

You never elect an employer as president of a Trades Council; or as chairman of a Trade Union Congress; or as member of a Trade Union. You never ask an employer to lead you during a strike. But at election times, when you ought to stand by your class, the whole body of Trade Union workers turn into black-legs, and fight for the Capitalist and against the workers.

I know that many of these Party Politicians are very plausible men, and that they protest very eloquently that their party really means to do well for the workers. But to those protests there is one unanswerable reply. Even if these men are as honest and as zealous as they pretend to be, I suppose you are not gullible enough to believe that they will do your work as well as you can do it yourselves.

I say to you then, once more, John Smith, that the most practical thing you can do is to erase the words Liberal and Tory from your vocabulary, write Socialist in the place and resolve that henceforward you will elect only Labour Representatives, and *see that they do their duty.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?

If you fail in your duty to men, how can you serve spirits?
He who renovates the people reaches the borders of extreme virtue.
To know what is just, and not to practise it, is cowardice.

—*Confucius.*

Gold is worth but gold: love's worth love.—*Swinburne.*

Oh my brother, if you only knew

What to me in these things is understood,

As it seems to me it would seem to you,

What was good for the Cause was surely good.

—*Francis Adams.*

When I began these letters, Mr. Smith, I promised to put the case for Socialism before you as clearly and as plainly as I could, asking you in return to render a verdict in accordance with the evidence.

I have now done the work as well as I could under the circumstances; and I leave the matter in your hands.

“Merrie England” is not as lucid, nor as strong, nor as complete as I hoped to make it, but it may serve to suggest the wisdom of wider studies.

A good work of this kind has long been needed. I have not had time, nor health, nor opportunity to do it

thoroughly, but I thought it better to do it as well as I could than to wait until I could take a whole year in which to do it more thoroughly.

Perhaps some day I will set to work and do it all over again. Meanwhile I ask you to believe that there is a great deal more to be said for Socialism than these papers of mine contain, and I suggest to you that it would be well to read the books I have recommended; firstly, because knowledge is always valuable, and secondly, because it is your duty as a man and a citizen to understand the society you live in, and to mend it if you can.

There are very many well-meaning people who, whilst owning that much wrong and misery exist, deny their own responsibility for any part of them.

Very commonly we hear men say, "Yes, it is a pity that things are so bad; but it is no fault of ours, and nothing we can do will mend them."

Now, John, that is a cowardly and dishonest excuse. It is the old plea of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" No one can shirk his responsibility. We are none of us guiltless when wrong is done. We are all responsible in some degree for every crime and sin, and for every grief and shame for which or by which our fellow-creatures suffer.

If for instance, the filthy condition of the Salford Docks should cause sickness and loss of life, every citizen from the highest to the lowest would be responsible for the wrong.

When injustice is done it avails not for a man to plead that he cannot prevent it. The fact is he has not *tried* to prevent it, and therein lies his sin.

The average citizen sees the slums and the sweaters; he sees the wretched and the destitute; he knows that the weak and innocent are systematically robbed and slain; and his one excuse is that he "cannot help it." Now, John, I ask *you*, have you *tried* to help it; or have you only lied to yourself by saying no help was possible?

Your duty, it seems to me, is clear enough. First of all having seen that misery and wrong exist, it is your duty to find out *why* they exist. Having found out why they exist it is your duty to seek for means to abolish them. Having found out the means to abolish them, it is your duty to apply these means, or, if you have not yourself the power, it is your duty to persuade others to help you.

Do your duty, John. Do not lie to your soul any more. Long have you known that injustice and misery are rife amongst the people. If you have not acted upon the knowledge it is not because you knew it to be useless so to act, but because you were lazy and preferred your ease, or because you were selfish and feared to lose your own advantage, or because you were heartless and did not really feel any pang at sight of the sufferings of others.

Let us have the *truth*, John, howsoever painful it may be; let us have *justice*, no matter what the cost.

Go out into the streets of any big English town, and use your eyes, John. What do you find? You find some rich and idle, wasting unearned wealth to their own shame and injury, and the shame and injury of others. You find hard-working people packed away in vile unhealthy streets. You find little children famished, dirty, and half naked outside the luxurious clubs, shops, hotels, and theatres. You find men and women overworked and underpaid. You find vice and want and disease cheek by jowl with religion and culture and wealth. You find the usurer, the gambler, the fop, the finnikin fine lady, and you find the starveling, the slave, the vagrant, the drunkard, and the harlot.

Is it nothing to you, John Smith? Are you a citizen? Are you a man? And will not strike a blow for the right nor lift a hand to save the fallen, nor make the smallest sacrifice for the sake of your brothers and your sisters! John, I am not trying to work upon your feelings. This is not rhetoric, it is hard fact. Throughout these letters I have tried to be plain and practical, and moderate. I have never so much as offered you a glimpse of the higher regions of thought. I have suffered no hint of idealism to escape me. I have kept as close to the earth as I could. I am only now talking street talk about the common sights of the common town. I say that wrong and sorrow are here crushing the life out of our brothers and sisters. I say that you in common with all men, are responsible for the things that are. I say that it is your duty to seek the remedy; and I say that if you seek it you will find it.

These common sights of the common streets, John, are very terrible to me. To a man of a nervous temperament, at once thoughtful and imaginative, those sights must be terrible. The prostitute under the lamps, the baby beggar

in the gutter, the broken pauper in his livery of shame, the weary worker stifling in his filthy slums, the wage slave toiling at his task, the sweater's victim "sewing at once, with a double thread, a shroud as well as a shirt," these are dreadful, ghastly, shameful facts which long since seared themselves upon my heart.

All this sin, all this wretchedness, all this pain, in spite of the smiling fields and the laughing waters, under the awful and unsullied sky. And no remedy!

These things I saw, and I knew that I was responsible as a man. Then I tried to find out the causes of the wrong and the remedy therefor. It has taken me some years, John. But I think I understand it now, and I want you to understand it, and to help in your turn to teach the truth to others.

Sometimes while I have been writing these letters I have felt very bitter and very angry. More than once I have thought that when I had got through the work I would ease my heart with a few lines of irony or invective. But I have thought better of it. Looking back now I remember my own weakness, folly, cowardice. I have no heart to scorn or censure other men. Charity, John, mercy, John, humility, John. We are poor creatures, all of us.

So here is "Merrie England;" the earnest though weak effort of this poor clod of wayward marl, this little pinch of valiant dust. If it does good—well; if not—well. I will try again.

Also, some day, perhaps, I will talk to you not as a practical man, but as a human being. I will ask you to feel with me the pulsing of the universal heart, to see with me the awful eyes of the universal soul, gazing upward, dim and blurred and weary, but full of a wistful yearning for the unrevealed and unspeakable glory which men call God.

But these are "practical" letters, written with a practical object, and addressed to practical people. They are here republished as a book; and as they have cost me some time and trouble in the writing, I ask you, on your part, to give a little time and trouble to the reading, and, further, if, after that, you think them worth what they have cost you, I shall be glad if you will help me by recommending them to your friends.