William Morris

Art and Socialism

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William Morris, Art and Socialism. Leek, 1884. Original English lecture.
https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/as/as.htm

Art and Socialism

My friends, I want you to look into the relations of Art to Commerce, using the latter word to express what is generally meant by it; namely, that system of competition in the market which is indeed the only form which most people now-a-days suppose that Commerce can take.

Now whereas there have been times in the world's history when Art held the supremacy over Commerce; when Art was a good deal, and Commerce, as we understand the word, was a very little; so now on the contrary it will be admitted by all, I fancy, that Commerce has become of very great importance and Art of very little.

I say this will be generally admitted, but different persons will hold very different opinions not only as to whether this is well or ill, but even as to what it really means when we say that Commerce has become of supreme importance and that Art has sunk into an unimportant matter.

Allow me to give you my opinion of the meaning of it; which will lead me on to ask you to consider what remedies should be applied for curing the evils that exist in the relations between Art and Commerce.

Now to speak plainly it seems to me that the supremacy of Commerce (as we understand the word) is an evil, and a very serious one; and I should call it an unmixed evil— but for the strange continuity of life which runs through all historical events, and by means of which the very evils of such and such a period tend to abolish themselves.

For to my mind it means this: that the world of modern civilization in its haste to gain a very inequitably divided material prosperity has entirely suppressed popular Art: or in other words that the greater part of the people have no share in Art—which as things now are must be kept in the hands of a few rich or well-to-do people, who we may fairly say need it less and not more than the laborious workers.

Nor is that all the evil, nor the worst of it; for the cause of this famine of Art is that whilst people work throughout the civilized world as laboriously as ever they did, they have lost—in losing an Art which was done by and for the people—the natural solace of that labour; a solace which they once had, and always should have, the opportunity of expressing their own thoughts to their fellows by means of that very labour, by means of that daily work which nature or long custom, a second nature,

does indeed require of them, but without meaning that it should be an unrewarded and repulsive burden.

But, through a strange blindness an error in the civilization of these latter days, the world's work almost all of it—the work some share of which should have been the helpful companion of every man—has become even such a burden, which every man, if he could, would shake off. I have said that people work no less laboriously than they ever did; but I should have said that they work more laboriously.

The wonderful machines which in the hands of just and foreseeing men would have been used to minimize repulsive labour and to give pleasure—or in other words added life—to the human race, have been so used on the contrary that they have driven all men into mere frantic haste and hurry, thereby destroying pleasure, that is life, on all hands: they have instead of lightening the labour of the workmen, intensified it, and thereby added more weariness yet to the burden which the poor have to carry.

Nor can it be pleaded for the system of modern civilization that the mere material or bodily gains of it balance the loss of pleasure which it has brought upon the world; for as I hinted before those gains have been so unfairly divided that the contrast between rich and poor has been fearfully intensified, so that in all civilized countries, but most of all in England, the terrible spectacle is exhibited of two peoples, living street by street, and door by door—people of the same blood, the same tongue, and at least nominally living under the same laws—but yet one civilized and the other uncivilized.

All this I say is the result of the system that has trampled down Art, and exalted Commerce into a sacred religion; and it would seem is ready, with the ghastly stupidity which is its principal characteristic, to mock the Roman satirist for his noble warning by taking it in inverse meaning, and now bids us all "for the sake of life to destroy the reasons for living."

And now in the teeth of this stupid tyranny I put forward a claim on behalf of labour enslaved by Commerce, which I know no thinking man can deny is reasonable, but which if acted on would involve such a change as would defeat Commerce; that is, would put Association instead of Competition, Social order instead of Individualist anarchy.

Yet I have looked at this claim by the light of history and my own conscience, and it seems to me so looked at to be a most just claim, and that resistance to it means nothing short of a denial of the hope of civilization.

This then is the claim:

> *It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do which shall he worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should he done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious.*

Turn that claim about as I may, think of it as long as I can, I cannot find that it is an exorbitant claim; yet again I say if Society would or could admit it, the face of the world would be changed; discontent and strife and dishonesty would be ended. To feel that we were doing work useful to others and pleasant to ourselves, and that such work and its due reward *could* not fail us! What serious harm could happen to us then? And the price to be paid for so making the world happy is Revolution: Socialism instead of *laissez-faire*.

How can we of the middle classes help to bring such a state of things about; a state of things as nearly as possible the reverse of the present state of things?

The reverse; no less than that. For first, *The work must be worth doing*: think what a change that would make in the world! I tell you I feel dazed at the thought of the immensity of work which is undergone for the making of useless things.

