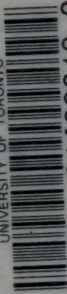
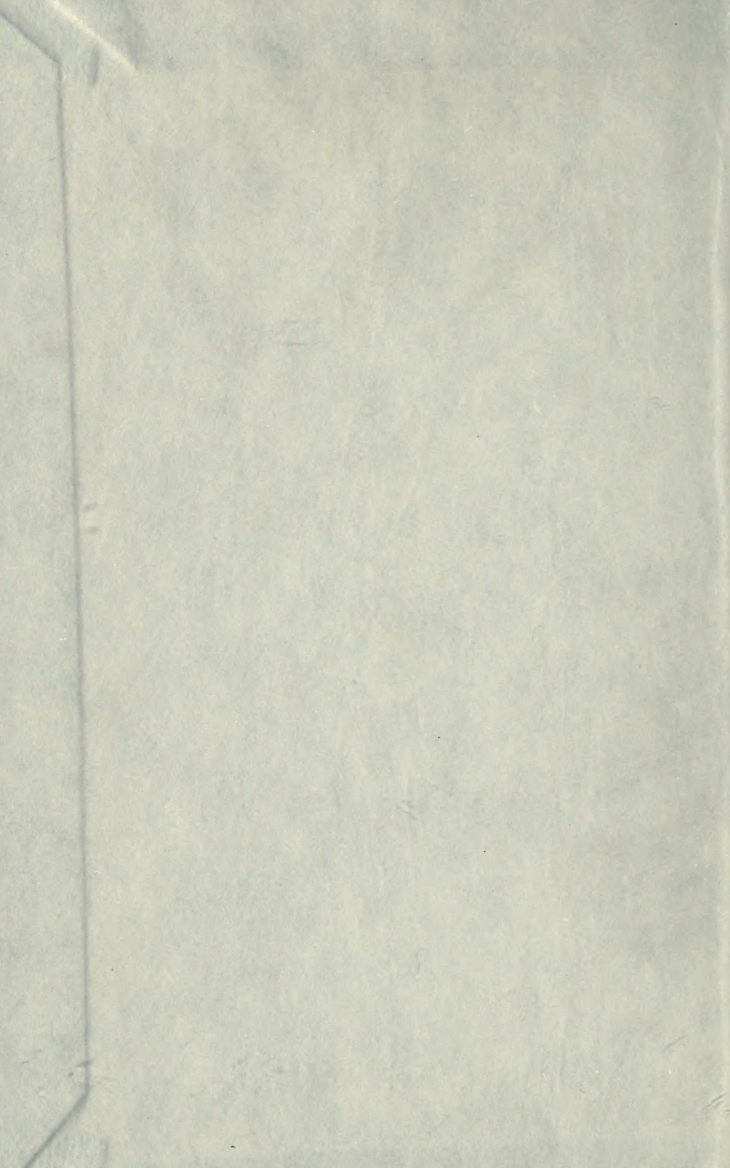


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SHOP SLAVERY AND
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SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

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A REVOLUTIONARY APPEAL TO THE EDUCATED
YOUNG MEN OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

BY
WILLIAM PAINE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

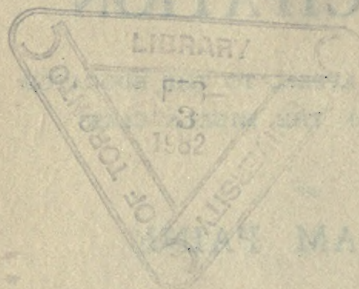
BY
H. G. WELLS

LONDON
P. S. KING AND SON
ORCHARD HOUSE
WESTMINSTER, S.W.

1912



SHOP SLAVERY
AND
EMANCIPATION



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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

H. C. WELLS

LONDON
P. S. KING AND SON
ORCHARD BOULE
WESTMINSTER, S.W.

WHAT shall it matter to me as I cross the road with the hand of my friend in mine that this man or that man remembers aught against me, when I walked in bondage to the sordid industrial *régime* that struck at me almost before I could stand alone, and enslaved me as soon as I was old enough to earn my bread? I shall laugh in his face if I am still found lovable, for the thing which he remembers against me I shall have sloughed off, and come into my own again.—THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION

