

ART AND THE PEOPLE: A SOCIALIST'S PROTEST AGAINST CAPITALIST BRUTALITY; ADDRESSED TO THE WORKING CLASSES (1883)

Fellow citizens,

I WISH to say a few plain words to you on the subject of art; and since I address myself chiefly to those who are called the working-classes, I know well that the plainer those words are the better, since now for many years, for centuries, the working-classes have scarcely been partakers in art of any kind, and the phraseology of men learned in

the fine arts will be strange to you. For centuries this slavery has been added to the rest of the oppression under which you lie, that you have been forbidden to have any share in the intelligent production of beautiful things.

Indeed, I think it will be news to many of you who toil to live that you may live to toil, that there either is or has been or can be any connexion between Art and the People. It may seem to you, I can well imagine, that art is concerned only in making luxurious toys for rich and idle persons, and that all the working-classes have to do with it, is that some of them can earn their poor wages by working at it as machines work, without knowing or caring what they are doing; while now and then on holidays those of them that chance to think of it and who live in London may stray into the National Gallery or the British Museum, and see the carefully hoarded works of past ages, and get from them such good as men can get who look on a book in an antiquated dialect of their language without an interpreter between them and the past.

And yet there is a phrase which of late has been much in the mouths of those who have been thought to be interested in the welfare of the Fine Arts; they have talked much of Popular Art: what does that mean?

The words Popular Art, or Art of the People, have a meaning you may be sure; the thing which they mean has really existed, or you would have little to look at when you stray into the National Gallery and the British Museum: the Art of the People has in many places and in many times solaced and sustained the people amidst their griefs and troubles.

And a great gift such an art seems to me; an art made intelligently by the whole body of those who live by their labour: instinct with their thoughts and aspirations, moving whither they are moving, changing as they change, the genuine expression of their sense of the beauty and mystery of life: an art born of their joy and outliving their sorrow, though tinged by it: an art leaving to future ages living

witness of the existence of deft hands and eager minds not too proud to tell us of their imperfect thoughts and their glimpses of insight into wonders and terrors, as they passed amid the hurry of their daily work through the sunshine and the shadow of their lives.

This, I say, is the Art of the People, and on this is founded all Art which is worth anything. I do not believe that Art worthy of the name can long exist, unless it rests on such a foundation: or if it can, if it really be that there can be an art practised by and for a few well-to-do and rich people, and founded on the slavery of the many, I for one will have nought to do with it: to me it will be contemptible and dishonourable, a rag of luxury and folly.

And yet, I must tell you that I am an artist: art is that by which I live; it feeds me body and soul, and without it the world would be empty to me: judge therefore how I must love and long for the Art of the People! For with me it comes to this, that I cannot live with any approach to happiness without art forming part of my life, and I know that my only chance of my having any real share in art, is that it shall be the Art of the People: nay more, I know that what art yet remains to us from the time when man had some pleasure in his labour, is lessening day by day, and that unless some change comes which will give all people a share in art, there will soon be no art at all left in the world. Judge therefore, I say, how I must love the Art of the People!

And one thing I must tell you before I go further, that this art is not a mere dream of something which might have been; as I have said it has in many times and places solaced the lives of toiling men; and this I have noticed of the times and places where it has flourished, that it has always been in advance of the apparent progress of the times that produced it. I have been astonished when I have looked into the popular art of past ages to find work so refined and elegant done in times so rude and rough: work bearing so many tokens of quick wit and invention done in times so ignorant

and superstitious: works showing so many signs of freedom of thought and pleasure in life and external nature in days which seem to us to have been so full of oppression, gloom and turmoil; all these, mind you, qualities of hand and soul which could not have been produced to the order of rich men; for such qualities are spontaneous and cannot be bought with money or compelled by power: in short, it is not easy to exaggerate the contrast between the beauty and thoughtfulness of the handicrafts of certain periods, and the folly and disgrace of their history as otherwise told. Can we wonder at this? That written history of "Kings and Scoundrels"** is made up of the deeds of the greedy few ruling arbitrarily; while the history of art is made up of the deeds of the patient many living naturally.

The History of Art! what is that history indeed but the history of the World, since it alone tells us of the deeds of the people, and what they thought of and hoped for? through this and this alone can we look upon times past as they really were and see them alive.