It would be an instructive day's work for any one of us who is strong enough to walk through two or three of the principal streets of London on a week-day, and take accurate note of everything in the shop windows which is embarrassing or superfluous to the daily life of a serious man. Nay, the most of these things no one, serious or unserious, wants at all; only a foolish habit makes even the lightest-minded of us suppose that he wants them, and to many people even of those who buy them they are obvious encumbrances to real work, thought and pleasure. But I beg you to think of the enormous mass of men who are occupied with this miserable trumpery, from the engineers who have had to make the machines for making them, down to the hapless clerks who sit day-long year after year in the horrible dens wherein the wholesale exchange of them is transacted, and the shopmen, who not daring to call their souls their own, retail them amidst numberless insults which they must not resent, to the idle public which doesn't want them but buys them to be bored by them and sick to death of them.

I am talking of the merely useless things; but there are other matters not merely useless, but actively destructive and poisonous which command a good price in the market; for instance, adulterated food and drink. Vast is the number of slaves whom competitive Commerce employs in turning out infamies such as these. But quite apart from them there is an enormous mass of labour which is just merely wasted; many thousands of men and women making *nothing* with terrible and inhuman toil which deadens the soul and shortens mere animal life itself.

All these are the slaves of what is called luxury, which in the modern sense of the word comprises a mass of sham wealth, the invention of competitive Commerce, and enslaves not only the poor people who are compelled to work at its production, but also the foolish and not overhappy people who buy it to harass themselves with its encumbrance.

Now if we are to have popular Art, or indeed Art of any kind, we must at once and for all be done with this *luxury*; it is the supplanter, the changeling of Art; so much so that by those who know of nothing better it has even been taken for Art, the divine solace of human labour, the romance of each day's hard practice of the difficult art of living.

But I say Art cannot live beside it, nor self-respect in any class of life. Effeminacy and brutality are its companions on the right hand and the left. This, first of all, we of the well-to-do classes must get rid of if we are serious in desiring the new birth of Art: and if not then corruption is digging a terrible pit of perdition for society, from which indeed the new birth may come, but surely from amidst of terror, violence and misery.

Indeed if it were but ridding ourselves, the well-to-do people, of this mountain of rubbish that would be something worth doing: things which everybody knows are of no use; the very capitalists know well that there is no genuine healthy demand for them, and they are compelled to foist them off on the public by stirring up a strange feverish desire for petty excitement, the outward token of which is known by the conventional name of fashion—a strange monster born of the vacancy of the lives of rich people, and the eagerness of competitive Commerce to make the most of the huge crowd of workmen whom it breeds as unregarded instruments for what is called the making of money.

Do not think it a little matter to resist this monster of folly; to think for yourselves what you yourselves really desire, will not only make men and women of you so far, but may also set you thinking of the due desires of other people, since you will soon find when you get to know a work of Art, that slavish work is *un*desirable.

And here furthermore is at least a little sign whereby to distinguish between a rag of fashion and a work of Art: whereas the toys of fashion when the first gloss is worn off them do become obviously worthless even to the frivolous—a work of Art, be it ever so humble, is long lived; we never tire of it; as long as a scrap hangs together it is valuable and instructive to each new generation. All works of Art in short have the property of becoming venerable amidst decay: and reason good, for from the first there was a soul in them, the thought of man, which will be visible in them so long as the body exists in which they were implanted.

And that last sentence brings me to considering the other side of the necessity for labour only occupying itself in making goods that are worth making. Hitherto we have been thinking of it only from the user's point of view; even so looked at it was surely important enough; yet from the other side—as to the producer—it is far more important still.

For I say again that in buying these things

'Tis the lives of men you buy!

Will you from mere folly and thoughtlessness make yourselves partakers of the guilt of those who compel their fellow men to labour uselessly?

For when I said it was necessary for all things made to be worth making, I set up that claim chiefly on behalf of *Labour*; since the waste of making useless things grieves the workman doubly. As part of the public he is *forced* into buying them, and the more part of his miserable wages are squeezed out of him by an universal kind of truck system; as one of the producers he is *forced* into making them, and so into losing the very foundations of that pleasure in daily work which I claim as his birthright; he is compelled to labour joylessly at making the poison which the truck system compels him to buy. So that the huge mass of men who are compelled by folly and greed to make harmful and useless things are sacrificed to Society. I say that this would be terrible and unendurable even though they were sacrificed to the good of Society—if that were possible; but if they are sacrificed not for the welfare of Society but for its whims, to add to its degradation, what do luxury and fashion look like then? On one side ruinous and wearisome waste leading through corruption to corruption on to complete cynicism at last, and the disintegration of all Society; and on the other side—implacable oppression destructive of all pleasure and hope in life, and leading—whitherward?