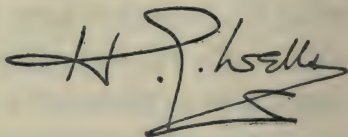
THE author of this book has asked me to contribute a word or so of Introduction for it to the general reader. It is a regrettable thing that so fresh and able a writer as Mr. Paine should need any introduction at all to the public; and I do not know whether Messrs. King would not be better advised to trust to the appreciation and recommendations of the reviewer at large for an adequate reception of this very sincere and splendid piece of writing. However, I bear my testimony for what it is worth, and add a word or so of opinion that is perhaps not quite in agreement with the opinion of Mr. Paine. He paints the dismal miseries of the living-in-shop assistant none too dismally; to that I can bear witness. For a wretched couple of years in my boyhood I slept in one of these

abominable dormitories he describes, ate the insufficient food supplied and drudged in the shop. Then when I was fifteen I ran away one Sunday morning to my mother, and told her I would rather die than go on being a draper. That seventeen mile tramp, without breakfast, to deliver that ultimatum is still very vivid in my memory. I felt then most desperately wicked, and now I know it was nearly the best thing I ever did in my life, and not only I, but Mr. Paine. And all the brotherhood of man fled with me that morning out of the house of mean bondage to life and opportunity. But such a lot of us, before it is too late, will not "rather die," and there you have the secret of all the tale of pitiful degradation that Mr. Paine recounts so bitterly.

But as for Mr. Paine's remedies I cannot so completely endorse them. I have my doubts of the comparative advantage of "living out" over "living in." You will learn something of the former state of affairs from

Samuel Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*, and it seems to me that the choice between the two is little more than the choice between the barrack and the slum. I do not know if there exists any adequate comparative study of the social status and welfare of girls and women, and particularly of young girls in such a trade as the drapery, where living in is the rule, and such a trade as refreshment catering, where living out prevails. Perhaps he justifies his case by the possibility of "hostels" such as he describes on pp. 59 to 63. That is for the reader to decide. And while Mr. Paine's chapter "The Way Out" stirs me deeply, and while I am convinced that the only ultimate "way out," not only for poor shop assistants, but for all humanity, is just that generous and desperate love for which he cries, I do not at the present moment see any prospect of its immediate and special application to the employees of the distributing trades. Nor am I so hopeless as he of the possible goodness of rich

people and powerful people and employing people. And, indeed, it is to them particularly I must commend this book. I must say to them in the abundance of their leisure and opportunity, "This is a voice for you. Consider the stifled anger of it, the desperation. This is something that grows beneath the feet of you and your children. Your leisure and your opportunity is very largely a trust that you should help your still helpless and inarticulate brothers out of this darkness. No way is known. You have to find the way."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. J. Wells". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "H" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vii
PREFACE	xiii
 CHAP.	
I. THE CASE OF THE PROVINCIAL	I
II. LIVING-IN, WITH SOME PERSONAL NOTES AND RECOLLECTIONS	II
III. THE PROSPECTS OF CHANGE POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY CONSIDERED	47
IV. THE SHOP: PAST AND PRESENT	75
V. THE POSITION OF THE LABOUR PARTY REVIEWED FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE SHOP- ASSISTANT	89
VI. THE WAY OUT	107



PREFACE

ORIGINALLY under the title of the "Counter Exposed," something answering in design to this little work was muddled into print, more or less to please and humour me, by a delightful little Dutchman who was anything but a *bona fide* publisher of revolutionary literature, and for whom I acted at the time as reader.

The chief fault of the earlier volume was that I relied too much on emotion, and tried to make my bricks without straw. For the larger amount of material now at my disposal, my acknowledgments are due to the writer of the series of articles in the *Daily Chronicle* entitled "Life in the Shop"; to the contributors of the numerous letters which appeared in the *Daily News* under the title of "Living-in"; to Mr. W. C. Anderson for his careful monograph "The Servitude of the Shop" published by the National Amalgamated Union of Shop-Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks; to Mr. M. I. O'Lehane, General Secretary and Organiser of the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association for notes on matters relating to the Irish Drapers' Assistants; to the Departmental Committee on the Truck Act for the information withheld from

me by the N.A.U.S.A. itself for fear I should *stale its news*, by publishing my book before it made its momentous communication to that Committee; and last but not least to the energetic secretaries of the Union in one or two important cities of the Kingdom.

When I first essayed to address the shop-assistant the Union was, so to speak, in leading strings. No one believed in it, nor, for the matter of that, in the shop-assistant either, and I am not sure that it was looked upon as being altogether respectable to associate oneself with it, even in print.

Since those days the N.A.U.S.A. has established nearly 500 branches throughout the United Kingdom, and several other Unions in allied branches of the distributive trade have come into existence. All these unions are now federated in the "National Federation of Shop Workers and Clerks," which again is affiliated to an International Federation of Employees with a bureau in Belgium. The International Federation includes, in addition to the English Unions, the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association, the National Federation of Employees of France, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Denmark, Servia, Poland, and the Shop Assistants' Union of New South Wales, Australia.

