisan and the artist fall asunder ; the geometer seeks no fields to measure ; the astronomer may be as ignorant of navigation as the common sailor of Babylonian astrology.



In a word, the former ends of life are degraded, one after another, to the level of means. The foundations of society once well and truly laid, henceforth it is upon the adornment of the superstructure that all the effort of intellect and imagination is bestowed. I need not dwell at length upon the subsequent quarrels of the architects, as they group themselves into schools and sects and churches, disputing for ever about the meaning and aim of life. I shall only contend that progress in civilisation does always and everywhere manifest the working of a single and fundamental law, which may be roughly expressed in this formula: *the greater the necessity of things, the smaller their importance.*

"Necessity" and "necessary" are sadly ambiguous words, but the familiar sense of "necessaries of life" is all that we require. If the human race is to continue, food and drink must somehow be provided, with shelter from heat and cold and beasts of prey. So long as the primitive condition endures, in which the "necessary" and the "important" are identical, man is not greatly differentiated from other animals. The first step along his own inimitable path is taken when there dawns upon him the marvellous discovery that some things may be valuable even though they contribute nothing to the preservation of life. Thenceforward a new instability of outlook will supplant the old risks of precarious existence. For what else is the aim of all philosophy but to discover the true standard of valuation? But let the theories be as numerous and conflicting as you please, they will not fail to agree upon this one point, that "bare necessity" is of all things the least qualified to serve as a criterion of worth.

With the ever increasing complication of society the



mind will wander this way and that, pursuing bold conjectures and idle fantasies, advancing and retreating with equal haste, or losing from time to time all sense of clear direction. Yet in all its errors and confusions it will cling to the one guiding principle, and will grow ever more and more imperious in its claim to govern the work of the hand. Nor is it merely that in the organisation of a particular craft or business those who do all the "necessary" labour are treated as the instruments of others who may not even appear on the scene. The mark of a civilised community is the rise of special classes of men engaged in activities which, in the narrower economic sense, are wholly unproductive. Only on those terms can the sciences, the arts, the refinements of human life appear and flourish. To stamp as "unproductive" the most creative forms of energy is, indeed, a strange misuse of language, but it must frankly be admitted that on the higher levels of activity, where thought and imagination are most remote from the production of "necessaries," the percentage of failure, waste, and idleness is certain to be higher than in simpler occupations. Where only muscle and a certain dexterity are requisite, most workmen will succeed; where the demand is for invention and intellectual power the majority will fail. Civilisation itself is a hazardous throw of the dice. Play for safety, like the savage, and you will not miss it; play for higher stakes, as civilisation must, and bankruptcy will be frequent and conspicuous. In Plato's *Republic* the disputants are invited to decide whether they will halt at the "city of pigs" or advance to the mixed goods and evils of civilisation. Actual history records no such moment of conscious decision,



Humanity moved by instinct towards the higher condition and the greater dangers, until at last every standard of primitive man was as utterly transformed as the water which once was changed into wine.



### III

#### THE NATURE OF THE REVOLT

THE way of progress, however, was by no means smooth and continuous. Archæology has made us familiar with the fact that civilisations can decline and vanish. So complete in some cases has been the disappearance that only by diligent and ingenious excavation have we learned that a people of elaborate culture so much as existed. Within the bounds of historical record the great example of the Roman Empire still confronts and, perhaps, misleads us. For though it is notorious that internal causes helped to undermine that magnificent edifice, the strongest impression bequeathed to human memory is the noise of barbarians hammering on the outer walls. And so, when we begin to wonder if our own civilisation is destined in its turn to be extinguished, our first instinct is to listen attentively for some wild and hideous clamour at the gates. It was thus that the Chinese peril was presented to us not long ago, and thus, too, that the German has been nicknamed the Hun.

The true menace, however, is not barbarous hordes from beyond the pale, nor yet the revival, under stress of war, of primitive cruelty. In the world of to-day we may find a revolt against civilisation more deliberate and more deadly than any that Attila ever compassed ; it is only to be regretted that our understanding of it



has been in some degree prevented by its outrageous manifestation in Russia. Since the Russians as a whole had never been quite on the same level of culture as other European peoples, it seemed natural that a revolution among them should swiftly assume a savage character, and that they should fall an easy prey to rogues and fanatics. We are apt, therefore, to infer that the horrors of Bolshevism will not be repeated in other countries, and that in England especially we have nothing worse to fear than social reconstruction of a somewhat drastic kind. In this way we fail altogether to grasp the nature of the danger; for bloodshed, though a picturesque accident of Bolshevism, is by no means its essence. It is possible that the pseudo-Lenins of England might accomplish their ends without massacre of individuals or classes. None the less, the goal of their policy, if not their conscious intention, is to assassinate civilisation by subverting the law which engenders and sustains it. The meaning and substance of Bolshevism are comprised in the doctrine, repudiated by mankind in the first dawn of progress, that the character of every political community ought to be determined by those who do the "necessary" kinds of work. It has nothing to do with democracy and the will of the majority; only in an equivocal sense does it stand and fall even with the arguments of Marx. Intellectually, at least, Marx reposes in just oblivion, and the creed now loosely attached to his name is impenetrable by the shafts of economists. The issue is broader and simpler, and more can be learned in the relative calm of England than in the Russian turmoil of famine and murder.

The whole philosophy of Bolshevism is latent in the



cant-words "labour" and "working-man," with their curious implication that outside an area rather vaguely described no one properly can be said to work. To arrive at an exact principle of definition is not easy. For if we are to be pedantic about the *manual* aspect of work, then the sculptor, the organist, the dainty female typist, and other palpable outsiders will be no worse qualified than many of those within the privileged ring. There are times when one is tempted to believe that everything turns on the question whether a man is paid by the week or at longer intervals. Yet there must be some defect in this criterion; for, though the distinction between wages and salaries is scarcely more than conventional, a Lord Chancellor or a versatile Prime Minister could not hope to transmute himself into a genuine "working-man" by arranging to receive his salary in weekly instalments. Can it be the number of working hours that gives the clue to the mystery, or the normal rates of pay? Why, then, should a doctor or a lawyer work seventy hours a week, while a railway porter is grumbling at fifty? And why should a mechanic demand as his indisputable right an annual income which to a clerk or a curate is only a distant ideal? No, the fundamental doctrine of "labour," as of undisguised Bolshevism, is that those who produce the necessities of life, and do the necessary kinds of work, are the real workers, the real authors of wealth, and therefore the rightful masters of the world. To this is eternally opposed what I have called the law of civilisation, that just *because* certain kinds of work are "necessary," *therefore* they are the least important and the least fitted to shape the fortunes of mankind.

The issue is clear and absolute, and this is the true



antagonism brought to light by the war. Nothing, it is evident, was farther from the minds of the original combatants when first they rushed into battle ; nothing could be more extravagant than to pretend that Germany stood for one side, England and her allies for the other. But it is ever in this indirect manner that a great war acts upon the world. A solvent of old barriers and traditions, it gradually tempts into the daylight all the dim creeds and dusky anarchists hitherto concealed in the shadows. Very early in the war it was noticed that many of the milder fanatics (" cranks " as we call them) were emerging from their customary asylums. Teetotallers, vegetarians, and anti-inoculationists swaggered openly in the market-place, while the noise of battle itself was deadened by the shouts of miscellaneous educationists, united by the solitary axiom that no one who had spent his life in the study and practice of education could possibly be entitled to express an opinion on the subject. In all this there was nothing very surprising or dangerous, but as the struggle grew longer and more deadly the eventual combatants began to move into the foreground, until at last, with the signing of an armistice, we were left with the uneasy reflection that all this blood might perchance have been shed for the routing of phantoms, while the substantial enemy stood there imminent and unscathed.



#### IV

### BOLSHEVISM AND "LABOUR"

I AM fully aware that the identification of Bolshevism with "labour" policy in England and other European countries will be hotly resented. I can also foresee the plausible objection that war, as the destroyer of conventions, may well give us truth for falsehood and substitute reality for shams. In reply I must begin by insisting again that a reign of terror is not the essence of Bolshevism. Let us cheerfully assume that only in Russia is there likely to be anything more sinister than occasional riots. Let us add the more doubtful assumption that "labour" in England will work for its ends only by constitutional methods. I shall still maintain that those ends, whether achieved by massacre or by parliamentary divisions, amount in principle to renunciation of the ideal which ever since his first escape from barbarism man has dimly but faithfully kept in view. For when you dismiss minor arguments and irrelevant pretences, invariably you find that the "working-man" theory of existence is reducible to the doctrine that those who handle the raw materials of life have a prescriptive right to control the community. Other kinds of work are secondary, superfluous, and parasitic; and only by the intrigues of kings or priests or financiers have the spurious workers usurped their commanding eminence. Reverting to a



hackneyed analogy, the argument would be something of this kind: the hands and the belly can lead a very decent sort of life without the brain, but the finest brain is impotent without the support of belly and hands; *therefore*, in the social organism as we find it, the brain should be subordinate, and the true image of a healthy Leviathan would be an overweening belly with vast protruding hands. In plainer words, the builder, the weaver, the cobbler, and other honest men can jog along very well without "luxury trades," better still without the professional classes, who get a livelihood without "working," best of all without the idlers who are saved by the accident of inheritance from even the languid exertion of growing rich through the industry of others.

I state the position baldly and crudely, but I do not believe that the more honest champions of "labour" will deny that, substantially, this is their creed. And further, I do not think it can be seriously questioned that the only effective means of propagating such a body of doctrine is force; not necessarily the force of rifle and bayonet, but force in the shape of withholding certain indispensable commodities and services until the demands of the "working-class" are conceded. Society cannot do without food, light, warmth, and the transport of goods; it even has a weakness for clean streets and linen. The game is, therefore, in the hands of a few classes of workmen, notably railwaymen and miners, who can at any moment paralyse all other industrial activities until their wages are raised. And here it was that the war provided a superb opportunity. In times of peace much inconvenience could be tolerated, or, when it came to a



struggle between masters and men, the chances of victory were not uneven, and public opinion could be heard. But in the agony of war on the modern scale there was no time for argument and delay. The policy of blackmailing the nation was no longer a gamble, but an almost infallible card.