And our own times, the days in which we live, how will those come to know the story of our lives from day to day? Well, when we are gone, and the 19th century has become a mere part of the past history of the world, people will still I suppose study history through the remains and records of popular art, as they do now: but when they come to these days and seek for evidence in their handiwork of the lives of those who lived by their labour, they will be balked and have to stop short: they will perhaps find evidence of what the upper and middle classes thought working men were like left them in literature, chiefly novels; they will have record more or less trustworthy of their efforts towards political and social advancement; they will know that they made and used certain machines, and that they drew such

and such wages: they will in short know something of the people as a political and commercial machine; but of the real story of their lives and the daily labour which was so great a part of them they will know nothing; a blank space will be the history of the popular art of the 19th century.

To make sure that you do not misunderstand me, I will state in the plainest words possible what seems to me to be the condition of Art in civilized countries, and in what proportions such art as there is, is shared amongst the various classes of the community.

Now the fine arts must be divided into two classes or kinds: the first what we may call the intellectual Arts, represented by painting and sculpture, address themselves wholly to the mind of man; they have no necessary connexion with any articles of material use, I mean. It is conceivable that a community might have all bodily necessaries, comforts, luxuries even, and not know what painting and sculpture meant: but besides these strictly intellectual Arts, there is a large body of art (or the pretence of it) which forms part of the matters of our daily life; our houses, our furniture, our utensils for eating and drinking, and our clothes are ornamented by this lesser kind of art, which cannot be dissociated from the things which we use every day: and this is commonly called decorative or ornamental art. I must further explain that while nations and times (though not many) have lacked the purely intellectual art, no nation or time has ever consented to do without the ornamental art; and lastly I must tell you that in all times when the Arts were in a healthy condition there was an intimate connexion between these two kinds of art; nay moreover that in those times when art flourished most, the higher and the lower kinds of art were divided from one another by no hard and fast lines; the highest of the intellectual art had ornamental character in it and appealed to all men, and to all the faculties of a man; while the humblest of the ornamental art shared in the meaning and deep feeling of the intellectual; one melted into the other by scarce

perceptible gradations: or to put it into other words, the best artist was a workman, the humblest workman was an artist.

Well, let us see how it fares with art to-day: those who practise the purely intellectual arts, and who are technically called 'artists' are all by virtue of their occupation conventionally of the class of gentlemen, and many of them are men of education from their youth up: it is nowise my business here or elsewhere to criticize the works of these men; but I think I may be allowed to say that they are really subdivided into two classes, the first composed of men who would in any age of the world have held a high place in their art; the second composed of men who hold their present position of gentlemen-artists either by the accident of their birth, or by their possessing industry, business-habits or such-like qualities out of all proportion to their artistic gifts. The work which these latter produce seems to me of little value to the world (though there is a thriving market for it), and their position is neither dignified nor wholesome; yet they are mostly not to be personally blamed for it, since oftenest they have some gifts for art though not great ones, and would probably not have succeeded in any other career; they are in fact good decorative workmen spoiled by a system which urges them to worldly ambition; in times when popular art was flourishing, and when one man was apprenticed to an artist, just as another was to a carpenter, they would have found their level, and in various ways done useful though unambitious work.

Again as to that first class of artists, who worthily fill their place and make the world wealthier by their work, they are very few, and have won their mastery over their craft by dint of incredible toil, painstaking and anxiety: yet in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, they cannot help looking back with longing eyes toward the past times of art when less labour produced greater results: for whatever knowledge they may have of the older art, and its methods of work, they are cut off from *tradition*, that wonderful almost magical accumulation of the skill of ages, which

men find themselves sharers in almost without effort on their part, and by which their toil of learning is so very much diminished.

Furthermore these great artists, as they only hold on to the past artificially and by effort, so also, and that is worse, they fail to touch widely those who are living in the present: for as a body the whole public, Upper, Middle and Lower classes, is ignorant of art: apart from the artists themselves and those very few persons who have special gifts of sympathy with them, there is no real knowledge of what art means; nothing at the best save certain vague prepossessions, which are but the phantoms of that Tradition I have spoken of, which once bound artist and public together. Therefore the artists are obliged to express themselves, as it were, in a language 'not understood of the people': nor is this their fault; if they were to try, as some think they should, to meet the public half-way, and work in such a manner as to satisfy only those prepossessions of men ignorant of art, they would be casting aside their special gifts, and would become traitors to that cause of art which it is their duty and glory to serve: they have no choice save to do their own personal work without any hope of being understood as things now are; to stand apart as possessors of some sacred mystery, which, whatever happens, they must at least do their best to guard: and by this isolation their loss is great; great both to their own minds and to the work they produce; and as to our loss, the loss of the public, it is not easy to measure: for, you see, it comes to this, if we are to consider the distribution of the great and elevating intellectual pleasure of the enjoyment of the higher arts, that only a very few among the most cultivated classes can share in it.