Here then is one thing for us of the middle classes to do before we can clear the ground for the new birth of Art, before we can clear our own consciences of the guilt of enslaving men by their labour. One thing; and if we *could* do it perhaps that one thing would be enough, and all other healthy changes would follow it; but can we do it? Can we escape from the corruption of Society which threatens us? Can the middle classes regenerate themselves?

At first sight one would say that a body of people so powerful, who have built up the gigantic edifice of modern Commerce, whose science, invention and energy have subdued the forces of nature to serve their every-day purposes, and who guide the organization that keeps these natural powers in subjection in a way almost

miraculous; at first sight one would say surely such a mighty mass of wealthy men could do anything they please.

And yet I doubt it: their own creation, the Commerce they are so proud of, has become their master; and all we of the well-to-do classes—some of us with triumphant glee, some with dull satisfaction, and some with sadness of heart—are compelled to admit not that Commerce was made for man, but that man was made for Commerce.

On all sides we are forced to admit it. There are of the English middle class to-day, for instance, men of the highest aspirations towards Art, and of the strongest will; men who are most deeply convinced of the necessity to civilization of surrounding men's lives with beauty; and many lesser men, thousands for what I know, refined and cultivated, follow them and praise their opinions: but both the leaders and the led are incapable of saving so much as half a dozen commons from the grasp of inexorable Commerce: they are as helpless in spite of their culture and their genius as if they were just so many overworked shoemakers: less lucky than King Midas, our green fields and clear waters, nay the very air we breathe are turned not to gold (which might please some of us for an hour may be) but to dirt; and to speak plainly we know full well that under the present gospel of Capital not only there is no hope of bettering it, hut that things grow worse year by year, day by day. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die—choked by filth.

Or let me give you a direct example of the slavery to competitive Commerce, in which we hapless folk of the middle classes live. I have exhorted you to the putting away of luxury, to the stripping yourselves of useless encumbrances, to the simplification of life, and I believe that there are not a few of you that heartily agree with me on that point. Well, I have long thought that one of the most revolting circumstances that cling to our present class-system, is the relation between us, of the well-to-do, and our domestic servants: we and our servants live together under one roof, but are little better than strangers to each other, in spite of the good nature and good feeling that often exists on both sides: nay strangers is a mild word; though we are of the same blood, bound by the same laws, we live together like people of different tribes. Now think how this works on the job of getting through the ordinary day's work of a household, and whether our lives can be simplified while such a system lasts. To go no further, you who are housekeepers know full well (as I myself do, since I have learned the useful art of cooking a dinner) how it would simplify the day's work, if the chief meals could be eaten in common; if there had not got to be double meals, one upstairs, another down stairs. And again, surely we of this educational century, cannot be ignorant of

what an education it would be for the less refined members of a household to meet on common easy terms the more refined once a day, at least; to note the elegant manners of well-bred ladies, to give and take in talk with learned and travelled men, with men of action and imagination: believe me that would beat elementary education.

Furthermore this matter cleaves close to our subject of Art: for note, as a token of this stupidity of our sham civilization, what foolish rabbit warrens our well-to-do houses are obliged to be; instead of being planned in the rational ancient way which was used from the time of Homer to past the time of Chaucer, a big hall, to wit, with a few chambers tacked on to it for sleeping or sulking in. No wonder our houses are cramped and ignoble when the lives lived in them are cramped and ignoble also.

Well, and why don't we who have thought of this, as I am sure many of us have, change this mean and shabby custom, simplifying our lives thereby and educating our *friends*, to whose toil we owe so many comforts? Why do not you—and I—set about doing this to-morrow?

Because we *cannot*; because our servants wouldn't have it, knowing, as we know, that both parties would be made miserable by it.

The civilization of the nineteenth century forbids us to share the refinement of a household among its members!

So you see, if we middle-class people belong to a powerful folk, and in good sooth we do, we are but playing a part played in many a tale of the world's history: we are great but hapless; we are important dignified people, but bored to death; we have bought our power at price of our liberty and our pleasure.

So I say in answer to the question Can we put luxury from us and live simple and decent lives? Yes, when we are free from the slavery of Capitalist Commerce; but not before.