Just imagine, by way of contrast, what would have happened if the professional classes had proposed to strike, on the ground that they were the section of society most injured by the general rise in prices. Picture the merriment, the shouts of boisterous laughter, the hearty invitations to strike as soon as they pleased ! But if the miners or the shipwrights thought fit to decide that they must gain one pound more and work one day less in every week, then indeed there were alarms and consultations, followed in almost every case by rapid surrender. What else, then, it is fair to ask, is this but the doctrine of force ? And what else is it but Bolshevism ? The war did not invent it, but supplied the occasion and stripped away the disguise. In this the advantage falls not wholly to one side ; for the opposite party (the party of civilisation) should now perceive more clearly the ultimate significance of the "labour" movement. So long as we suppose that we have only to deal with genuine abuses, such as excessive hours of work, inequitable payment, and insufficient opportunity for enjoying the best things in life, we are not looking the enemy in the face. Abuses might be remedied by an improved sense of justice and humanity, but your genuine Bolshevik, by whatever name he call himself, hates nothing so much as co-operation and good feeling on the existing basis of society. What he desires is class-conscious



warfare and the humiliation or extinction of all classes but one. As to Justice, he will doubtless make use of that exalted name, but only because his conception of Justice is founded on this same assumption, that the "working-man" is the only reality in a world of traditional shams.

European history, prior to the last century or so, can show nothing strictly resembling a party formed with the deliberate object of securing the exclusive dominance of a class. I am far from denying that the poor were grievously oppressed by social traditions and, still more, by economic superstitions; but the great parties in the State—Whigs, Tories, and the like—however much devoted to the interests of the ruling caste, owed their position to the social evolution of more than a thousand years. Believing themselves, not wholly without warrant, to be the makers of their country's greatness, they accepted the result of history without much criticism, and were guilty, if guilt it was, of class-*unconscious* rather than of class-conscious politics. Above all, they were restrained by the national outlook, enlarged sometimes by dynastic complications, but always reverting to its indigenous base.

The "labour" movement, on the other hand, was born of steam and revolution not much more than a hundred years ago. Attached as it were by accident to the soil and history of England, it has tended from the outset, and more consciously with every stage in its development, to override national frontiers in favour of an international delineation of classes. War in the old sense is to be abolished in order that the new war against property and bourgeois supremacy may sweep freely over the face of the earth. It will be said, of



course, that I am still doing a grave injustice to many able and excellent men, who repudiate Bolshevism and all its works but adhere to the "labour" party with the single and sincere intention of raising the level of industrial life. Even Mr. Ramsay Macdonald and his friends might hesitate to allow that their object was to shatter the entire fabric of civilisation. The question is, however, whether the problem has ever been adequately stated, and whether even the most sober and reasonable supporters of the "labour" programme have discerned its eventual bearing on the progress of mankind. There is, in any case, a deep confusion at present between a genuine effort to improve the condition of wage-earners and a retrograde movement inspired by ignorance, envy, and malice. The only hope is to disentangle the good from the evil, if by any means it can be done. In attempting it we shall come upon fresh difficulties and shall have to pass beyond the controversies of ordinary politics to questions more vital to civilisation.



## V

### LIFE AS AN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

THE misfortune common to nearly all civilisations has been their tendency to produce an exaggerated contrast between poverty and wealth. The causes of the mischief have varied considerably in different ages ; the remedies proposed have been not less diverse, and the philosophy of the matter has swung to and fro between widely distant points. Some have taught that poverty is a blessed condition, some that good and ill fortune should be accepted with the same indifference, some that penury can at least hamper the energies of the soul, some, perhaps, that it can stifle them altogether. Before we invite either the poor or the rich to draw any inference from these wavering precepts, or even from the orthodox condemnation of avarice, we must satisfy ourselves that the scientific revolution of industry has not so modified the entire conditions of human life as to call for an equally new philosophy of wealth. If in the terminology of the present day words like " progress," " reform," and " reconstruction " often seem to bear only a commercial sense, the explanation will not be found in any sudden increase of human cupidity, nor in any peculiar aggravation of poverty. The men of a hundred or five hundred years ago were quite as covetous and miserly as their latest descendants, and far more exposed to the embarrassment of poverty,



or even to the peril of actual starvation. Little or nothing can be deduced from older arguments until we realise that we have, in fact, to deal with a new way of thinking, born simultaneously with a new industrial population.

The curse bequeathed to us by the nineteenth century is the belief that life can be expressed in terms of economics; and the origin of a creed so lamentable and so fallacious is bound up with the startling expansion of those branches of knowledge which, in the same century, usurped the name of "science." I call it usurpation, not because the study of the physical world is other than scientific, but because "science," in its current significance, has at once a pretence of exactness in relation to many dubious generalisations and a pretence of exclusiveness for which there is no rational warrant. No one has yet supplied a valid reason for granting the name to chemistry and refusing it to the study of poetry; no one, again, has explained why modes of thought and language appropriate to physics should have wandered through biology into the field of economic and social phenomena. Without pretending here to argue the point, I must simply affirm that "science" has thus degenerated into a slang-word exactly comparable to "working-man," and further, that there is a genuine connection between the two.<sup>1</sup> It was the application of "science" to industry that created the modern type of "working-man," and it was the wonderful progress in certain kinds of knowledge that encouraged the extension of abstract reason-

<sup>1</sup> Other examples are "artist," as meaning a "painter," and "scholar," as confined to the student of Latin and Greek. Both of these, however, are obsolete.



ing to the totality of human affairs. Men either abandoned altogether the hope of understanding life as a whole, or fell into the delusion of supposing that some particular science was in itself a sufficient guide to conduct. In a word, the "working-man" himself is a product of "science," and the "working-man" theory of life is an offshoot of "scientific" thought.

A simple illustration of my meaning is found in a common misuse of the distinction between "necessaries" and "luxuries." Highly questionable even in abstract economics, this distinction is persistently interpreted in a moral sense, as though there were scientific authority for condemning the entire production of objects theoretically superfluous. I am not concerned to deny that some kinds of expenditure may be reprehensible, but it is certain that political economy, so far as it is scientific, can provide no moral criterion. Adam Smith and his offspring can teach us that, where much labour is spent on one kind of production, another kind, perhaps more necessary, is likely to suffer; but if we choose to reply that these so-called luxuries, no matter what risk they involve, happen to be the only things that make life endurable, the criticism of moralists will then rightly command our attention, but economic doctrine will be as irrelevant as arithmetic. The economist is, at most, in the position of the doctor, who can warn a patient that his present way of life must bring him to an early grave, but has no commission to analyse the strangely various motives of irregular living, nor yet to declare that "a short life and a merry one" is not the sanest of human mottoes. Medicine itself might do harm enough if erected into a dogmatic system of eugenics, but the fallacies of economics are



more insidious, because they belong to a peculiar borderland, where the line between abstract and concrete is easily blurred, and where the results of mental specialisation may almost unconsciously be magnified into an imposing philosophy.

In the assumption that happiness is proportionate to wealth, in the counter-assumption that great wealth is an evil, in the mutual suspicion of capital and labour, in the demand for redistribution and equality, most of all in the programme of Bolshevism, actual or potential, there lurks always this same intolerable suggestion, that human life is simply an economic activity. Militarism is a crime because it hampers industrialism; industrialism is also a crime so long as it is capitalistic, and all civilisation is a failure in so far as any one but the real producer of wealth, supposedly the "working-man," lays hands on the product. To this the first answer is that, relatively to the higher ends of civilisation, the whole business of industrial production is of quite inferior importance; not because we can or ought to dispense with perpetual industry, but because a world obsessed with the idea of production is still thinking in terms of raw materials and still facing in the direction of necessity. On the other hand, the rich and various activities which make up the complex of civilisation have a value not derived from necessity, and assuredly not created by the labour of the "working-man."

Consider for a moment all that is embraced in the compass of philosophy, science, literature, and art. The interweaving of these constitutes the higher life of man, and I should be glad to know what claim here the "working-man" has to be the producer, and what



would become of him if we were to insist on the doctrine that only they who produce have a right to the product. Civilisation is dependent upon "labour" just as a stage and a theatre are needed for performance of the drama; but, after all, "the play's the thing," and I fail to see how the carpenter and the mason can be regarded as the authors either of *Hamlet* or of the cultivated taste which prefers *Hamlet* to the silliest farce. Were we strictly to adapt the "working-man" theory to the case in point, I fear we should have to refuse the mason and the carpenter admission to the show. We should say to them, "You are neither of you Shakespeare, you are not poets or playwrights of any kind, you are not dramatic critics, you are not even reporters for the Press. Get back to your lathe, your bricks, and your mortar, and leave to others the pleasures of the mummary which you did not produce."

The makers of civilisation are philosophers, poets, painters, musicians, lawyers (*iuris prudentes*), clergymen, dons, schoolmasters; queer, outlandish people for the most part, but none of them "working-men." The function of the "workman" has been the modest one of making a tub for Diogenes, a pair of stockings for Malvolio, and a cane for Squeers. Shall we conclude, then, that he must not benefit by the wisdom or folly of these and other notable characters? If we resist so unpleasing a conclusion, it can only be because we reject absolutely the doctrine that the producer has an exclusive or peculiar claim to the fruits of his work. The argument has nothing to do with individual talents. A ploughman may chance to be an admirable poet, just as a king may be a passable locksmith, but we are considering only the relative status of occupa-



tions and the claim of one to enjoy what is produced by another. A poem, no less than a loaf or a bar of steel, is a product of human energy, and I desire to know why we should deal with the "necessaries" on a principle which, if applied to products vastly more important to civilisation, would be repudiated with fury and contempt.