But if it fares thus with that side of the arts which, depending on individual genius, is only acted on indirectly by bad social conditions, what is likely to be the state of that other side of the fine arts which is commonly called decorative art; art which (or the pretence of which) is to be found

on nearly every piece of goods which is offered for sale? How is it likely to be with this art which above all other depends on the co-operation of men with each other?

Well I suppose there are many people who have not realized the fact that such an art exists, or who have heard that it ever did exist; and few indeed are those who consider that this great body of art, which has in times past had such a hold on the world, can now be worth the exercise of the thoughts of serious people.

Such as these arts now are, this is the way in which they are carried on; they are made by three sets of people, I won't say working together, but rather jostling along together: the first link in the chain is the capitalist called the manufacturer, a ridiculous misnomer since the word ought to mean a man who makes things with his hands: well he is by virtue of his position conventionally a gentleman, and often enough has received a liberal education; but in spite of any education he may have received it is rarely indeed that he takes any interest in the craft he is supposed to direct, and rarer still that he troubles himself on the quality of any ornament, i.e., art, which may be in it for its own sake: nay, if he be personally inclined to do so his position would soon put a stopper on his wishes: he has been created to 'make a profit' as 'tis called, i.e., to accumulate money which he has not earned, and which most people suppose tumbles mysteriously from the sky as a heaven-sent blessing on capital; but which some of us, who have not been content to accept the miracle, believe really comes of the earnings of those who do labour with their hands, and are called in the jargon of to-day 'operatives' not manufacturers. A good deal more could be said of the manufacturer and his position, but at present I must consider him only as the first link of the chain in the production of popular art (so called) and from that point of view all I need say of him is that he is and is compelled to be quite careless of what art there may profess to be in the wares he gets made. It will illustrate this side of the subject

if you think how many rich men there are who profess (no doubt honestly) to be deeply interested in art and literature; who read poems and such-like books, who further the establishment of museums, who buy pictures for great sums of money, and who nevertheless are actually engaged in pushing on the degradation of art, because they are in a position which forces on them the accumulation of money as an imperative duty, not to be set aside by any consideration: which money if they but knew it, is not theirs, but has been forced by the screw of competition out of the earnings of those who are, to speak bluntly, their slaves.

The second link in the chain of the system by which industrial art is produced, is the body of men who go between capital and labour, as managers, foremen, and the like; as far as the ornamenting of wares is concerned they are represented by the designer, who is usually educated technically but seldom liberally: in the few cases in which gentlemen-artists are employed in this intermediate position, they know little or nothing of the way in which the wares are made and have next to no communication with the workman; but whatever the social position of the designer may be as a factor in the production of art, he is bound by the same necessity as the capitalist to consider first of all the 'making a profit,' and is also in most cases only a superior slave to the operative-slave, and competes for a bare existence like the latter.

As for the workman, the third link in the chain, I need not waste many words on his share in the production of art; when he has anything to do save to tend an automatic machine, he has nevertheless no control over the design of the art, or even over the way in which it is to be carried out; he is only responsible for turning out his work rigidly to pattern, is in fact a machine and nothing better.

Now at present I will not ask you workmen whether you are content to spend your working hours fulfilling the office of cog-wheels and cranks, but I will simply assert that under the system I have been speaking of it is impos-

sible to turn out art: you must take an artist's word for that.

Let us look at the system again and summarize its beautiful arrangements: I am supposing it, mind you, to be a system for the production of art as it verily professes to be in some degree in all cases, while sometimes it is supposed to be employed making wares which are pure works of art. This in short is the system: at the head is a man who is absolutely master of the production, who is forced by his position not to heed whether what he produces is good or bad so long as it sells at a profit: his will is carried one step further by subordinates who have to take care that the wares shall sell at a profit and of nothing else; and finally the 'hands' who accomplish the will of the 'captain of labour' have one thing only to do, to make their labour profitable—to their master.

What place can art have in such a system? How much can people care about art who will put up with the products of such a system?

But indeed whatever may be thought of the matter by a public quite ignorant of art, the plain truth is that the system does not intend to produce either art or anything else which might add to the pleasure of life or its dignity: making a profit out of the lives of the great masses of the working-man is its sole aim.