Surely there are some of you who long to be free; who have been educated and refined, and had your perceptions of beauty and order quickened only that they might be shocked and wounded at every turn, by the brutalities of competitive Commerce; who have been so hunted and driven by it that, though you are well-to-do, rich even may be, you have now nothing to lose from social revolution: love of Art, that is to say of the true pleasure of life, has brought you to this, that you must throw in your lot with that of the wage-slave of competitive Commerce; you and he must help each other and have one hope in common, or you at any rate will live and die hopeless and unhelped. You who long to be set free from the

oppression of the money grubbers, hope for the day when you will be *compelled* to be free!

Meanwhile if otherwise that oppression has left scarce any work to do worth doing, one thing at least is left us to strive for, the raising of the standard of life where it is lowest, where it is low: that will put a spoke in the wheel of the triumphant car of competitive Commerce.

Nor can I conceive of anything more likely to raise the standard of life than the convincing some thousands of those who live by labour, of the necessity of their supporting the second part of the claim I have made for Labour; namely *That their work should be of itself pleasant to do*. If we could but convince them that such a strange revolution in Labour as this would be of infinite benefit not to them only, but to all men; and that it is so right and natural that for the reverse to be the case, that most men's work should be grievous to them, is a mere monstrosity of these latter days, which must in the long run bring ruin and confusion on the Society that allows it—If we could but convince them, then indeed there would be chance of the phrase *Art of the People* being something more than a mere word.

At first sight, indeed, it would seem impossible to make men born under the present system of Commerce understand that labour may be a blessing to them: not in the sense in which the phrase is sometimes preached to them by those whose labour is light and easily evaded: not as a necessary task laid by nature on the poor for the benefit of the rich; not as an opiate to dull their sense of right and wrong, to make them sit down quietly under their burdens to the end of time, blessing the squire and his relations: all this they could understand our saying to them easily enough, and sometimes would listen to it I fear with at least a show of complacency—if they thought there were anything to be made out of us thereby. But the true doctrine that labour should be a real tangible blessing in itself to the working man, a pleasure even as sleep and strong drink are to him now: this one might think it hard indeed for him to understand, so different as it is to anything which he has found labour to be.

Nevertheless though most men's work is only borne as a necessary evil like sickness, my experience as far as it goes is, that whether it be from a certain sacredness in handiwork which does cleave to it even under the worst circumstances, or whether it be that the poor man who is driven by necessity to deal with things which are terribly real, when he thinks at all on such matters, thinks less conventionally than the rich; whatever it may be, my experience so far is that the working man finds it easier to understand the doctrine of the claim of Labour to pleasure in the work itself than the rich or well-to-do man does. Apart from any

trivial words of my own, I have been surprised to find, for instance, such a hearty feeling toward John Ruskin among working-class audiences: they can see the prophet in him rather than the fantastic rhetorician, as more superfine audiences do.

That is a good omen, I think, for the education of times to come. But we who somehow are so tainted by cynicism, because of our helplessness in the ugly world which surrounds and presses on us, cannot we somehow raise our own hopes at least to the point of thinking that what hope glimmers on the millions of the slaves of Commerce is something better than a mere delusion, the false dawn of a cloudy midnight with which 'tis only the moon that struggles? Let us call to mind that there yet remain monuments in the world which show us that all human labour was not always a grief and a burden to men. Let us think of the mighty and lovely architecture, for instance, of medi?val Europe: of the buildings raised before Commerce had put the coping stone on the edifice of tyranny by the discovery that fancy, imagination, sentiment, the joy of creation and the hope of fair fame are marketable articles too precious to be allowed to men who have not the money to buy them, to mere handicraftsmen and day labourers. Let us remember there was a time when men had pleasure in their daily work, but yet as to other matters hoped for light and freedom even as they do now: their dim hope grew brighter, and they watched its seeming fulfilment drawing nearer and nearer, and gazed so eagerly on it that they did not note how the ever watchful foe, oppression, had changed his shape and was stealing from them what they had already gained in the days when the light of their new hope was but a feeble glimmer; so they lost the old gain, and for lack of it the new gain was changed and spoiled for them into something not much better than loss.

Betwixt the days in which we now live and the end of the Middle Ages, Europe has gained freedom of thought, increase of knowledge, and huge talent for dealing with the material forces of nature; comparative political freedom withal and respect for the lives of *civilized* men, and other gains that go with these things: nevertheless I say deliberately that if the present state of Society is to endure, she has bought these gains at too high a price in the loss of the pleasure in daily work which once did certainly solace the mass of men for their fears and oppressions: the death of Art was too high a price to pay for the material prosperity of the middle classes.

Grievous indeed it was, that we could not keep both our hands full, that we were forced to spill from one while we gathered with the other: yet to my mind it is more grievous still to be unconscious of the loss; or being dimly conscious of it to have to force ourselves to forget it and to cry out that all is well.