I am afraid, too, that, when we look a little more closely, the claim of the "working-man" to be the creator of industrial wealth will scarcely be maintained. For the moment I will pass over the function of capital and attend only to scientific invention and to the still more decisive influence of human ideals. Only by a fixed resolve to ignore the facts can it be denied that virtually the whole of the modern inflation of wealth is a by-product of the intellectual conviction that the physical sciences hold the key to the meaning of the universe. From this belief, assisted by the supplementary talent for invention, sprang all the discoveries which have revolutionised the nature of industry. Compared with research and inventive skill, the contributions of the miner and the weaver, the journeyman and the "hand," are but of trifling importance. You cannot drive an engine without an engine-driver, but the man who invented the engine invented the driver too. Behind them both, and of far greater moment than either, stood the man who, caring nothing for engines or drivers, was searching for a mechanical principle by which to unravel the skein of the universe and finally, perhaps, to get rid of God.

Knowledge itself has been for some men the noblest ideal, and even in respect of knowledge it is an erroneous interpretation of history which imputes the absence



of certain sciences in certain centuries to mental apathy. The men of the thirteenth century had brains enough to launch them on the road afterwards trodden by a Newton or a Darwin, but their interest did not guide them in that direction. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that no extension of physical science could raise them to the summit of speculation, and so they followed with unswerving fidelity what they believed to be the upward path. Perhaps they only wandered round in a circle. However that may be, it is certain that every fresh flight of theoretical genius shapes anew the ideal of action, and that every fresh conception of happiness exercises its influence upon the expansion or contraction of wealth. There is no need to dwell especially on those brief periods of otherworldliness when riches were vanity and poverty a safe passport to heaven. Quite apart from that occasional enthusiasm, the doubt has been widespread and persistent whether the mere possession of wealth in its crudest sense is a sufficient guarantee that the joy of life will not elude the possessor. Only in our own age has the doubt appeared to vanish. I do not mean that the voice of protest is silent, but never before, I believe, was the movement of social and political reform inspired with such serene and unfaltering confidence that wealth and happiness are twin sisters, and that redistribution of the one must ensure a corresponding diffusion of the other. Whence comes this bright and simple revelation? While invention and acquisitiveness have stimulated each other, we must look beyond the mere opportunity provided by new mastery of physical resources to some movement of thought wide and intense enough to colour the



general ambition. With no wish to slander distinguished and worthy men, I suspect that the Utilitarians must bear part of the responsibility. Weak, deplorably weak, in their intellectual foundations, they contrived to import into practice a rough test of merit, which served well enough for the reformation of obvious abuses, and failed completely as a higher criterion. Because they refused to examine their own formula, and to admit that the meaning of "utility" was the very point at issue, they encouraged the modern irruption of barbarians, those sturdy manufacturers and merchants, who burst so lightly through the gossamer threads of scruple and scepticism which had hitherto entangled the seeker after wealth. To the eyes of these bold explorers the tree of knowledge was hung with golden apples, and therein lay the infallible evidence that it was also the tree of life. Of that creed the inevitable and proper nemesis is Bolshevism. For the new ideal, combined with the new knowledge, brought into existence the huge and unmanageable population which was to adopt and better the doctrine of its masters, interpreting life in terms of economic prosperity and striving perpetually to secure a greater share for itself.

When Aristotle defined a slave as a "living instrument," at least he hinted at the existence of the soul; but somehow, under the influence of a mechanical philosophy, that half of the definition came to be overlooked. So far as man creates anything, the industrial workers of the modern world were created to be "hands" and nothing more. The soul, however, is a most inconvenient adjunct, productive of irregularity, diminishing profits, and threatening at last to usurp control of



the apparatus which the "hand" was intended only to serve. Such is the fate now hanging over civilisation. The monster has come to life and got loose; Frankenstein is alternately angry and frightened, while the unhappy followers of a different ideal have no other consolation but to wish both alike at the bottom of the sea.

To save misunderstanding, it should be added that dissent from an economic interpretation of life has nothing to do with the conventional denunciation of wealth. Far from condemning the possession of riches, even when of fabulous magnitude, I take this opportunity of offering my cordial sympathy to any one who wishes himself richer than ever he is likely to be! Some excuse for that barren aspiration will presently be attempted in a less egotistical form. Meanwhile I must try to meet some probable criticisms and to fill some obvious gaps in the preceding argument.



## VI

### INDUSTRIALISM

THE majority of "labour" leaders in this country will declare that their quarrel is not with wealth, but with capitalism, and thence with the system which interposes relays of middlemen and jobbers between producer and consumer, inflating prices by the demand for irrelevant profits, and enabling a horde of superfluous impostors to live on the industry of others. More than this, they will earnestly protest that mere desire for financial betterment is not the true motive of their agitation. Within the "working-class," it will be urged, there is a growing thirst for the higher education which opens the way to intellectual and æsthetic enjoyment. The deepest grievance is lack of spiritual opportunity. Without more leisure and better pay, industrial workers cannot travel, unless by unreasonable sacrifices, beyond the limited horizon of elementary education. No danger need be feared for civilisation when the very object of "working-class" policy is to secure an equitable share in the things that make civilisation worth having. Justice herself is summoned as a witness, and the right of all to equality in culture is freely asserted. In protestations of this kind (and I do not question their sincerity) a number of distinct arguments may be detected, all of them, however, carrying the same implication, that Capitalism is the enemy of



Justice. Shaliapin has consented (perhaps with a little pressure) to sing for Lenin, and, on the same principle, spiritual wealth as well as material would be at the disposal of the masses, were it not for the intervention of financial adventurers, who exploit impartially the unskilled labourer and the illustrious artist for their private benefit. Knowledge and beauty, no less than bread and raiment, they sell at an exorbitant price: even the kingdom of heaven has to be approached through a turnstile, and the man in Arnold Bennett's novel who reduced the capitation fee of everlasting salvation becomes the ideal priest for modern society.

First of all, then, let us examine the capitalist relatively to production. No one can deny that the accumulation and investment of savings is the indispensable condition of progress in wealth; and, since few will be prepared wholly to deprecate such progress, we must suppose that the vexed question is not capital in the abstract, but its control by individuals or syndicates, and the consequent distribution of profits. It appears to me, however, that we must admit a further distinction before we can arrive at a clear perception of the point. Eloquent as the capitalist would certainly be on his own behalf, I should propose to cut short his oration by assuring him, though at the risk of wounding his vanity, that his importance is not half so great as his enemies aver. The fact (if it be a fact) that in the course of industrial development capital tends more and more to agglomeration, until the bulk of it is manipulated by a few remarkable individuals and a few skilfully organised groups, does undoubtedly embitter social controversy and impart a new edge to old attacks on the institution of property. Yet, as



regards the origin and increase of wealth, I cannot see that the function of capital is radically affected, whether it be concentrated in the hands of a few plutocrats, distributed widely among persons of moderate means, or controlled by permanent officials. The truth is that capital, regarded as an agent of production, is no more and no less important than "labour." They are the two concomitant and inseparable artificers, by whose agency the palace of wealth is raised from its foundations and solidly compacted, and both alike are but instruments of the creative energy of mind. A store of clay is capital to the potter; each is useless without the other, and no combination of them constitutes wealth until some one ascribes value to the vessel, and hence is ready to give something else in exchange for it. The first creator of value is our common stepmother, Necessity. Outside her stringent embraces, where liberty of taste becomes possible, the author and only begetter of wealth is the human mind, as it mounts through the lower storeys of everyday convenience to the airy pinnacles of contemplation and fancy. A lump of coal, a pair of tongs, a brown Greek manuscript, an old postage-stamp—all of these are, or may be, wealth in precisely the same sense, even though in the two latter examples the business of production, as effected by the concert of labour and capital, consists in nothing more reputable than the forging of old masterpieces out of new materials. Capital and labour, labour and capital: they realise and complete each other. Should one ask which is prior in importance, I shall be prepared to attempt an answer when the questioner in his turn will inform me which comes first in the cycle of evolution, the hen



or the egg. Meanwhile, the capitalist need not detain us, except when he chances to be identical with the financier, the contractor, the merchant, or any of the strategists who take part in the elaborate business of persuading the public that goods not yet in their possession are worth purchasing at the cost of those that they have.

Now it cannot, I think, be disputed that ability to conduct any financial enterprise to success is as peculiar, and in its higher virtuosity perhaps as rare, as the gift of impersonating Othello or of leading an army to victory in the field. Our colloquial expression, to "make a fortune," is full of significance. The man who anticipates or fosters the demand for a commodity, and then supplies it in such a way as to fill his own pockets, is the authentic maker of the fortune. Think of the innumerable steps that lie between heaving shapeless lumps of material out of the ground and placing on the market a finished product exactly consonant with the needs and taste of the public. Think, too, of the perpetual uncertainty, the years of loss and stagnation, the long roll of actual bankruptcies; and then consider soberly whether it is the wielder of spade and pick who most deserves to make the fortune, or suffers primarily by the disasters. Here again, if we seriously mean to apply to industrial life the theory that he who produces should be master of the product, the speculator, the financial adept, the merchant, and in some minor degree every one of their numerous satellites, will fairly lay claim to a bigger share than either the "working-man" or, for that matter, the artist and the scientific inventor.

Take, for instance, the case of an author's first play.



