

## CHAPTER III

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE EXISTING SYSTEM BY SCIENCE

THIS wonderful blindness which befalls people of our circle can only be explained by the fact that when people behave badly they always invent a philosophy of life which represents their bad actions to be not bad actions at all, but merely results of unalterable laws beyond our control. In former times such a view of life was found in the theory that an inscrutable and unalterable will of God existed which foreordained to some men a humble position and hard work, and to others an exalted position and the enjoyment of the good things of life.

On this theme an enormous quantity of books were written, and an innumerable quantity of sermons preached. The theme was worked up from every possible side. It was demonstrated that God created different sorts of people: slaves and masters; and that both should be satisfied with their position. It was further demonstrated that it would be better for the slaves in the next

world ; and afterwards it was shown that although the slaves were slaves, and ought to remain such, yet their condition would not be bad if the masters would be kind to them. Then the very last explanation, after the emancipation of the slaves,<sup>1</sup> was that wealth is entrusted by God to some people in order that they may use part of it in good works ; and so there is no harm in some people being rich and others poor.

These explanations satisfied the rich and the poor (especially the rich) for a long time. But the day came when these explanations became unsatisfactory, especially to the poor, who began to understand their position. Then fresh explanations were needed. And, just at the proper time, they were produced.<sup>2</sup> These new explanations came in the form of science : political economy, which declared that it had discovered the laws which regulate the division of labour and the distribution of the products of labour among men. These laws, according to that science, are : that the division of labour and the enjoyment of its products depend on supply and demand, on capital, rent, wages of labour,

<sup>1</sup> The serfs in Russia and the slaves in the United States of America were emancipated at the same time—1861-64.—(Trans.).

<sup>2</sup> The first volume of Karl Marx's *Kapital* appeared in 1867.—(Trans.).

values, profits, etc.; in general, on unalterable laws governing man's economic activities.

Soon, on this theme as many books and pamphlets were written and lectures delivered as there had been treatises written and religious sermons preached on the former theme; and still, unceasingly, mountains of pamphlets and books are being written, and lectures are being delivered; and all these books and lectures are as cloudy and unintelligible as the theological treatises and sermons; and they too, like the theological treatises, fully achieve their appointed purpose, *i.e.* they give such an explanation of the existing order of things as justifies some people in tranquilly refraining from labour and in utilising the labour of others.

The fact that, for the investigation of this pseudo-science, there was taken to show the general order of things, not the condition of people in the whole world, through all historic time, but only the condition of people in a small country, in most exceptional circumstances—England at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>—this

<sup>1</sup> Compare Walter Bagehot's words—

“The world which our political economists treat of is a very limited and peculiar world also. They (people) often imagine that what they read is applicable to all states of society, and to all equally; whereas it is only true of—and only proved as to—states of society in which commerce has largely developed, and where it has taken the form of development, or something

fact did not in the least hinder the acceptance as valid of the results to which the investigators arrived, any more than a similar acceptance is now hindered by the endless disputes and disagreements among those who study that science and are quite unable to agree as to the meaning of rent, surplus value, profits, etc. Only the one fundamental position of that science is acknowledged by all, namely, that the relations among men are conditioned, not by what people consider right or wrong, but by what is advantageous for those who occupy an advantageous position.

It is admitted as an undoubted truth, that if in society many thieves and robbers have sprung up, who take from the labourers the fruits of their labour, this happens not because the thieves and robbers have acted badly, but because such are the inevitable economic laws, which can only be altered slowly, by an evolutionary process indicated by science; and therefore, according to the guidance of science, people belonging to the class of robbers, thieves, or receivers of stolen goods, may quietly continue to utilise the things obtained by theft and robbery.

Though the majority of people in our world do not know the details of these tranquillising scientific explanations, any more than they formerly near the form, which it has taken in England."—*The Postulates of Political Economy*.—(Trans.).

knew the details of the theological explanations which justified their position, yet they all know that an explanation exists ; that scientific men, wise men, have proved convincingly, and continue to prove, that the existing order of things is what it ought to be, and that therefore we may live quietly in this order of things without ourselves trying to alter it.

Only in this way can I explain the amazing blindness of good people of our society, who sincerely desire the welfare of animals, but yet with quiet consciences devour the lives of their brother-men.