But for all the brave show this makes on paper, it is still too early in the day to congratulate anyone. The successes gained so far are only

moderate with a membership of 60,000 odd, though I am told from 500 to 600 new members attach themselves to the N.A.U.S.A. every month. This, be it noted, I write on hearsay only, as I have no title to pose as the spokesman of the Union. On the contrary, I hereby solemnly exonerate the Union of any complicity with the extreme attitude I have adopted; but although I absolve the Union, I claim no great originality from first to last for anything which appears in the following pages. My apology must be that at a critical moment, and at all costs, even at the cost of repeating others, I wish to give a striking precedent to unflinching criticism of a kind best calculated to startle the reader into thinking for himself, or into quarrelling with me for holding and advancing views which he may not yet have made his own.

WILLIAM PAINE.

January, 1912.



"IN most cases a youth entering a commercial establishment is withdrawn altogether from home influence; his master must become his father, else he has, for practical and constant help, no father at hand; in all cases the master's authority, together with the general tone and atmosphere of his business, and the character of the men with whom the youth is compelled in the course of it to associate, have more immediate and pressing weight than the home influence, and will usually neutralise it either for good or evil: so that the only means which the master has of doing justice to the men employed by him is to ask himself sternly whether he is dealing with such subordinate as he would with his own son, if compelled by circumstances to take such a position."—RUSKIN, "*Unto this Last.*"

SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

I

THE CASE OF THE PROVINCIAL

WHEN a boy leaves school for good, and goes into an office or a shop, the novelty of having something to do, which approaches the dignity of work, is its own reward, and as he acquires some slight degree of proficiency he warms to his new occupation. At last life seems to have begun in real earnest. He is surprised to find how easy it all is, and not a little relieved that his early misgivings were quite beside the mark.

But after a little time, the solemn stupidity of business begins to assert itself. The comparative freedom loses its charm now that there dawns no escape from the monotonous daily routine. Wedged into a system which threatens to exploit him as a mere automaton, if he is a lad of spirit, backed up with sound health, he makes a stand, and begins to question his surroundings.

2 SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

For argument's sake I will suppose the case of an average healthy youth of middle-class extraction apprenticed in a small provincial town—one who has been tenderly nurtured and brought up in a quiet, decent household. As such he finds the ruling topics which obtain amongst his colleagues are not much to his taste; similarly, their pleasantries are oftentimes coarse and disgusting. Twenty times a day he blushes in secret at what he must presently smile at if he desires a peaceful life. I am casting no wholesale reflection on his associates as a class. Whatever looseness of speech and behaviour he witnesses is to a large extent bred of the conditions in which they find themselves—the barrack-like life of the living-in system, under which a number of young men are herded together, with no sort of society open to them but such as may be picked up at haphazard in the streets. No one, however, feels more acutely than a boy of sixteen or seventeen that first bitter mortification at lewdness in word or act.

Fortunately, he is not yet old enough to generalise, and the reunion with his family at night-time (I am supposing him apprenticed in his own town and going backwards and forwards to business), or the society of one of his old schoolfellows, suggests a brighter aspect to life, and his business environment appears unfortunate, it is true, but exceptional.

He finds, or thinks that he finds, his employer

a cold, calculating man, with no soul above his profits and the balance at his banker's. All through the day, and every day of the week, obsequiousness, fawning, lying even, are held up to him for imitation as "tact": skilfully to undersell a rival shopkeeper becomes "enterprise"; to palm off doubtful articles on an unwary purchaser, or persuade a reluctant one into an unprofitable bargain, figures as "ability"; and, most humiliating of all, whilst constantly urged to politeness and courtesy by foreman and employer, his own veracity is questioned by suspecting purchasers, and he himself is treated by everybody as if he were of no account whatever.

Thus at a period of life when his feelings are unusually sensitive he finds himself in a doubly false position.

Is it surprising if a great bitterness gradually comes over his mind? This whole gigantic imposture called business, what is it, he argues with himself, but self-interest and the sorriest sort of make-believe? And to what end is he called upon to take part in it? Because he has his own living to get, is it an indispensable condition that he should work early and late for an employer who never manifests the slightest interest on his behalf, and between whom and himself there is neither affection nor respect? The hurry and haste of it all, the keen struggle and uncertainty, imply something desperate lurking beneath the surface of things. In the meantime,

4 SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

while employers strive for ascendancy, does not his own foothold grow insecure? For mere bread and board will he always have to join issue with one master against another?