Therefore the sad truth is that there is no popular art to-day, no art which represents the feelings and aspirations of the people at large, as for example the buildings of the Middle Ages represented the feelings and aspirations of the people, gentle and simple, lay and clerk, of that period.

This then is the condition of the fine arts under the rule of Plutocracy: on the one side there remains of the higher intellectual art, the work of poets, painters, and the like, a very small remnant struggling amidst a thicket of pretence and imposture: this remnant is lofty in aim and is not without special skill of its own; but it is quite unregarded by, indeed unknown to the people in general, and is but ill understood even among the cultivated classes by all but a very few.

On the other side of what used to be popular art there remains but a ghastly pretence of ornament which is nothing but a commercial imposture, or at best but a foolish survival of a half-remembered habit.

That I say is all the art we have left us; we in the heyday of civilization, we who, as many people confidently believe, have at last perfected our social system, and arranged for it to endure for ever in that perfect form.

Popular art is a thing the world once had and has now lost: is the loss grievous or trivial?

I answer first by another question: Is it right that the most of civilized men, all town-dwellers at least, should be deprived of the sight of beautiful things? is it right that they should, except on rare occasions, have to look on mere squalid ugliness?

I do not think we can seriously argue that question: consider what it means; loss of the sense of beauty. Indeed you may say that people will get used to it and will not feel it: alas! that is too true of this loss as of others. Think then what follows! We shall no longer for one thing be able to understand the meaning of the poets and great writers of the world; their language will be dead to us. What would be left to us indeed of all that makes life worth living? What! shall man go on generation after generation gaining fresh command over the powers of nature, gaining more and more luxurious appliances for the comfort of the body, yet generation after generation losing some portion of his natural senses: that is, of his life and soul? Think of a race of men whose eyes are only of use to serve them to carry their food to their mouths without spilling it!

It is no idle fear that this may befall us; nay there are plenty of such men already; and they may well say that if we are to live amidst of London as it is or amidst the squalor of the manufacturing districts without any hope of bettering the state of things, if not for ourselves, yet at least for our sons or our sons' sons, they may well say in this hopeless case that they are happier than those who have still

kept their manlike senses: that it is better to be born blind.

A strange conclusion to come to if we must! a strange outcome of the progress of the race, if that be so:

That nature should have led us on through her ever varying moods and seasons of loveliness to desire beauty, and then that our own greed and cowardice should spoil all for us, even nature herself in the long run: if indeed it be true as I hear all kinds of people asserting that it is, that the inevitable destiny of the race of man will compel him to cover the whole of the civilized world with places like London or Manchester.

As for me I will say plainly that I can conceive of no greater downfall to the hopes of civilization than the fulfilment of this so-called inevitable destiny would be: a society replete with all material comforts but shorn of man's intellectual pleasures: in such cold words has one to speak of the reduction of the world to something far below a huge swine-stye; the grossest state of savagery which the world has known would be better than that, for there was hope in it; but no hope in the future which the present system, the rule of plutocracy, would bring us to.

So I say that if the beauty which once surrounded the daily life of man is to pass away for ever, the mere loss of that beauty, of the reasonable pleasure of the eyes, would be a grievous loss to the world: nay such a loss would be a sign that either our ideas of the progress of the race were but a fond dream from the first, or that progress has reached its height and is now going down hill: that the decrepitude of the race of man is beginning.

Where lies the hope with which we must answer this terrible fear?

To my mind it is wrapped up in the answer to be made to yet another question which I must now ask: Is it right that all men who make anything should be deprived of the pleasure of making beautiful things intelligently? Or, to put it in other words, is it right that only a very few men should have pleasure in their daily work?

I can easily suppose that it seems strange to most of you to hear that there can be pleasure in labour: and truly to most men nowadays, even to most of those who are not strictly of the working-classes there is no pleasure in it; yet there are still a few men left whose life is spent in creating beauty for the sake of the beauty, that is to say that their work may give pleasure to themselves and others. Now consider such work, think of the pleasure that lies in a great piece of intellectual art, a picture, a poem or a piece of music; the pleasure and elevation of soul which you receive from it as you look or read or listen: think of this I say, and I believe it will be as inconceivable to you as it is to me that such work can be done without pleasure, that what it has rejoiced you so to receive has been no joy, nothing but weariness for the author, the inventor, to give.

People talk of the inspiration of a great author or a great artist; not without reason I think; for to my mind that inspiration means the hope and the fruition of pleasure which fills a man as he receives from the minds of those who came before him to give to his fellows now living and to those that shall live.