For, though all is not well, I know that men's natures are not so changed in three centuries that we can say to all the thousands of years which went before them; You were wrong to cherish Art, and now we have found out that all men need is food and raiment and shelter, with a smattering of knowledge of the material fashion of the universe. Creation is no longer a need of man's soul, his right hand may forget its cunning, and he be none the worse for it.

Three hundred years, a day in the lapse of ages, has not changed man's nature thus utterly, be sure of that: one day we shall win back Art, that is to say the pleasure of life; win back Art again to our daily labour. Where is the hope then, you may say; Show it us.

There lies the hope, where hope of old deceived us. We gave up Art for what we thought was light and freedom, but it was less than light and freedom which we bought: the light showed many things to those of the well-to-do who cared to look for them: the freedom left the well-to-do free enough if they cared to use their freedom; but these were few at the best: to the most of men the light showed them that they need look for hope no more, and the freedom left the most of men free—to take at a wretched wage what slave's work lay nearest to them or starve.

There is our hope, I say. If the bargain had been really fair, complete all round, then were there nought else to do but to bury Art, and forget the beauty of life: but now the cause of Art has something else to appeal to: no less than the hope of the people for the happy life which has not yet been granted to them. There is our hope: the cause of Art is the cause of the people.

Think of a piece of history, and so hope! Time was when the rule of Rome held the whole world of civilization in its poisonous embrace. To all men—even the best, as you may see in the very gospels—that rule seemed doomed to last for ever: nor to those who dwelt under it was there any world worth thinking of beyond it: but the days passed and though none saw a shadow of the coming change, it came none the less, like a thief in the night, and the *Barbarians*, the world which lay outside the rule of Rome, were upon her; and men blind with terror lamented the change and deemed the world undone by the Fury of the North. But even that fury bore with it things long strange to Rome, which once had been the food its glory fed on: hatred of lies, scorn of riches, contempt of death, faith in the fair fame won by steadfast endurance, honourable love of women—all these things the Northern Fury bore with it, as the mountain torrent bears the gold; and so Rome fell and Europe rose, and the hope of the world was born again.

To those that have hearts to understand, this tale of the past is a parable of the days to come; of the change in store for us hidden in the breast of the Barbarism of

civilization—the Proletariat; and we of the middle class, the strength of the mighty but monstrous system of competitive Commerce, it behoves us to clear our souls of greed and cowardice and to face the change which is now once more on the road; to see the good and the hope it bears with it amidst all its threats of violence, amidst all its ugliness, which was not born of itself but of that which it is doomed to destroy.

Now once more I will say that we well-to-do people, those of us who love Art, not as a toy, but as a thing necessary to the life of man, as a token of his freedom and happiness, have for our best work the raising of the standard of life among the people; or in other words establishing the claim I made for Labour-which I will now put in a different form, that we may try to see what chiefly hinders us from making that claim good and what are the enemies to be attacked. Thus I put the claim again:

> *Nothing should be made by man's labour which is not worth making; or which must be made by labour degrading to the makers.*

Simple as that proposition is, and obviously right as I am sure it must seem to you, you will find, when you come to consider the matter, that it is a direct challenge to the death to the present system of labour in civilized countries. That system, which I have called competitive Commerce, is distinctly a system of war; that is of waste and destruction: or you may call it gambling if you will, the point of it being that under it whatever a man gains he gains at the expense of some other man's loss. Such a system does not and cannot heed whether the matters it makes are worth making; it does not and cannot heed whether those who make them are degraded by their work: it heeds one thing and only one, namely, what it calls making a profit; which word has got to be used so conventionally that I must explain to you what it really means, to wit the plunder of the weak by the strong! Now I say of this system, that it I is of its very nature destructive of Art, that is to say of the happiness of life. Whatever consideration is shown for the life of the people in these days, whatever is done which is worth doing, is done in spite of the system and in the teeth of its maxims; and most true it is that we do, all of us, tacitly at least, admit that it is opposed to all the highest aspirations of mankind.

Do we not know, for instance, how those men of genius work who are the salt of the earth, without whom the corruption of society would long ago have become unendurable? The poet, the artist, the man of science, is it not true that in their fresh and glorious days, when they are in the heyday of their faith and enthusiasm, they are thwarted at every turn by Commercial war, with its sneering question "Will it pay?" Is it not true that when they begin to win worldly success, when they become

comparatively rich, in spite of ourselves they seem to us tainted by the contact with the commercial world?