In the midst of his perplexities, now and again, he thinks of religion as a possible support and anchorage; but further reflection plunges him into doubt, doubt into distrust, distrust into scorn. On no side is there break or respite in the new life that confronts him. The monotonous Sabbath rounds the monotonous week, and solemnly ratifies what his whole nature rebels against.

Through it all of course there are the usual breaks, without which life would become insupportable—bank holidays, Christmas festivities, and the like—but I am concerning myself only with those things which register themselves deeply on his growing consciousness.

At the home of one of his old schoolfellows there is a pretty sister. Of an evening he watches her about the room, hangs upon her speech, and treasures up every word of encouragement that escapes her. Soon his regard ripens into love, but at the mere mention of "prospects" his suit becomes ridiculous.

Thus already, before he is out of his teens, the three great factors which go to the making or unmaking of thousands of our youths—business, religion, and the affections—have failed him. At the outset he was not responsible for the choice: it was thrust upon him. The embarrassing

question: "What are we to do with our boys?" has been answered in his person.

In dearly buying this experience, three years of his apprenticeship have passed, and he now finds himself in the wholesale department of his shop or stores, with sundry opportunities of acquiring an insight into office work.

His curiosity is at once awakened by the massive ledger, in which are entered all the large and small transactions of the country shopkeeper. The pencilled remarks at the foot of many of the accounts particularly engage his attention: "bad," "doubtful," "bill at three months," "County Court," and the like, varying with the solvency or otherwise of the debtors.

On the next market day he identifies the customers with their ledger accounts and the marginal notes that accompany them, and marks how this or that man meets with this or that treatment, according to the soundness of his credit. Many of them are young men, more or less persevering, who have risked small savings or legacies on their ventures, and have their livelihood at stake. At night-time the monthly accounts for the next journey are carefully gone through and certain memoranda entered in the diary. For not a few accounts payment in full is to be demanded (their adjudged security being reached), and, failing that, a settlement through the Court to be applied for. In the course of the next week two or more of these rural debtors collapse, or further credit is refused.

6 SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

Repetitions of the like nature occurring week by week, he is aroused to the uncertainty of their tenure, and overhauls the old ledger to see how matters stood then. He traces back several accounts which have grown steadily worse, and notices how many addresses are perpetuated under different names.

In his own immediate neighbourhood the same uncertainty prevails. A large shop opens, and two small ones presently put up their shutters. A still larger one is opened, and the former disappears. His curiosity is satisfied; he no longer consults the ledger on that score; henceforth the tragedy becomes a mere dry detail of business, until it presses nearer home. One morning the old clerk says to him: "I am leaving this week; they say they must have a younger man, unless I am prepared to take less. And so I am going." The incident is a cruel stab at the heart of a still generous youth. He feels himself spurned and insulted by it. "His very strength and readiness, then," he argues, "are a menace to the security of his elders, and as young men grow into old men, later on he too will be displaced with as little remorse or provision as this poor old clerk." What he does not understand—and at his age perhaps it is as well that he should not understand—is that it is only by forced economies of every kind that private trade is held together at all.

Imperceptibly, he has abandoned something of that early restraint which tempered his behaviour, and now freely consorts with his colleagues both

in and out of doors. He even perhaps on occasion allows himself a little licence in his cups at "the nice little pub" somewhere on the outskirts of the town. "No harm, you know; just a few choice spirits, a singsong, and what the devil would you have a fellow do eopped up in that d——d office all the week?"

There are recurring moods, however, which he confides to nobody, when the look on a face seen during the day, or the memory of a book he has just read, lifts him insensibly out of the present—moods in which, as he goes home under the stars, his outraged boyhood whispers, "My God! if this is to be my lot, how much better for me if I had never been born."

Alternating thus between disgust and recklessness, he makes his way up to manhood and longs for his apprenticeship to expire, to get out into the world and rehabilitate his old dreams in more congenial surroundings. He knows not yet that he is dogged at every turning, and that change will be in place only, and not in condition. Nay, it will be worse—far worse. Home, with its sweet solace of affectionate glance and kindly greeting, will have arrayed itself on the other side. The charmed circle will show him to have been the victim of an illusion, that tamed his valour, trifled with his expectations. In the time to come, he cannot hope to have such a home to hold over his own son's head; nay, can hardly hope to have a *legitimate* son or any home at all.