Now further I assert that some portion of this pleasure of creation is felt by every man who duly makes anything for the benefit of mankind: in which sentence you see there lie two important claims for labour: the first that such labour must be *duly* done; the second that it must be done for the benefit of the commonwealth.

It must be duly done; there must be in it some of the keen interest which every healthy man takes in healthy life; and in order that there may be such interest, it must have in it variety and hope besides that mysterious bodily pleasure which goes with the deft exercise of the bodily powers: the variety and hope that should go with all labour are intimately connected with each other: for the hope means hope of excellence, the hope of doing something different from day to day; nay in the end, of doing something which no other man but the workman has yet

thought of in some respects at least: a piece of work so done, you understand, is a work of art, and he who does it is an artist, and only so done can any work that has any endurance in it be done duly.

But also not only must the work be done duly, but it must be done for the benefit of the commonwealth: when done it must be worth the trouble and labour spent on it, and when this claim is satisfied there is added self-respect to the hope and variety which I have just claimed as due to worthy labour: so that the pleasure which an artist, that is a free workman, feels in his labour, is made up of these three things, variety, hope of excellence and self-respect: and the feelings of those who receive his work with due sympathy may be expressed by the corresponding words, surprise, pleasure and gratitude: and, believe me, the knowledge that one's work will be so received is a reward which the greatest man cannot afford to fall short of, and which the humblest cannot be deprived of without suffering grievous wrong.

But the workman of to-day is not free: he is during his working hours at least the slave of a system of labour which does not in the least concern itself with his pleasure in the work: instead of the incitement of the hope of excellence and the amusement of variety, it uses one goad to labour, the fear of ruin and starvation: it says in plain terms: 'Do this work which blind chance has apportioned to you, or else go to the workhouse or die.'

Who can wonder that all work which can be ill done is ill done nowadays? it would be a more reasonable hope to expect to find figs on thistles than to find art growing from such a system.

For, moreover, those who have to work under the compulsion of competitive commerce cannot comfort themselves by thinking that suffer as they may they are suffering for the benefit of the commonweal. The system of competition which enslaves them has no such end in view as that: it is but the hollowest pretence which professes to think

that the greater part of the wares made by modern commerce are of any use to the world; a professor of that system will, if he says what he thinks, admit that speedily enough: ask him the end of commerce, and he will tell you, to find occupation for people, to carry on the life of society.

But I will translate his speech and tell you what it means: just this is the end of competitive commerce, the getting people to live and breed in order that they may toil to go on living and breeding and by their toil produce a profit for certain people who call themselves masters: other things may be good, says this gospel, but this thing is necessary, that workmen should live and breed to produce a profit for their masters: this makes the true greatness of a country, this is prosperity, this is civilization.

Well, whatever names you may call it by, and I could find different names from these, it is for this we have given up art at least: and I who know what art means am not content with the sacrifice. But you, working men, of whom I am to my measureless grief compelled to say that you do not know what art means, I ask you to consider what has been sacrificed along with art and as a part of it.

I have said that an artist, or free workman, works amused by variety, cheered by hope of success and excellence, and elevated by the sense of giving worthy gifts to the world: how then does the slave of commerce work? Does variety amuse him? What! with the pattern before him with the invention of which he had nothing to do, which he will vary at his peril: day by day and day by day the same dull task, his only solace to think of something else while it is going on? Good for him and us if his thought is of why he is a slave.

Does the hope of excellence cheer him? nay he is not asked, not allowed even, to excell: to turn the crank oftener than his comrade, that is his excellence: good for him and for us if he refuses to do so. Or lastly, is he elevated by the thought that he is giving worthy gifts to the world? What, when he scarcely knows what he is doing; or if he does

know, knows only too well what sort of a gift his master (not he) is offering to the world—wares made to sell—let the buyer find out what they are! let the ‘hand’ take care he don’t put too much work in them, ‘for the margin of profit is narrow!’

The hope of the workman! what respectable hope has he save by constant toil and by dismal thrift, the misery and unmanliness of which I as an artist, and as one who enjoys life, can at least guess at, by toil and thrift to cast aside his craft and climb up the ladder into the class of petty capitalists; where he in his turn will make a profit from other men’s labour, from other men’s necessities and despair? That is the hope held out to him as the glory of the gospel of supply and demand, or in plainer English, the gospel of Devil take the hindmost: for you know climbing up the ladder means pulling two or three others off the rungs.