The author desires to see it produced on the stage, and desires, presumably, to get a living by his work. The play may be a consummate piece of art, but between that kind of excellence and financial success there is all the difference in the world. Even to get the masterpiece considered by an impresario may be impossible without the help of an agent. Then comes the hiring of a theatre, the selection of a cast, the niceties of judicious advertisement, the delicate hints to critics, with other preliminary manœuvres. In all these parts of the business the author will probably be incompetent, and throughout the entire undertaking it is likely to be someone else who bears the greater part of the risk. Suppose, then, that the play does hit the public fancy and draw streams of gold to the box-office, is it an offence against Justice if the actor-manager and others annex a larger share than the author? Not unless once more we abandon the principle that the producer has the first claim to the product. The author makes the play, but he does not make its financial success. We may deplore the subjection of the drama to these conditions, but that (in the present phase of the argument) is an irrelevant emotion. It is not even true that in a finer world, where art was independent of hucksters, the artist would secure for himself the wealth that now falls into other hands. The truth is rather that the spoils now divided among forty thieves or so would cease to exist. The case is the same with the commercial value of scientific discovery. A chemist invents a new process, and someone else makes a fortune by a new dye. Why not? It is the manufacturer who makes the business, and the business which fills the coffers. The same principle holds good



in the entire economic organisation of the world. The speculator, the financier, the advertiser, the agent, the merchant, the retailer, and all the rest of them create a particular kind of value, the kind most readily convertible into cash, and win a particular kind of reward. Another kind of value and reward belongs to the artist and the discoverer. Is it so certain that this is an outrage to Justice? I doubt not that, tempted by the analogy of the artist, many will argue that the simultaneous disappearance of the middleman and his fortune, even though it deprived the "producer" too of his golden chance, would be all to the good. I cannot grapple here with so intricate a problem. I shall only observe that the proposal to eliminate the machinery of commerce and finance cannot be combined with the proposal to enjoy its present results. If those who now grow rich by trafficking were to be annihilated, their riches would not then reward the honest "workers" who disembowel the earth of coal and iron. Many of the virtuous diggers would vanish along with their rascally exploiters, and the rest, if I am not greatly mistaken, would be poorer than before. But this is by the way. Most of the greater fortunes are made, I suppose, by elaborate transactions related very distantly, or not at all, to commodities indispensable to human existence. Can we bring a more damaging indictment against the financial juggler when we catch him practising his arts upon grain or coal or necessary transport? A "corner" in food-stuffs will strike us all as more iniquitous than a monopoly of diamonds, but before insisting too warmly on the ethical point it is well to remember that most of the gambling in vital necessities is done by "labour" itself.



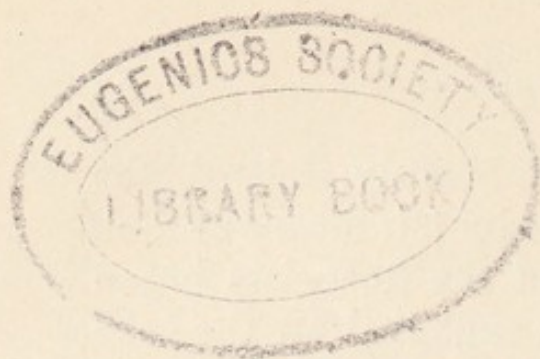
From the standpoint of the hapless consumer, who has no direct commercial interest at stake, there is, on the face of it, nothing to choose between a Trust and a Trade Union, a group of miners or mechanics and a group of millionaires. They are rival yet complementary forms of the same evil. Both are financial syndicates, and the Trade Union is, perhaps, the more impregnable now that its funds are protected by a notorious Act of Parliament. Both, again, tend to be international rather than national in sympathy, and both attempt to employ the weapon of monopoly for bettering their position, no matter how they may damage the interests of others. Is it even true that the high finance is more tainted with dishonesty? For what else is the policy of restricted output but direct robbery of the employer and indirect cheating of the public? No, the Trade Unions are formidable institutions, but, if we are to talk of morality, they will never command the respect of any but their members until they make it their ambition, for the good of the community, to raise the standard of workmanship and to give the fullest opportunity to individual talent. As things are, the public is injured, incompetence is protected, and the man who works harder or better than his fellows is branded as a traitor in the camp. Economically, of course, this is the blindest folly, but that does not alter the fact that the Unions present themselves to a dispassionate observer as associations seeking nothing but their own advantage and recognising no weapon but force. I am aware that this accusation (familiar enough by now) is always resisted. Even those who deprecate some of the methods adopted excuse them on broader grounds of equity, and plead



that, where a just demand is stubbornly resisted, the workers are driven to seek redress by fair means or foul. The employers, it is argued, and the financiers began it; the many are for ever being exploited for the sake of the few; the distribution of profits is iniquitous, the wage-system utterly wrong. I am not, however, defending the exploitation of "labour" or the divine right of financial magnates. My point is simply that a bogus philosophy, aided by a particular application of "science," has created a kind of industrialism fatal to the life of civilisation. Rival forces of employers and employed, both, as it seems, inspired by the same ideal, tear each other to pieces, and neither asks whether the ideal is worth pursuing.

Far from being alternative policies, militarism and industrialism are in practice so remarkably similar that they stop not far short of identity. I am not alluding to the efficacy of commercial ambition in generating war; I mean rather that the assumption, underlying the whole industrial struggle, that happiness is proportionate to wealth, leads to the patronage by all parties concerned of methods equivalent to acceptance of the principle that might is right. If that ugly motto is not inscribed on the banners of the combatants, it is chiefly from defect of logic, or perhaps because they lack the cynical courage of their opinions which we find in the works of German militarist writers. But since it may be thought that my argument thus far has been biassed against the "working-class," I will now attempt to approach a little nearer to the bewildering problem of Justice.





## VII

### WORK AND JUSTICE

WE have seen already that the character of every political society is determined by the relative status of different occupations. The original basis of aristocracy, for example, was simply the belief that proficiency in the most important activities was confined, by heredity or by continuity of tradition, to a small group of families. At first this belief was well founded, but all early aristocracies become obsolete, partly because the occupations in question (such as fighting and hunting) lose much of their importance, partly because skill in them comes to be more widely diffused. The first reason is the more significant, but the character of the change is always disguised and complicated by the tendency of wealth to follow, and thereafter to generate, prestige. In old days kings rewarded their chieftains with large gifts of land, and once (we must try to remember) it was true that the largest landowner was also the wealthiest man. In course of time, however, the growth of commerce made it easily possible for a merchant to be richer than a noble. Rivalry in this respect bred rivalry in others; the tradesman became pretentious, the aristocrat disdainful; but presently the nobleman found himself obliged to save his own position by marrying the merchant's daughter, thus acquiring an oblique interest in the business, which, as



time went on, became more and more direct. At a later stage, when social convention had sanctioned most kinds of commerce, the merchant got himself ennobled, and the old aristocracy was slowly converted into an interesting relic, to be preserved at last only by the superstition of "reformers," who persistently talk as though in the twentieth century the feudal system were still at its height.

Aristocrat and merchant are merely illustrations of a process which affects every class in the community. The relative positions of all occupations are constantly shifting. The doctor, the lawyer, the priest, the schoolmaster, the soldier, have been variously esteemed in various countries and ages; and always we discern the same power of wealth to attract to itself the semblance of honour. In the modern world, where society is more intricate and wealth vastly greater than in any previous epoch, there is also unprecedented confusion upon the question of work and its reward. The general effect of the democratic spirit is to equate all occupations, and therefore all persons, in vulgar esteem. Of this the natural consequence is to enhance the prestige of riches, and thus to strengthen every day the assumption that wealth is the sole reward of work. But since it is all too evident that wealth is unevenly distributed, the cry of injustice arises and the demand for equalisation of pay. On the heels of these agitations comes a keen inquiry into the sources of production, resulting in the specious and sophistical theory of the "working-man." The final doctrine, triumphant already in Russia and loudly proclaimed elsewhere, is that the wealth-producing class alone is important, and hence that the proletariat is entitled to everything, the



bourgeoisie to nothing but the burden of taxation. Such in outline is the strange evolution of an idea. First honour brings wealth, then wealth buys honour, then honour means nothing but wealth, then the supposititious authors of wealth are the only honourable persons. This complete reversal of values is no fantasy of pessimism or logic, but a genuine historical process now completing itself before our eyes. And because, to me at least, it means the overthrow of civilisation, I think it is time we began to cast about for remedies, seeking them not in the chicanery of quack politicians, but in reconsideration of ideas.

On the subject of wealth and its uses I know nothing wiser in any modern book than a remark by one of the characters in Henry James's novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* :

" Isabel's poor (said Ralph) . . . I should like to make her rich."

" What do you mean by rich ? "

" I call people rich when they're able to meet the requirements of their imagination."

" To every man according to his imagination." What an admirable formula for distributive justice ! Quite impracticable, no doubt, in the world we inhabit, but still of great value as a reminder that the real evil is not the possession of wealth, but the possession of a mind that cannot keep pace with it. The Greeks recognised in " magnificence " a virtue which, unfortunately, has dropped out of our catalogue. Its function was to expend great sums of money in such a way as to accomplish a noble and beautiful result, avoiding



both meanness and tawdry display. Though great wealth was required for its full exercise, the spirit of magnificence could enter even into minor expenditure ; for the magnificent man, like the artist, will touch nothing that he cannot adorn. This, surely, is the spirit one would desire to see embodied in a political society. So long as the mind is master of its instruments, neither wealth nor poverty will corrupt the world. One man, on this principle, is qualified to spend the wealth of Croesus, while another will mishandle the wages of a gardener or fail to deserve the takings of a tramp. Our own social and economic calamities spring from the fact that the nineteenth was the *nouveau riche* among centuries. Unrestrained by the traditions belonging to ancient wealth, unillumined by new visions of felicity, it found itself suddenly presented with great heaps of gold, and was seized with no finer ambition than to make them greater still. All values irreducible to price were forgotten ; or when (as did sometimes happen) a genuine example of magnificence was offered, it was either condoned as amiable folly, suspected as a bid for public favour, or resented as patronage of the poor. Can we wonder, then, that rich and poor alike have acquired the habit of acting on the assumption that wealth is the sole reward of work ? And thus it is that happiness is forgotten and the problem of Justice obscured.

Setting aside for the moment the wide province of "labour," let us now inspect a few of the bourgeois professions. Take the civil servant, the doctor, the barrister, the bank-clerk, the schoolmaster, and add, if they will consent for a special purpose to be bourgeois, the poet and the artist. What is the interrelation in



any of these of the three factors, intrinsic pleasure of work, social reputation, financial reward? As to the first, the question is notoriously unanswerable. No philosophy of Hedonism has either measured the intensity of pleasures or tabulated in any convincing form their distinctions of quality. Work that depresses one man to the verge of suicide fills another with inexhaustible delight. Nevertheless, it is clear that most men (not all, I think) would sooner enter one profession than another, and that gratification of their choice is commonly accepted as part of the return for their work. Unless, however, a man is of rare moral character, he will look also for some recognition by others, and will take note of the fact that his own profession stands high or low in public esteem. Here again there is no fixed scale of values. A canvass of opinions would reveal much diversity of estimation, and I cannot pretend to guess in what order of importance a poet and a banker, a diplomatist and a bagman, a scholar and a bookmaker would be arranged by popular vote. It is enough that the habit of rating one kind of occupation more highly than another is discoverable in every grade of society, and that hence is derived one of the motives which influence the choice of a profession.