Need I speak of great schemes that hang about neglected; of things most necessary to be done, and so confessed by all men, that no one can seriously set a hand to because of the lack of money; while if it be a question of creating or stimulating some foolish whim in the public mind, the satisfaction of which will breed a profit, the money will come in by the ton. Nay, you know what an old story it is of the wars bred by Commerce in search of new markets, which not even the most peaceable of statesmen can resist; an old story and still it seems for ever new, and now become a kind of grim joke, at which I would rather not laugh if I could help it, but am even forced to laugh from a soul laden with anger.

And all that mastery over the powers of nature which the last hundred years or less has given us: what has it done for us under this system? In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, it was doubtful if all the mechanical inventions of modern times have done anything to lighten the toil of labour: be sure there is no doubt, that they were not made for that end, but to "make a profit." Those almost miraculous machines, which if orderly forethought had dealt with them might even now be speedily extinguishing all irksome and unintelligent labour, leaving us free to raise the standard of skill of hand and energy of mind in our workmen, and to produce afresh that loveliness and order which only the hand of man guided by his soul can produce—what have they done for us now? Those machines of which the civilized world is so proud, has it any right to be proud of the use they have been put to by Commercial war and waste?

I do not think exultation can have a place here: Commercial war has made a profit of these wonders; that is to say it has by their means bred for itself millions of unhappy workers, unintelligent machines as far as their daily work goes, order to get cheap labour, to keep up its exciting but deadly game for ever. Indeed that labour would have been cheap enough—cheap to the Commercial war generals, and deadly dear to the rest of us—but for the seeds of freedom which valiant men of old have sowed amongst us to spring up in our own day into Chartism and Trades Unionism and Socialism, for the defence of order and a decent life. Terrible would have been our slavery, and not of the working classes alone, but for these germs of the change which must be.

Even as it is, by the reckless aggregation of machine-workers and their adjoints in the great cities and the manufacturing districts, it has kept down life amongst us, and keeps it down to a miserably low standard; so low that any standpoint for improvement is hard to think of even. By the means of speedy communication

which it has created, and which should have raised the standard of life by spreading intelligence from town to country, and widely creating modest centres of freedom of thought and habits of culture—by the means of the railways and the like it has gathered to itself fresh recruits for the reserve army of competing lack-ails on which its gambling gains so much depend, stripping the country-side of its population, and extinguishing all reasonable hope and life in the lesser towns.

Nor can I, an artist, think last or least of the outward effects which betoken this rule of the wretched anarchy of Commercial war. Think of the spreading sore of London swallowing up with its loathsomeness field and wood and heath without mercy and without hope, mocking our feeble efforts to deal even with its minor evils of smokeladen sky and befouled river: the black horror and reckless squalor of our manufacturing districts, so dreadful to the senses which are unused to them that it is ominous for the future of the race that any man can live among it in tolerable cheerfulness: nay in the open country itself the thrusting aside by miserable jerry-built brick and slate of the solid grey dwellings that are still scattered about, fit emblems in their cheery but beautiful simplicity of the yeomen of the English field, whose destruction at the hands of yet young Commercial war was lamented so touchingly by the high-minded More and the valiant Latimer. Everywhere in short the change from old to new involving one certainty, whatever else may be doubtful, a worsening of the aspect of the country.

This is the condition of England: of England the country of order, peace and stability, the land of common sense and practicality; the country to which all eyes are turned of those whose hope is for the continuance and perfection of modern progress. There are countries in Europe whose aspect is not so ruined outwardly, though they may have less of material prosperity, less wide-spread middle-class wealth to balance the squalor and disgrace I have mentioned: but if they are members of the great Commercial whole, through the same mill they have got to go, unless something should happen to turn aside the triumphant march of War Commercial before it reaches the end.

That is what three centuries of Commerce have brought that hope to which sprung up when feudalism began to fall to pieces. What can give us the day-spring of a new hope? What, save general revolt against the tyranny of Commercial war? The palliatives over which many worthy people are busying themselves now are useless: because they are but unorganized partial revolts against a vast wide-spreading grasping organization which will, with the unconscious instinct of a plant, meet every attempt at bettering the condition of the people with an attack on a fresh side; new machines, new markets, wholesale emigration, the revival of

grovelling superstitions, preachments of thrift to lack-alls, of temperance to the wretched; such things as these will baffle at every turn all partial revolts against the monster we of the middle classes have created for our own undoing.

I will speak quite plainly on this matter, though I must say an ugly word in the end if I am to say what I think. The one thing to be done is to set people far and wide to think it possible to raise the standard of life. If you think of it, you will see clearly that this means stirring up *general discontent*.