No, the work itself, the exercise of the craft (a word which in our older tongue means power) offers no hope and no pleasure to the workman. Yet note by far the greater part of your waking hours are your working hours, that the remnant of your lives is but made up of rests to enable you to go on toiling: under the present plutocratic system therefore the greater part of your lives will be passed in shuffling off a wearisome burden day by day, which day by day you must take up again. Is this a life for men to lead? Can we believe that it is necessary that the vast majority of men should live such a life? Is it necessary, that is, for most men, to lead an unhappy life lit by no gleam of self-respect, cheered by one hope only, the hope of shifting the burden of unhappiness on to some one else’s shoulders? Such is the life to which plutocracy condemns you.

So therefore my position comes to this; that art once common to the whole people has by the action of competitive commerce been taken from all but the more cultivated part of the well-to-do classes, and that as regards art this injustice is gradually putting an end to all art even amongst this limited class: while as regards the life of the people in

general, it has not only starved it of beauty, but has also made almost all labour unhappy; that is to say, has cast a burden of unhappiness on the lives of the great mass of the people.

This evil I will not call the greatest of all the evils which the careless pursuit of so-called civilization has brought on the world, but will rather say that it does in itself include all the evils born of that fearful recklessness. What then is the remedy for it? I have just now denied that it was necessary that man's labour should be unhappy: but I say most solemnly that this unhappy labour *is* necessary to the existence of the present system of competitive commerce, on which modern society rests: I say that the whole structure of modern society rests on its power to compel the mass of the people to work unhappily on pain of death by starvation.

Unless this is changed utterly we may as well fold our hands, and let things go as they will; that is the plain truth: if you ask me, will not the change be gradual? I must say, yes, indeed; since it *must* come about by the change of opinion in men's minds; it is of course that whatever action takes place must spring from opinion—from hope let us say. Yes, it will be gradual; but do not let us deceive ourselves, it must be complete and without compromise: one thing has to be aimed at and one alone: the reconstruction of Society on such a basis that from thenceforth it will be impossible for any man to make his private profit from the compulsion of other men's labour: that it will be impossible for a man to labour duly without benefiting himself and all other men.

Pretty much the reverse of this is at present the rule in the productions of labour: when a piece of work is to be put in hand, the question asked of himself by the capitalist is this: Will it sell at a profit to me? And the fuller meaning of that question is developed by these two further questions: Can money be screwed out of the general public for it? That is the question, and the second is: How much over

the actual cost of production can I get for myself? or in other words: How much can I cut off for myself from the product of each workman's daily labour?

Or will you have the two questions in plainer English still? technical words are not wanted here: these are the questions: How much can I take by stealth from the public? how much can I take by force from the workman?

These are the two pillars of England's greatness; supply and demand are the words used to cloak their native hideousness, and men are hoodwinked by fine words.

But under the condition of things which I beg you to try to bring about, two questions would have to be asked when anyone was about producing anything: first, will the thing produced be useful to the world? second, will the making of it give healthy and pleasurable occupation to the makers?

If both these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, then the work should not be done at all; the product of it will either not be wealth positively, or it will not be wealth relatively to the practical life of man: that is, it will either be worthless or the price for it will be too high: for instance it may be desirable to polish steel forks highly; but if the work shortens men's lives the price for the polishing is too high, and we ought to do without it.

At first sight it does not seem a great demand to make on human wisdom to get it to assert that no work should be done which is not useful when done and not degrading to do: but look around the world and think how the application of such a maxim would alter the face of it! I say that the vast majority of workers are under the present system engaged in doing nothing with frightful toil: nay there is a side to modern labour which is worse even than that: the greater number of people are poor, their household goods, scanty as they are, they must have at the lowest possible price, and their poverty creates the demand for wares which ought to have no value at all, and which would have none if there were not slaves of poverty who must be provided with such things as slaves alone will put up with: the poor must

live on poison since nothing else is cheap enough for them; they live on poison and 'get used to it,' as people phrase it; that is, they are forced to perpetuate the degradation of a part of the community, to spread it, to deepen it.

So you see people are kept poor that cheap wares may be made, and being poor cheap wares are a necessity for them, and that necessity can only be supplied by the cheap wages (or poverty), which are necessary to allow riches to accumulate in a few hands.