The third factor, financial remuneration, is more measurable than the others, yet not so definite as to exclude the elements of chance and variety. In some instances, particularly in government service, the ordinary scale of pay is known from the outset; few prizes are open to competition, and often it must seem that superior merit counts for less than advancing age. In other professions energy and foresight will find greater opportunities, and the courage to take a risk



may be required. Even the man who starts a school on his own account is something of an adventurer, and, though he knows that great wealth will never be his portion, the sense of independence, tinged with a faint thought of bankruptcy, may act as an agreeable stimulus. Another type of experience is illustrated by the life of the poet, or any kind of artist. For financial success men of this stamp must depend on the accident of public fancy, and to some of them the general level of education must set a limit to hope. Opulence is not for the authors of tragedies and epics; I do not know that any poet (unless it was Byron or Tennyson) ever made much of a fortune by the sale of his works. Painters, some few of them at least, may command higher prices; the fees of operatic singers are often astonishing, and the popular music-hall artist will surpass in splendour even his manager and his agent. In a financial sense, however, the artist is always a gambler. He stakes his gifts on a dubious table, and too often is tempted to retrieve his losses by prostituting his art to the taste of the mob. With him we may compare or contrast another species of gambler, the man whose business is simply finance. I call him a gambler with no hint of reprobation, and without forgetting that in native shrewdness, prudence, and system he is as far removed from the player of baccarat as from Rembrandt or Mr. George Robey. I only mean that the risks, like the prizes, are enormous. Wars and rumours of wars, political fluctuations, caprice and fashion, strikes, migrations, discoveries, genius, folly, profound calculation, irrational prejudice, with a host of imperceptible causes, affect the chances of this most intricate of games; nor is any edifice of



credit so stable that some unpropheied earthquake may not bring it to the ground.

We see, then, that throughout the professional and commercial area men elect to lead different lives, that they balance the charm of work against social prominence, and both against financial security or hazardous possibilities of wealth. And further, we must note that it is hard to disentangle the competing motives, and to be certain in any given example that one is adopted to the exclusion of another. Superficially, the financier cares least for the intrinsic quality of work and least for reputation. He seems ready to follow any road to prosperity, and his methods are often counted unscrupulous. Yet it is probably as true of him as of the poet that what carries him along is the sense of energy, the consciousness of self-expression, and the love of mastering the difficulties that block the path to success. Who will assert that Jim Pinkerton in Stevenson's *Wrecker* was less fervently inspired than his friend Loudon Dodd? As to reputation, the financier will be content with the kind of respect that his ability commands; or, if he takes any stock of cold shoulders and whispering tongues, he will be no more convinced than any other adventurer by the disapproval of those who have not sampled the adventure. The poet in his turn, however much he rejoices in his work, will seldom be indifferent to fame; I doubt even whether his faith in the judgment of posterity will always console him for failure to sell his poems. This I say not in a cynical spirit, but because (apart from the need of livelihood) a poet will rightly desire to stir his own generation, and the sale of his works is evidence of power.



And now, after this brief analysis of professions and motives, let us introduce the problem of Justice. "Labour" is still excluded from our survey, but as we cast a wide glance over the varying rates of pay, the uneven chances, the relative poverty and wealth within the whole range of work which requires mental ability and some kind of higher education for its performance, on what grounds and in what kind of cases shall we declare that injustice is done? Are the maximum and minimum rates of pay for civil servants unjust? or the starvation of a poet? or the poverty of an organist? or the wealth of a stockbroker? And if so, why? We seem to have caught a glimpse of two principles. The first is that, when a man chooses freely a particular kind of work, he must take his election as part of his reward, and, for the rest, must abide by his accidents. One is enticed by the prospect of a comfortable old age, another by the element of hazard. In both cases there is room for misfortune, for even the civil servant, with his vista of regular increments fading into a pension, may be cheated of his precise expectations by a general change in economic conditions. But misfortune is not injustice, nor does its frequent occurrence forbid us to hold that the success or failure of a life deliberately preferred to others cannot rightly be measured by its financial result. Indubitable where leisure is openly ranked above opulence, this rule does not fail of application to a life actually chosen for its promise of wealth. The second principle is that one whose fortune hangs on the favour of the public has no grievance if he find himself neglected. He may write the finest tragedy in the world, or play like an angel on the trumpet, but



if the audience prefer the concertina, or fall asleep at the climax of the drama, the artist must put up with the verdict, without pretending that the scales of Justice are weighted against him. Wherever taste and fashion are arbiters, Justice, it seems, has no office to fulfil. A man is then worth, in the financial sense, exactly as much as the world chooses to pay him. He may, if he please, protest that the world is vulgar and despicable; if wiser, he will suffer in silence; if exceptionally gifted with humour, he may even suspect that the fault is partly his own. Every change in taste, or in the general philosophy of an age, affects the economic status of certain professions. Thus, at the present time, education is (for mixed reasons) in the ascendant, and the salaries of teachers will rise. We hear every day that hitherto they have been infamously treated, and that now at last justice will be done. Such expressions are not wholly idle, if they signify progress towards a higher ideal, but they supply neither a determinate sense for Justice nor a reason for excepting education (especially in its higher forms) from the general rule, that the taste of the customer must regulate the price of the goods.

Let the fortunes of schoolmasters, lawyers, artists, and all kinds of professional men rise and fall with every changing gale, no blood will be shed and not many tears. It is only when we return to the thorny field of "labour" that discontent becomes menacing and controversy acute. Here our first observation will be that the "working-class" movement, in its most recent phase, derives but little of its impetus from the fear of destitution. On the contrary, it seems often to flourish most where wages are highest. Led, as a rule, by



"intellectuals" of middle-class origin (educated, cleverish men, with no capacity for political thought), the insurgent armies are drawn from mines, railways, and all the other industries best protected by powerful Trade Unions. These it is, while the unskilled poverty of casual employment remains inarticulate, who talk loudly of "justice" and clamour vociferously for "rights." Let us see, then, whether it is easier here than in the bourgeois world to fix the interpretation of those difficult words. Bearing always in mind that the part played by "labour" in the execution of human designs is not creative but instrumental, we cannot avoid the further admission, that the least sensitive instruments will be the most serviceable. To put it as frankly as possible, civilised man uses animate instruments for building and adorning his house only in so far as the inanimate fall short of automatic perfection. Wherever a machine can replace a man, it does. At any moment a new invention may eliminate a whole class of workers; even the miners may awake some morning to find themselves superfluous, and there is always the chance that some deeper and slower revolution in philosophy<sup>1</sup> will ultimately extinguish many of the industries which now consume the coal. Justice, in any case, is for men, not for implements, and the less emphasis the workers lay on their instrumentality the stronger will be their claim to a hearing. At present there is too much inclination to dwell on the stern rule of necessity. Whatever the future may have in store, it seems that thousands of men must always be employed in pro-

<sup>1</sup> "Philosophy" is a word of variable usage. Here, and in every similar context, I mean by it a considered way of life, *e.g.* the way of the Epicureans or the Christians.



ducing food and other indispensable commodities. Upon them we shall continue to depend for the sustenance of life, and thence is derived the force of the protest against overwork and underpay.

Two things, however, must be said in reply. In the first place, the necessity of an immense number of products now issuing from factories and workshops is ambiguous and conditional. To a large extent it only means that so long as the present ideal of industrial supremacy is cherished, a huge mass of cheap goods must be manufactured to satisfy the needs of the industrial population. The workers, in fact, are making things for themselves, but, relatively to civilisation, the value, and even the necessity, of their efforts is far from unquestionable. To that point I shall presently return. The second and more obvious fact is that the necessity of certain things, such as food, fuel, and clothing, is precisely the reason why they must be cheap ; precisely the reason, that is to say, for keeping the cost of production as low as possible. The real problem is how to provide decent remuneration for the necessary kinds of work, not *because* but *in spite* of their necessity. Whenever we look back to the foundations and rudiments of human life, we are reminded that in the sheer struggle against the destructive forces of Nature there is no question of better wages or worse. Where demand is brutally imperative, supply must somehow be forthcoming. If none will work voluntarily, then some must work as slaves ; if none will work as slaves, then all alike must perish. But does it follow that, as at present, a particular class of workers must labour for the benefit and maintenance of all ? Not if we are content to remain at the level of primitive



man ; but if civilisation is preferable, assuredly it does. With these awkward facts lying always at the roots of social life, how can we assign to Justice an intelligible sense, which will distinguish it from unmitigated necessity, and instruct us how to determine equitably for the "working-man" the relation of toil to reward ?

The distinction (however provisional) between bourgeois and working-class occupations has already suggested one line of reflection. I argued that, where free choice of a profession was exercised, the character of the life selected must in some degree be weighed against its financial result ; and I added that, wherever the estimation of work was dependent on the wayward taste of the public, the worker must accept his lot with good humour, and not pose as the victim of injustice. Is it the same with the vicissitudes of the "working-class" ? Or is there in the conditions of their service some radical difference, by which Justice acquires a more definite function ? That there are differences is, I think, undeniable. The first is that both the possibility and the significance of choice are far smaller in the wide world of "labour" than within the limited circle of professions. While it would be too much to say that a boy of the artisan class has no option at all, his freedom is usually restricted by the immediate need of earning wages and by the localisation of industries, as well as by youth and the lack of advanced education. At the age of thirteen or fourteen he is more subject to the influence of his parents than he would be a few years later ; nor can his decision be regarded as fully personal when his outlook and experience are so narrow. For these reasons, as well as for others belonging to the character of his work, it would



too often be a mockery to expect him to weigh the enjoyment of a chosen activity against its financial recompense. And again, he would seldom be convinced by the argument that a man is worth no more than society pleases to give him. That is all very well for a novelist, let us say, or a painter, who is angling for public recognition and striving at the same time to educate the fish: it may pass, though more doubtfully, as a maxim for barristers or professors; but has it any real application to a bricklayer, a carter, a plumber, or to others of similar degree? In a broad sense one may argue that all cases alike are covered by the law of supply and demand, but, as we descend the scale towards the least skilled and humblest occupations, does not that law obliterate all humane considerations and reduce itself to the employer's cold resolve to buy labour as cheaply as possible in a market where it must always be cheap? If so, there can at least be no injustice in the counter-move, that is to say, in the combination of workers for the purpose of selling their work at a higher price, even if they carry it to a point at which violence is done to all interests but their own.