And now to illustrate that I turn back to my blended claim for Art and Labour, that I may deal with the third clause in it: here is the claim again:—

> *It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do—*
> First—*Work worth doing;*
> Second—*Work of itself pleasant to do;*
> Third—*Work done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious.*

With the first and second clauses, which are very nearly related to each other, I have tried to deal already. They are as it were the soul of the claim for proper labour; the third clause is the body without which that soul cannot exist. I will extend it in this way, which will indeed partly carry us over ground already covered:

> *No one who is willing to work should ever fear want of such employment as would earn for him all due necessaries of mind and body.*

All due necessaries—what are the due necessaries for a good citizen?

First, *honourable and fitting work:* which would involve giving him a chance of gaining capacity for his work by due education; also, as the work must be worth doing and pleasant to do, it will be found necessary to this end that his position be so assured to him that he cannot be compelled to do useless work, or work in which he cannot take pleasure.

The second necessity is *decency of surroundings:* including *(a)* good lodging; *(b)* ample space; *(c)* general order and beauty. That is *(a)* our houses must be well built, clean and healthy; *(b)* there must be abundant garden space in our towns, and our towns must not eat up the fields and natural features of the country; nay I demand even that there be left waste places and wilds in it, or romance and poetry—that is Art—will die out amongst us. *(c)* Order and beauty means, that not only our houses must be stoutly and properly built, but also that they be ornamented duly: that the fields be not only left for cultivation, but also that they be not spoilt by it any more than a garden is spoilt: no one for instance to be allowed

to cut down, for mere profit, trees whose loss would spoil a landscape: neither on any pretext should people be allowed to darken the daylight with smoke, to befoul rivers, or to degrade any spot of earth with squalid litter and brutal wasteful disorder.

The third necessity is *leisure*. You will understand that in using that word limply first that all men must work for some portion of the day, and secondly that they have a positive right to claim a respite from that work: the leisure they have a right to claim, must be ample enough to allow them full rest of mind and body; a man must have time for serious individual thought, for imagination—for dreaming even—or the race of men will inevitably worsen. Even of the honourable and fitting work of which I have been speaking, which is a whole heaven asunder from the forced work of the Capitalist system, a man must not be asked to give more than his fair share; or men will become unequally developed, and there will still be a rotten place in Society.

Here then I have given you the conditions under which work worth doing, and undegrading to do, can be done: under no other conditions can it be done: if the general work of the world is not worth doing and undegrading to do it is a mockery to talk of civilization.

Well then can these conditions be obtained under the present gospel of Capital, which has for its motto "The devil take the hindmost"?

Let us look at our claim again in other words:

> *In a properly ordered state of Society every man willing to work should be ensured—*
> First—*Honourable and fitting work;*
> Second—*A healthy and beautiful house;*
> Third—*Full leisure for rest of mind and body.*

Now I don't suppose that anybody here will deny that it would be desirable that this claim should be satisfied: but what I want you all to think is that it is *necessary* that it be satisfied; that unless we try our utmost to satisfy it, we are but part and parcel of a society founded on robbery and injustice, condemned by the laws of the universe to destroy itself by its own efforts to exist for ever. Furthermore, I want you to think that as on the one hand it is possible to satisfy this claim, so on the other hand it is impossible to satisfy it under the present plutocratic system, which will forbid us even any serious attempt to satisfy it: the beginnings of Social Revolution must he the foundations of the re-building of the Art of the People, that is to say of the Pleasure of Life.

To say ugly words again. Do we not *know* that the greater part of men in civilized societies are dirty, ignorant, brutal—or at best, anxious about the next week's subsistence—that they are in short *poor?* And we know, when we think of it, that this is unfair.

It is an old story of men who have become rich by dishonest and tyrannical means, spending in terror of the future their ill-gotten gains liberally and in charity as 'tis called: nor are such people praised; in the old tales 'tis thought that the devil gets them after all. An old story—but I say *"De te fabula"*—of *thee* is the story told: *thou* art the man!

I say that we of the rich and well-to-do classes are daily doing it likewise: unconsciously, or half consciously it may be, we gather wealth by trading on the hard necessity of our fellows, and then we give driblets of it away to those of them who in one way or other cry out loudest to us. Our poor laws, our hospitals, our charities, organized and unorganized, are but tubs thrown to the whale; blackmail paid to lame-foot justice, that she may not hobble after us too fast.

When will the time come when honest and clear-seeing men will grow sick of all this chaos of waste, this robbing of Peter to pay Paul, which is the essence of Commercial war? When shall we band together to replace the system whose motto is "The devil take the hindmost" with a system whose motto shall be really and without qualification "One for all and all for one."