And now when I say that this is the reason why there is no popular art now, surely the absence of beauty from the ordinary life of civilized man looks a more serious thing than many people who have thought and written on economical matters would allow: for that absence of art from the matters of daily life is the badge of slavery: people who are poor can have no art; for art cannot be produced without thought, without freedom from sordid anxiety, above all without leisure: and do you suppose that wares the very soul of which is such qualities as these can compete in the market with wares that have been screwed out of the necessity of the poor; that are born from the high pressure of machines tended by men who have no more time for thought than the eager unremitting *pursuit* of those tireless machines for ten hours a day may leave them?

No; popular art cannot live under the full development of competitive commerce; the revolt against unhuman work which is necessary for its existence would destroy the exploiting system of the capitalists, which appears by this time to be rapidly approaching perfection: nor without popular art can the art of the rich and cultivated long exist; what is now left of it is but a reflex of the days before commercialism began; while it was yet hanging in the balance, whether the days in which a man might be allowed to enjoy the fruits of his own labour were to come without our going through the terrible mill which the gospel of free contract has provided for us.

As far as the mass of people is concerned art is gone or all

but gone from the daily life of man in civilized countries, and I say that is no mere accident but a necessary consequence of the rule of plutocratic anarchy: some branches of human invention can live under that tyranny: it allows learned men to seek out the secrets of nature and to subdue her forces because these matters can be turned to the advantage of the profit-market. But in art, the romance of each day's life, there is nothing 'practical' that is convertible into money, so long as it is real: all plutocracy can do is to degrade it into an hypocrisy, a sham of real feeling and insight, a set of counters for the picture-dealers; it can do that and in the end kill it, but it cannot use it.

Yes, art is not far from actual death and beauty is fading out of the land before the poison of riches. Green and beautiful places are still left in the countryside of England, but the hand of decay is on them; the life of man is poor and slavish there, and his dwellings, the sure token of the life led in them, which were once sound, trim, and beautiful, are giving place to miserable abortions which it is a pain and grief to look at; mere scrapings from the heaps of filth where you working-men live and which we call great cities.

And those terrible and frightful places; this horror we call London, or those worse because filthier hells the manufacturing districts—if ever the world escapes from the nightmare of riches and poverty which now oppresses us, will people from the midst of order and peace be able to understand what they were like?

And if we choose to consider the matter and face what must be the future unless this living death of Commercialism is swept away, do we not know what it must come to, supposing that national ruin does not overtake us? no rest, no beauty, no leisure anywhere: all England become like the heart of Lancashire is now: a breeding-stye for flesh and blood machines for the production of the profit of capital: machines, yes, but men also who, dimly perhaps, but miserably certainly, will be conscious of their own degradation.

Yes, it may be that Commercialism will find for us plenty

of food and clothes and house-room, comforts even or luxuries; for us, I say, for most of us. It may be that, though it must have a body of abject poverty to serve it, it will produce so many rich men, and so many well-to-do men down to the class of the well fed prosperous artizan, that the class of the *poor* slaves will not be very numerous and will be powerless: that I know is the ideal of a large body of so-called advanced thinkers; and they may realize it, though I do not think they will, as I fervently hope they will not: for art, or the beauty of life, would be wholly lacking to all these classes, rich, middle-class, and poor; they would pass a wretched bestial degraded existence, and the hope of the progress of the race would have perished.

What is to save us from this misery, this hell? What but a Social Revolution which shall take away from men at once the power and the temptation of accumulating riches or in other words of keeping a body of slaves to do their dirty work for them: a Revolution which by abolishing men's power of making a profit from their fellows' labour will abolish all classes: not the mere arbitrary distinction between lord and commoner, gentleman and worker, but the real and dreadful distinction between rich man and poor, between the cultivated and the ignorant, between the refined and the brutal, which now exists, and is the foundation of plutocratic society.

I know as surely as I know that I breathe, that this Social Revolution would give to each and all of us a fair share of the good and evil of life: we should have our fair share of troublesome work and no more than our fair share: for we should not then be set to work for the sake of working: there would no longer be any need to cumber the world with mountains of useless wares: no need to weary ourselves with making either the idiotic toys of the rich, or the miserable rags of the poor, which form now by far the greater part of the baggage of commerce.

In all our work would be hope, and the greater part of it would be a labour of love, given freely and happily to the

commonweal, as the commonweal would freely and ungrudgingly supply our needs for us: the hours of such work would to most of us be the happiest, but mere rest, time for thought, or dreaming even, would not be lacking to us, nor in any wise be grudged to us.