The validity of the argument will not easily be disputed, but what is its moral? In almost every age of free speculation men have been found to support the opinion that Justice means no more than successful force. So harsh a thesis is not lightly to be dismissed as a mere figment of cynicism or sophistry. Justice, it is wiser to admit, will always revert to identity with superior force whenever society fails to make it mean something better. Law alone will not save us, for law is often but the instrument and expression of force.



Indeed it was reflection upon the nature of Law that first made men despair of Justice ; and in this very problem of work and reward, which now is convulsing the modern world, the first aim of every combatant party is to capture the legislative machinery, with a view to imposing its own conception of Justice on the rest. Nor is the difficulty evaded by passing from law as the ordinance of the State to the less precise sense assumed by the word in economics. The more prominent the "law" of supply and demand becomes in controversy, the more bitter will be the sense of injustice and the stronger the impulse to rebel. As for the solemn pretence that a "law" of that kind is inevitable, you might as well argue that to walk upstairs is impossible because the law of gravitation obliges you to move towards the centre of the earth. And so, when we compare the less with the more "necessary" kinds of work, and find that it is chiefly in relation to the latter that the terms "justice" and "rights" are bandied to and fro, the suspicion arises that we are about to touch the level at which "justice" means the interest of the stronger, and "rights" anything that can be extorted by force. Necessity, says the proverb, knows no law. I should prefer to say that it knows no justice.

If the marketable value of human work is regulated at one extreme by caprice, at the other by necessity ; and if we have visited each in turn without lighting upon Justice, it would seem that there must be something wrong in our method of search. The truth is that Justice, as the agent of distribution, is in the position of a demonstrative science which cannot supply its own premisses. Given a recognised basis, it will



then be unjust to pay a man more or less than a certain wage, but for a real direction of the process it is vain to imagine that a statute, an economic formula, a computation of profits, or anything so shallow can serve as a governing principle. I have contended, for instance, that in the creation of wealth "science" and invention count for much more than "labour." But *how much*? How can any economic calculation enable us to make a fair comparison between mental ability and manual toil? Or will it be any easier if we bridge the wide gap between the creative idea and the operative "hand" by thrusting in the capitalist, the advertiser, the retailer, the commercial traveller, and all the other *dramatis personae*? Shall we, then, look for a millennium in blessed words like co-operation and profit-sharing, in guilds or syndicalism, or in that last refuge of mental indolence, the State? These, when not masks of tyranny, are but makeshifts and halfway-houses. There is no economic solution of economic problems. What lies behind all our difficulties is nothing less than our philosophical conception of life as a whole. There alone is an adequate standard of valuation; thence alone can Justice derive a meaning comprehensive enough to carry us beyond legalism and barren economics. Justice can only be a free and mutual gift; rights cannot be extorted by force; for whatever is forcibly extorted thereby ceases to be right and just. Never can the relations of men to one another be equitable until they are grounded in the faith that no good thing can be either redistributed or diminished by distribution.

All this, I freely confess, must sound vague and remote from the actual conduct of life, but, for illustra-



tion of the function of philosophy, let me refer once more to my own contention, that the claim of "labour" to dominate human society is equivalent to renouncing the principle of civilisation. It is entirely a question of relative values, and I maintain that the advocates of "labour" rest their case on the false assumption that work is valuable in proportion to its necessity, whereas necessity is the very fact that depreciates value. The issue here is purely philosophical. We have to consider what meaning and ultimate object we discern in human life: to be content with any less radical argument is simply to evade the contest. On philosophical grounds too (quite independently of the economic fallacy) I reject the view that the producer has any peculiar right to absorb the product, for on that principle the greater part of mankind would be entitled to no share at all in the higher fruits of civilisation. Picture a war between two factions, one threatened with starvation of the body because it did not sow corn or tend fat oxen, the other with starvation of the soul because none would guide it to the seat of the Muses. The "production" doctrine is, in fact, pure selfishness. Try to arrive on those lines at a fair distribution of goods, and nothing but disastrous failure can ensue. And once more, the consequence of substituting an economic interpretation of life for a wider philosophy has been to conceal the very existence of the fundamental question, how far the joy of energy can be its own compensation. I have admitted, and admit again with emphasis, that to thousands of men and women the question must have a hollow sound. Their occupations are wearisome, pointless, perhaps even hateful; they find no reason for persevering in them but the



pressure of necessity or the lure of opulence at some distant day. Nevertheless, I can see no glimmer of hope for the future unless the belief that Justice means the equal distribution of wealth is supplanted by the thought that happiness is the free activity of the soul. How infinitely wise was the proposal of Socrates to treat "the art of money-making" as irrelevant to the analysis both of Justice and of work!

As to equality, I have never been able to guess why men should expect to be equal in tangible wealth any more than in strength or beauty or wisdom, but, without diverging into that ancient battlefield, let us reflect a little further on the failure of many kinds of work to make life enjoyable; or, to choose a better expression, the failure of many lives to provide their own enjoyment. We cannot lay the whole burden on the actual hours of work, for that would be to suggest that the toilsome forms of work, or even the element of toil in all work, might be eliminated. Visions of that kind, sometimes cherished in garden suburbs, belong rather to the Garden of Eden. Hours of work and hours of leisure must be viewed as a whole. While their respective parts in making life delectable will vary with the dispositions of individual men almost as greatly as with the intrinsic nature of occupations, the contrast between work and play, business and leisure, will always be sharpest where the activity itself is least delightful; and that is one reason for the common complaint that the "working-class" has insufficient leisure and insufficient means of profiting by what it has. Concerning hours of labour, the possibility and even the commercial advantage of reducing them, it would be superfluous here to express an opinion. For my own



argument, however, the employment of leisure, and the balancing of work and recreation in the general economy of life, are of vital importance ; and thus it is that we arrive at education, the one topic of philosophical discussion which it never seems possible to avoid.



## VIII

### THE DILEMMA OF EDUCATION

THE demands for free education, better education, an educational ladder stretching from the cradle to the university (not to say the grave) are too familiar to need exposition. But of those who insist most earnestly upon the duty of providing such facilities I wonder how many have tried to gauge the probable effect on industrial conditions of extending higher education to all. The main objects appear to be two, improvement in the quality of work and the finer use of leisure. Both are admirable and almost beyond criticism. Yet before we decide to pursue them with unqualified enthusiasm it might be well to take account of certain other facts and to glance at some rather startling possibilities. First of all, we must accept with some caution the belief that improved education for the multitude will mean improvement in financial welfare. That belief rests on imperfect scrutiny of the relevant facts. Within the bounds of a particular business it is often (though not always) true that the man of superior attainments secures a higher rate of pay ; or, if we take a general survey of human occupations, our first impression may be that ignorance and poverty, knowledge and wealth, go together. No judgment, however, could be more superficial. I pass over the minor point, that the success of the better-educated



man is often founded on the ignorance of his rivals, and so would vanish if they too could acquire knowledge; nor shall I trouble to quote any of the numerous exceptions to an imaginary rule. These are but trifling criticisms until we perceive that wealth, for all its material solidity, cannot be measured by arithmetic, inasmuch as its purchasing value is relative to the mental outlook of its possessor. I am not suggesting that eggs and bacon are sold at a higher figure to university graduates than to chimney-sweepers (though such things have been known to happen), or that house-rent rises in proportion to the tenant's intellectual reputation. What I mean is that, with every expansion of the mental horizon, felicity appears to consist less and less completely in a waterproof larder, furnished with a sufficiency of bacon and eggs. Earlier in the argument I remarked that great wealth was excusable when imagination was large enough to cope with it. On the same principle, I must now observe that wealth, as expressed in terms of money, means the ability to purchase what you want. What you "want" is partly determined by the social traditions in which you have been bred, and for this reason a curate or a doctor with £200 a year will always be poorer than a cobbler or a tinker with the same emolument. But deeper by far than the effect of social conventions is the influence of knowledge and imaginative vision. Consider, for example, the stimulus of historical study to the appetite for travel, the provocation of books to a scholar, or the shocking discrepancy between a small income and a taste for old porcelain and Whistler etchings. True, there are bright, helpful people who assure us that all these things can be enjoyed



in public libraries, national collections, and personally conducted tours; just as there are some who believe the earth to be flat, and others, for aught I can tell, whose notion of Paradise is an eternal promenade through the British Museum. Magnify a hundredfold these tepid consolations, and still the bonds of poverty will press most hardly upon those who best know how to be rich. For the effect of education is at once to enlarge the imagination and to restrict the means of satisfying its demands. In this sense, at any rate, it will always be true that whoso increases knowledge increases sorrow. Moreover, the relation of money to the power of enjoyment is but one aspect of the difficulty attending the grant of higher education to all. Lack of means to purchase the ornaments of leisure raises less storms than discontent with work.

And here we must wipe out the hypothetical boundary between "working-class" and "bourgeois" ways of livelihood. Much as we hear of the monotony and tedium of artisan life, it cannot be doubted that the discontent arising from that cause is more frequent, and far less surprising, among the legions of ill-paid clerks and assistants who, in one way or another, grease the dull wheels of commercial machinery, or polish with assiduous futility the lower benches of the learned professions. Nor are disappointment and scepticism confined to these humbler situations. Barristers and doctors with a mediocre practice; teachers of apathetic pupils; poets damned by the faint praise of critics; painters accepted by the Royal Academy—how many of these, parting slowly with illusions, gaze disconsolately over the flat plains of life? No station, no office is immune from disappointment. Cabinet



ministers grow conscious of ineptitude, and even a permanent official may be visited with transient remorse. After all, it is the mind that chafes at uncongenial work, and where the mind is best cultivated and most aspiring professional routine is likely to be least tolerable.