Who knows but the time may be at hand, but that we now living may see the beginning of that end which shall extinguish luxury and poverty? when the upper, middle, and lower classes shall have melted into one class, living contentedly a simple and happy life.

That is a long sentence to describe the state of things which I am asking you to help to bring about: the abolition of slavery is a shorter one and means the same thing. You may be tempted to think the end not worth striving for on one hand; or on the other to suppose, each one of you, that it is so far ahead, that nothing serious can be done towards it in our own time, and that you may as well therefore sit quiet and do nothing: let me remind you how only the other day in the lifetime of the youngest of us many thousand men of our own kindred gave their 'lives on the battle-field to bring to a happy ending a mere episode in the struggle for the abolition of slavery: they are blessed and happy, for the opportunity came to them, and they seized it and did their best, and the world is the wealthier for it; and if such an opportunity is offered to us shall we thrust it from us that we may sit still in ease of body, in doubt, in disease of soul? These are the days of combat: who can doubt that as he hears all round him the sounds that betoken discontent and hope and fear in high

and low, the sounds of awakening courage and awakening conscience? These, I say, are the days of combat, when there is no external peace possible to an honest man; but when for that very reason the internal peace of a good conscience founded on settled convictions is the easier to win, since action for the cause is offered us.

Or, will you say that here in this quiet, constitutionally governed country of England there is no opportunity for action offered to us: if we were in gagged Germany, in gagged Austria, in Russia where a word or two might land us in Siberia or the prison or fortress of Peter and Paul— why then, indeed—

Ah! my friends, it is but a poor tribute to offer on the tombs of the martyrs of liberty, this refusal to take the torch from their dying hands! Is it not of Goethe it is told, that on hearing one say he was going to America to begin life again, he replied, "Here is America, or nowhere!" So for my part I say, "Here is Russia, or nowhere."

To say the governing classes in England are not afraid of freedom of speech, *therefore* let us abstain from speaking freely, is a strange paradox to me. Let us on the contrary press in through the breach which valiant men have made for us: if we hang back we make their labours, their sufferings, their deaths of no account.

Believe me we shall be shown that it is all or nothing: or will anyone here tell me that a Russian moujik is in a worse case than a sweating tailor's wage-slave? Do not let us deceive ourselves, the class of victims exists here as in Russia. There are fewer of them? May be—then are they of themselves more helpless, and so have more need of our help.

And how can we of the middle classes, we the capitalists and our hangers-on, help them? By renouncing our class, and on all occasions when antagonism rises up between the classes casting in our lot with the victims: with those who are condemned at the best to lack of education, refinement, leisure, pleasure and renown; and at the worst to a life lower than that of the most brutal of savages—in order that the system of competitive Commerce may endure.

There is *no* other way: and this way I tell you plainly, will in the long run give us plentiful occasion for self-sacrifice without going to Russia. I feel sure that in this assembly there are some who are steeped in discontent with the miserable anarchy of the century of Commerce: to them I offer a means of renouncing their class by supporting a Socialist propaganda in joining the Democratic Federation, which I have the honour of representing before you, and which I believe is the only body in this country which puts forward constructive Socialism as its program.

This to my mind is opportunity enough for those of us who are discontented with the present state of things and long for an opportunity of renunciation; and it is very certain that in accepting the opportunity you will have at once to undergo some of the inconveniences of martyrdom, though without gaining its dignity at present. You will at least be mocked and laughed at by those whose mockery is a token of honour to an honest man; but you will, I don't doubt it, be looked on coldly by many excellent people, not *all* of whom will be quite stupid. You will run the risk of losing position, reputation, money, friends even: losses which are certainly pin pricks to the serious martyrdom I have spoken of; but which none the less do try the stuff a man is made of—all the more as he can escape them with little other reproach of cowardice than that which his own conscience cries out at him.

Nor can I assure you that you will for ever escape scot-free from the attacks of open tyranny. It is true that at present Capitalist Society only looks on Socialism in England with dry grins. But remember that the body of people who have for instance ruined India, starved and gagged Ireland, and tortured Egypt, have capacities in them—some ominous signs of which they have lately shown — for openly playing the tyrants' game nearer home.

So on all sides I can offer you a position which involves sacrifice; a position which will give you your "America" at home, and make you inwardly sure that you are at least of some use to the cause: and I earnestly beg you, those of you who are convinced of the justice of our cause, not to hang back from active participation in a struggle which—who ever helps or who ever abstains from helping—must beyond all doubt end at last in Victory!