Then we should have nature beautiful around us again, for surely then no disgrace of foulness in air or water would be suffered, nor would it in anywise need to be, with science set free from the huckster's fetters: and remember once more it is not mere carelessness of beauty as we are now, the serving of our real needs, that has turned half England into a foul and greasy cinderheap, but the insatiable compulsion of commerce on us to make an extra profit from labour we know not for what or for whom.

Doubt it not that from all this art would spring art in all forms, great and glorious, full of hope with eyes always turned towards perfection.

Is it a dream? If so then let us give up all striving for progress: do not let us worry ourselves about politics, but stand by and grin as one knave pushes the other out of the saddle; for one or another will be much the same to us: let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die—or better still let us die to-day.

It is no dream but a cause; men and women have died for it, not in the ancient days but in our own time: they lie in prison for it, work in mines, are exiled, are ruined for it: believe me when such things are suffered for dreams, the dreams come true at last.

But how is the change to be brought about?

The minds and hearts of men must be set on bringing it about; that is clear; no noise of people puffing themselves will do it, no mere electioneering dodges, no mere clattering of fine phrases amongst those who perfectly well agree with each other; it must come from the hearts of men who are resolved on it. Yet do not mistake my meaning; I have heard several people say: This is a thing which must be the gradual birth of opinion; therefore we, though we think

the change necessary, must take no active measures to bring it about, but let it grow spontaneously.

Friends, such words may have the appearance of philosophical wisdom and forbearance and tolerance, but I fear their meaning is, *I durst not though I would.*

What other sign can there be of the growth of spontaneous opinion save eager and *active* attempts to spread that opinion? is the opinion never to result in action? and if ever when? if 'tis too early to-day, will it be late enough to-morrow? Alas! for some of us it will be too late; for every minute while we speak our fellows and friends are living in degradation and dying in despair.

I say it is the plain duty of those who believe in the necessity of social revolution, quite irrespectively of any date they may give to the event, first to express their own discontent and hope when and where they can, striving to impress it on others; secondly to learn from books and from living people who are willing, or I will say, *who can be made*, to teach them, in as much detail as possible what are the ends and the hopes of Social Revolution; and thirdly to join any body of men which is honestly striving to give means of expression to that discontent and hope, and to teach people the details of the aim of Constructive Revolution. You will understand that although I have numbered these duties first, second, and third, they must be all set about together: you can neither express your discontent nor learn what hopes there are of making it fruitful without union with others who have those aims in view.

And mind you by union I mean a very serious matter: I mean sacrifice to the Cause of leisure, pleasure and money each according to his means: I mean sacrifice of individual whims and vanity, of individual misgivings, even though they may be founded on reason, as to the means which the organizing body may be forced to use: remember without organization the cause *is* but a vague dream, which may lead to revolt, to violence and disorder, but which will be speedily repressed by those who are blindly interested in

sustaining the present anarchical tyranny which is mis-named Society: remember also that no organization is possible without the sacrifices I have been speaking of; without obedience to the necessities of the Cause.

Educate, Agitate, Organize; these words the motto of our Federation do most completely express what is necessary to be done by those who have any hope in the future of the People.

To feel the wrongs which oppress ourselves and our fellows, to learn what remedies there are for them, to declare openly the wrongs and remedies and to band together to make that declaration effective: how can those who wish to call themselves free and honest do less than this?

And the consequences that may come of our action? What can they be in the long run save peace and order? You who fear revolt, you who fear revolution, think what blind revolt and aimless revolution may mean; shake off at least enough of your cowardice and sloth to consider what must be the consequences of blind repression, of aimless upholding of a state of Society where side by side with refinement and cultivation dwell brutality and ignorance; and in which this dreadful contrast is not an accident but a necessity of the existence of your boasted civilized society.

I tell you civilization will begin on the day when we determine that Riches and Poverty shall disappear into one commonweal of happy people. I tell you that civilization, long talked of, much boasted of, never yet attained, will begin on the day when the organization of the claims of labour is strong enough to force on society the acceptance of those claims: when the necessary and inevitable revolution, the child of all the long centuries of history, which while we speak is being born out of the corruption of the organized anarchy which it is doomed to destroy, when that revolution shall take definite and orderly form, and sweep away for ever the two great foes of humanity, riches and poverty.

It is for you working men to attain this end: learn what you have to claim and unite to claim it: who or what can resist you then?

"There also shall we be free from the troubling of kings and scoundrels" are the memorable words used by the free-men of Norway when they left their country at the end of the tenth century to find freedom amidst the terrible wastes of Iceland; but for them the history and mythology of the North would have been forgotten.