I must notice, however, the probable objection, that my argument casts a serious aspersion on the whole pursuit of knowledge. An old and respectable tradition assures us that philosophy is itself a fountain of enjoyment, that the sage is armed against fortune, that poverty brings no emptiness where the treasury of the mind is full. Agreeable as it would be to probe the meaning and validity of these commonplaces, I am not directly concerned with them. In examining the relation of work to reward, and the common sources of dissatisfaction, we have to remain on the average level of human experience. So regarded, the broad result of comparing worse educated minds with better is that improvement in culture tends to heighten the consciousness of poverty and to foster a spirit of scepticism or disgust. The main task before us, then, is to calculate the effect of letting loose upon the huge world of "labour" the higher education now restricted to comparatively few. For my own part, I should be ready to throw aside at this point the whole question of wages and salaries; for that, I am sure, would soon prove to be a trifling matter as compared with the deeper revolution of sentiment about the kinds of work that occupy men's lives.

The Greeks, who of all peoples had the clearest insight into the law of civilisation, were saved from certain misgivings by taking the existence of slavery for granted. To slaves was allotted all the drudgery



which had to be accomplished if their masters were to enjoy the life of wisdom and virtue. We, on the other hand, have tricked ourselves by the abolition of slavery into forgetting that the same unpleasant work has still to be done. The true, the unsolved problem is not the institution of slavery, but the task of the slave. Pass a statute to make an end of the one, and the other will confront you more palpably than before. Who will hew the wood and draw the water? Habit and necessity provided at first the obvious answer, that the same men, or the same families, would continue in the old way of life. The slave, the serf, the *adscriptus glebae* might technically have vanished, but a change in legal terminology was found to have altered uncommonly few of the facts. In communities mainly agricultural, and in times when education was admittedly confined to the few, there were no great searchings of heart; but in our own industrial age, with its dense populations, monstrous cities, and infinite mechanical complexity, while the mass of dirty work has increased beyond measure, the assumption that special classes of men exist for the sake of doing it is questioned more passionately every day. When the common folk began to pick up the elements of education, our grandmothers shook their heads and vowed no good would come of it. Girls would grow impudent, restless, unfitted for their station, and vulgarly emulous of their betters. In a certain sense our grandmothers were perfectly right. Their philosophy, however, was limited, and their apprehensions ranged not much farther afield than the business of household and farm. But when we pass from these rustic perplexities to the gloom of slums and the sordid uproar of factories; when we



watch thousands of men and women drifting to and fro, like bewildered ghosts, under the pall of smoke which has to pass as the dome of heaven, we may hastily leap to the conclusion that nothing but ignorance could reconcile them to their odious destiny. The inference, no doubt, will be dubious. Much rhetoric and much amiable sympathy have been wasted on sorrows that rarely are felt. When and where human beings will find contentment is not easily prophesied ; Arcadia has little charm for the inveterate townsman ; even London children on their annual holiday look askance at rural delicacies and pine for their succulent snacks of fish. Yet the actual sentiments of the industrial population under present conditions do not invalidate the judgment, that ignorance has thus far proved the best substitute for slavery ; in other words, that lower kinds of work are performed only or chiefly by those who are incapable of higher. Pass through the black country, peer into pits and sewers, walk only for an hour or two about the grey streets of London, and then ask yourself candidly whether men and women educated up to the university, or even the secondary, standard would consent to perform all these trumpery, wearisome and nauseous tasks.

Such is the educational problem of civilisation, which, so far as I can see, we have not yet had the courage to face. When the Bolsheviks set the stout and prosperous bourgeois to clean out the sewers, it may have been a fine stroke of humour, but it was also the refutation of the Bolshevik gospel. Had Lenin and Trotsky stood at work in the subterranean slime and bawled their political doctrines into the upper air, or had they protested that drainage was a useless bourgeois inven-



tion, they would at least have had the merit of consistency. But when the bourgeois was armed with broom and shovel and told to clear up the mess, it became obvious that nothing more was contemplated than the interchange of Jack and his master. Whether we call this beneficent revolution or brutal harlequinade is purely a question of taste. The mistress may be driven down into the scullery while the maid reads novels in the parlour, but no real change is thus effected, so long as the scullion's work has still to be done. How do we propose to get it done in the golden future, when all alike are endowed by education with delicate perceptions and elegant ideals?

Some two or three expedients have been suggested by those whom the existence of the dilemma has not wholly escaped. First of all come those who cling to faith in salvation by machinery. Inanimate instruments, they believe, will at last supplant the animate, and all will be well. No hope, I fear, could be more delusive. When we isolate particular persons and particular pieces of work, it is easy enough to be deceived. We watch the coal-scuttle, formerly lugged upstairs by a panting housemaid, ascending in the effortless lift; we call to mind a hundred similar conveniences, and rejoice in the deliverance of mankind. We forget, however, that the total effect of machinery on the world has been to create a thousand times as much dirt and grinding toil as it has removed. In the ages of agricultural labour and handicraft there was more poverty but infinitely less grime and bondage. It is the factory and the "hand" that have brought us to the edge of revolution; and the revolt of the worker to-day (however little he may know it) is against the



machines which have mastered his life. When the scuttle and the lift are really taken as a parable ; when, that is to say, machines are adjusted and restricted to the ordering of an intelligible scheme of life, it will be a different matter ; but until that far-off happy day arrives, to chase the *ignis fatuus* of automatism is only to wade deeper into the marsh. Another proposal, ingenious and plausibly counterfeiting justice, is to assign the highest rates of pay to the most repulsive kinds of work. To this the merely economic obstacle is that "necessary" labour must be cheap. The graver objection is that, the more you educate men and increase their self-respect, the less ready will they be to lead dull or degraded lives in return for a bribe.

A third and more serious policy rests on the old and established doctrine, that different men are naturally fitted for different occupations ; some for intellectual activity, some for administration or business, some merely for unskilled manual labour. Let each man, then, find the place best suited to his quality, and the difficulty will be overcome. To philosophical statesmen, from Plato onwards, this principle has strongly appealed, for its equity seems to be as patent as its promise of satisfaction to all. With intelligent methods of education and a sufficiently flexible society, what hindrances can there be to the realisation of an ideal so luminously simple ? Alas ! there are only too many. In the first place, all the old difficulties about work and pay are likely to recur. However honestly we believe that appropriate work contains its own reward, the appreciation of this principle must always be faintest when we reach the lowest grade of intelligence. Caliban was well suited to his daily tasks, but we do not learn



that he was enamoured of them, or that, transported from the magic island to Manchester, he would have refused to take part in a strike. In these times, too, we should have to reckon with the possibility of an Ariel in Bolshevik pay. Again, the principle of obedience to natural inclination must always tend to defeat itself. For what else can have been the origin of organised crafts and castes, the very institutions which afterwards confine men to a rigorous environment, with little or no chance of escape? Even national characteristics are thus stereotyped, and the dominance of some peoples over others justifies itself. One more step, and we slide imperceptibly into the Aristotelian doctrine of the "natural" slave. Nature is, in truth, the most ambiguous and slippery of goddesses. Whether passive subservience to her mandates or active resistance is the sounder policy, philosophers, after more than two thousand years of disputation, have notoriously failed to decide.

A third difficulty thus rises into view. The family (in some shape or other) is assuredly a "natural" institution, and the family is the toughest of all obstacles to the gravitation of individuals towards their "naturally" appointed work. Not merely the legal right to bequeath property, but tradition, pride and "natural" affection will always exercise their sway. The father will desire to impart his own craft to the son, or, if ambitious, will strive to hoist him upwards into some more highly reputed profession. Never, unless he has parted with his humanity, will he consent to see him fall lower in the social or economic scale. For this reason light-hearted or light-headed reformers in all ages have proposed to abolish the family; an excellent



plan if human beings could be treated as algebraical symbols in an equation, or if the disadvantages of the family system were even half so destructive of society as the advantages offered us in exchange.

Lastly, if, despite these objections, it should still be maintained that the community would be made happier and healthier by the adjustment of work to natural disposition, I will not contest the principle in the abstract, but I will ask its advocates whether they are perfectly certain that all human beings, or at least the greater part of them, have those decisive aptitudes which the theory requires. In a rough-and-ready sense it is clear enough that some men are fitted for kinds of work above or below the capacity of others ; but to infer (as do so many of our sparkling educational reformers) that everybody is born with a peculiar gift for something, and that, on this ground, it is expedient to turn the fabric of society upside down, is the very apotheosis of folly. More than this, if every man who found himself engaged in a menial task were assured that this was indeed his just allotment, I doubt if he would be content with mere rebellion against the authority of the State. Would he not execrate the very name of Justice and curse the day of his birth ?

From these unsuccessful excursions we are driven back to our unresolved dilemma. We cannot recognise slavery ; we dare not cynically avow that the masses must be kept in ignorance in order that servile tasks may be done ; we shall not, if we are candid, deny that the spread of higher education will either make men too fine for the lower kinds of work or oblige them to confess themselves too coarse for refinement. It was, I believe, a vague consciousness of this problem



that caused humane and intelligent men to resist the abolition of slavery ; while the same thought, working in a certain type of revolutionary mind, has sometimes issued in despair of civilisation. For civilisation remorselessly exhibits all the inequalities which Nature hides in her bosom. At the present time, in a world confused and outraged by war, we see before us neither despair nor acquiescence, but a revolt which threatens to shatter the temple built up through long and arduous centuries by the exquisite ingenuity of man. Nothing is so frail and delicate as civilisation : the mere vibration of battle is enough to annihilate the prizes of victory. If the result of a mortal combat between "labour" and the rest of the community is not, perhaps, so certain as those who look only at the numbers of the rival armies imagine, it is certain that either event must be ruinous. Either the world will fall back into barbarism, or it will save its inheritance at too dire a cost. Everyone with a gleam of sanity in his composition will rather strive to invent a way of reconciliation. To define a policy is beyond the scope of this pamphlet, but I cannot end without some hint of the quarter from which I should venture to look for the appearance of light.



## IX

### THE WAY OF ESCAPE ?

EASY as it is to project into the future one's rainbow hopes and fancies, the track that leads towards their realisation must pass through a dark and rugged landscape. Could we count on good-will and general harmony, could we root out time-honoured prejudice, jealousy, and hatred, there still would remain that most baffling of obstructions, the mediocrity of human nature. Now this mediocrity (nowhere more apparent than among those who have had the same opportunity of the same education) becomes, under democratic auspices, more heavily preponderant in proportion to the increase of population ; and one effect of industrial, as of military, competition has been to establish it as an axiom that no country can be healthily progressive unless its numbers are swelling year by year. The speculative ground of this assumption is, I conceive, the failure of Malthus to demonstrate his heresy ; for so long as a Malthusian flavour hung about political writings there was a tendency to deplore the progenitive fervour of the poorer classes, which now is held up as a model to the discreditable rich. The whole question, whether as one of morality or of worldly prudence, is far too complicated for casual discussion, but the admonition to be fruitful and multiply, delivered some thousands of years ago to patriarchs in the desert, will hardly, I suppose, be taken as a final maxim for manufacturing cities, and I am certain that the refutation



of Malthus proves nothing at all. The true Malthusianism (if the word may be tolerated) is that population increases as fast as you can feed it, and much faster than you can raise it to a high standard of civilisation. The careful bourgeois, who has to educate and provide for his children, is content with a small family ; the poorer folk, who are taught to recognise no such responsibility, breed with a fine indifference to the future. So long, then, as the State, believing this to be the basis of national supremacy, reckons it a sacred obligation to provide food and employment for all, every scheme for refining the quality of workmanship and the daily life of the worker will be swept away by a fresh torrent of babies.

As a first step towards regeneration, I suggest, therefore, that a reduction of our population by some five or ten millions would increase our industrial efficiency, enlarge our material wealth, and make the pilgrimage of life a little smoother for those who at present find it most rough. Whether souls in their ante-natal condition, now pressing on towards the gates of birth and the amenities of the slum, would be vitally injured by this policy I must leave it to Plato and others to decide. For us the only practical question is how to effect so complete a reversal of the prevailing tendency without encouraging fantastic restrictions on marriage or vile and degrading prevention of birth. The hard way of temperance and foresight, which alone can lead in the true direction, will, I fear, attract but few followers, while the State, in its fond desire to conciliate the forces of "labour" and (fonder still) to banish poverty, is deliberately ushering into the world a mighty host of tax-supported paupers and decorating them with



the titles of freemen and citizens. Whereas the forefathers of the poor, small as their relish may have been for private benevolence, had a far greater contempt for maintenance at the public expense, we have now determined to combine the evils of public and private charity by elevating doles to the status of "rights," and by officially fleecing the bourgeois lest the "working-man" should go short of wool.

In a rash moment I said that we could not recognise slavery, but if we are to breed a race of Englishmen who expect to be housed and doctored and educated without lifting a finger on their own behalf, fed, when times are hard, by subsidies to millers or bakers, employed and paid on their own terms, insured against the penalties of incompetence, pensioned in their declining years, and barely subject to the accident of mortality, what else will there be but political cant and doctrinaire phrases to distinguish such creatures from sleek and pampered slaves? My business, however, is not to bemoan these portents of the coming age, but merely to inquire whether the process of arithmetical reduction can be stimulated by some deeper conversion of mind. Government intervention, nationalisation of industries, even Whitley councils and similar tactical devices are, at the most, but delaying measures, comparable in the language of the day to trench-warfare, but holding out no promise of ultimate peace. The root of the evil is a distorted vision of life and a false conception of the issue. Industrialism is proposed as the alternative to militarism, and to this I reply (as before) that, if militarism is bad for the world, industrialism bids fair to be worse. We deceive ourselves by recalling the familiar contrast



between the horrors of war and the graceful arts of peace : we forget that industrialism is a recent creation, without precedent or historical analogy. Superficially the outcome of scientific invention, it springs, fundamentally, from a new philosophy of happiness, or rather, from a philosophy which has forgotten its own first lesson, that happiness is the aim of life. Doubtless everyone continues to cherish his private objects of desire ; doubtless, too, there never was an age when the general resolve to have " a good time " was firmer ; and yet, when we calmly ponder the effects of the industrial revolution, and contemplate the lives of rich and poor alike in the endless struggle for economic supremacy, it is difficult to believe that one in a hundred of them has ever put it to himself that life of this kind may not be worth living, and that a better may lie within his reach. There is, I allow, little point in comparisons of new and old. Ask whether the Englishman of to-day or the Englishman of a hundred years ago is the happier, and no materials will be found for a convincing answer. Antiquarianism is a diversion, not a remedy. The golden age of skins and acorns was never more than a literary affectation, and the " simple life " is wont to resolve itself into a more expensive fashion in dress. The evil does not lie in the general augmentation of wealth, nor yet in the follies of personal expenditure. Least profitable of all are tirades against the wealthy, combined with ill-concealed envy of their lot. Hatred of the rich because of their riches is more explicable but not more defensible than contempt of the poor because of their poverty. The industrial system, which, by reducing life to an economic formula, has



clouded all higher ideals and put civilisation itself in jeopardy, would be neither mended nor ended if all the larger incomes were swept away and the proceeds distributed. There would still remain, and very possibly in worse case than before, this vast and unwieldy population which we can neither satisfy nor control; a population educated enough to welcome the doctrines of Marx and Lenin, but not wise enough to know that they are nonsense.

The only cure for this distracted multitude is, I repeat, to get rid of it. But how can it be done? Not by the rough benevolence of machine-guns, nor even by transportation to America. The forces which created it are "science" and philosophy, and it is they alone that can undo their work. For consider the paradox of the situation. Were one asked to name a typical result of applying "science" to industry, one would point without hesitation to the slum. Squalid alleys, battered landscapes, stunted and twisted human beings, dirty, noisy, sunless lives, make up a long and awkward bill; and meanwhile "Science" rushes about, wringing her hands and shouting at the top of her voice, "Sanitation," "Eugenics," "Town-planning," and other watchwords of progress; a modern Rachel weeping for her children, and protesting between her sobs that at least they are illegitimate. So, no doubt, they are; and the occurrence of such bastard offspring should remind us that "science" has only a minor part in the drama of life. The author of the plot and the characters must always be philosophy; some vision of human destiny, some final judgment upon the worth of actions and things. "Science" can teach us how to get riches, but not whether happiness can be bought



with them, just as she can fashion hideous engines of warfare but cannot determine the morality of their use.

How, then, shall we rescue civilisation by reforming our philosophy? "The multitude," says Plato, "is not philosophical," and in the main our revolution must begin from above. Yet every man becomes a philosopher in embryo as soon as he asks himself whether his own way of life is tolerable; and the more you educate men for other than technical purposes the more frequently that question will thrust itself into their meditations. Were whole industries to be extinguished simply because perpetual strikes for higher wages had made them economically impossible, the result would be to cast a mass of hungry and exasperated workers into the streets; but if, through the gradual spread of a loftier ambition, fathers should refuse to set their children to stupid, dingy work, no matter how high the wages, society might succeed in remodelling itself without rushing upon famine and riot. Our unalterable dependence on "necessaries" need not seriously disturb us. To the end of time, it is true, man will plough and weave and build; but does it follow that he must for ever exhaust his skill on the manufacture of what are called "necessaries" only because "luxuries" would be too extravagant a name for their merit? Must all this sweat and dust and clatter be devoted to the multiplication of cheap and flashy goods for a mean and dingy population? Let us beware, at least, of economic remedies which would make the cheap things dearer but not more precious, and of a political philosophy which, seeking only to pacify a tumultuous populace, fears to eradicate the causes of tumult. No other reform is worth pursuing



but the diversion into nobler channels of the energy now wasted on the production of trash. And what this means is that the author of our prospective dilemma, Education, must be trusted to find at last the way of escape. Refine the intelligence of the worker, touch him with the spirit of the artist, fire him with the spark of invention, teach him, above all, that he is responsible for the welfare of himself and his children ; and then he will turn, in due course, from querulous discontent with his wages to a wholesome appetite for his daily work, or to a not less wholesome disgust.

Whatever the steps in our procedure, it is not to be denied that the negative movement involved in every great transformation of ideals must threaten society with shipwreck. For this reason men shrink from a fundamental revision of their philosophy, and trust to the immediate stratagems of "practical" politics. Practical they are in a certain sense, but for the cure of constitutional maladies they are no more a substitute than the boy-scout with his first-aid appliances for the diagnosis of the learned physician. The futility of patching and mending, of compromise and timid concession, was never so patent as at the present hour. We have to deal with the actual and violent upheaval which I have called the revolt against civilisation ; that civilisation which the delegates at Paris are thought to be surrounding with impregnable walls. To me it seems rather that they are busily pouring oil on the surface of a teacup, while the waters of ocean rage more furiously every day. The battle of nations is ancient and familiar ; militarism and the insane ambition to rule the world are periodic evils, which reach their climax and pass away ; but industrialism,



the war of classes and the limitless pretensions of "labour," are a monstrous birth unknown to history. In face of it, we are summoned to fight, not for persons or families, not for privilege and old abuses, but for the law of civilisation which has raised us from the bondage of necessity to the vision of freedom and delight.

And yet this is not enough. At the very moment when we are hurrying away in search of weapons and armour our feet are stayed by the thought of Justice. If love of Justice, as I have myself affirmed, is the authentic cause of war, then the war of classes, no less than the war of nations, must have some tincture of justification. Groping our way through a forest of perplexities, we stumble at last,

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,

upon the spectre which has haunted man throughout his marvellous career. Have we forgotten the dethroned and disinherited while we bask in the glitter of victorious usurpation? Does the choice lie between civilisation and slavery on the one side, barbarism and freedom on the other? Some third alternative there must surely be; for civilised man, we are bound to believe, is not a slavemaster, and the barbarian, we know, is not free. One thing at least it is both wise and charitable to assume, that our troubles were begotten neither by the malice of the rich nor by the obstinacy of the poor. The evils of civilisation are the price we have paid for the goods. It remains to devise a philosophy which will save the treasure and atone for the cost.