The next scene is probably laid in Manchester,

8 SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

Liverpool, or one of the other large centres of commerce. Given a month, to wear the novelty off his new venture, and the bald outlines of his situation have pretty well declared themselves. A bare subsistence wage, from seventy to ninety hours' work per week, and a total unconcern as to what becomes of him, are among its leading features. The little dream has been forestalled, and the "take it or leave it" principle meets him again on the threshold of manhood. If he vacate his post, twenty others are willing to fill it on the same terms. So cheapened on the one hand by his own colleagues, and on the other by lack of resources, it is no great marvel if he bows to the inevitable, and ceases for ever to wonder, to hope, or to devise a remedy.

But he has the opportunity of getting on?

A word or two upon what "getting on" means. I remember in the Exeter Theatre fire of 1887—of which I was an eye-witness—a burly brute, who forced his way out of the gallery by scrambling over the heads of those who were suffocating in a bend of the stairs, literally ploughed his path through the congested mass of human beings, beating back, or gripping faces and hands to aid his exit. The like is analogous of "getting on" behind the counter. He may attempt this, it is true. He may ingratiate himself in the favour of the manager or employer by strategems that a public school would put him in Coventry for; may, by deflowering himself of the instincts of

fellowship and the love of fair play, seize every chance of thrusting himself into conspicuous notice, and by browbeating and bullying rise into managerial control or proprietorship; but such a one as I have had in mind would hardly lend himself to that. Call it by whatever other name you like, his heart is broken; his day is done. If he have not initiative enough to break away and choose some other calling, he becomes one of a type thousands of whom are to be found behind the counter: silent, saddened, long-suffering. Life has no more surprises for him, no more adventure; the colour has gone out of it, the texture is threadbare. He may, under special circumstances, marry, but if so, his children, when they grow up, will be poorer than himself; his home will be dull, prosaic; his mind will be full of apprehension of the future. On a bank holiday, when he strolls out to take the air, you may see him on the promenade of a cheap watering-place, a ridiculous but truly pathetic figure, dressed in a frock coat and a straw hat, with a pipe in his mouth, pushing a perambulator. If he remain single and live out, he may for a while by dint of great economy rent a combined room, and become one of that numerous and intelligent public that buys cheap reprints of standard works, but his poor knowledge will be cramped and unrelated; for over his mind a low mist will hang, the mist of a hundred broken visions and disappointed hopes blurring and confusing all the issues of life.



"It is not slanderous to tell the truth about the breakfasts of stale bread and rancid butter, the watery tea, the pallid chicory decoction which serves for coffee, the crowded, dingy, and ill-ventilated dormitories. And desirous as all traders must be to find their profits increasing, very few of them are wholly regardless of public opinion. . . . We should be glad to see the system abolished altogether, and the status of assistants raised by the acquisition of more social independence. They live far too much like sheep under existing conditions. They are barked at all day by shop-walkers, and they are herded in a sort of pen at night. They are not voters, or ratepayers, or anything that is personal or independent. They have no influence in the commonwealth, either separately or collectively, and though their wrongs are numerous, their rights are few. And while the former they cannot remedy, the latter they cannot enforce. What is the explanation of it all? Is it not partly the living-in system and its diet of skilly and mock Irish stew?"--*Drapers' Record*.

II

THE LIVING-IN SYSTEM: WITH SOME PERSONAL NOTES AND RECOLLEC- TIONS

So much for my imaginary case. It is near enough in most essentials to hit the mark; but there is another aspect of the question which I barely glanced at in passing, and which I propose to deal with more extensively in this chapter—the Living-in System as it exists in London, Birmingham, Bradford, Newcastle, and in a lesser degree all over the provinces. (In London it is at its worst; in Scotland it is almost unknown; in Ireland a stand has been made, and it is beginning to disappear.)

Though I strained a point in the foregoing chapter to screw the interest of my subject up to concert pitch, I am quite aware that my material admits of no heroics. The shop-assistant is by the nature of his limitations somewhat of a comic figure. Mr. H. G. Wells, when he elevates him into fiction, finds such funny names for him as Kipps and Buggins, and the popular sobriquet by which he is derisively known to the working classes is “counter-jumper.”

His betrayal has come about in manifold ways, and not seldom, I am afraid, by his own shortsightedness. The draper's assistant affects a certain superiority over the grocer's assistant; the grocer's assistant has his own idea about the draper's assistant; the ironmonger's assistant is criticised by both, and in his turn is alive to the merits of his own position; whilst the chemist's assistant looks down on all, or tries not to; and the banker's clerk will no doubt feel a little characteristic disgust at my having alluded at all to *him*.

Also, he dearly loves to lord it over his fellows. As a drapery assistant pertinently phrased it the other day: "The managers 'boss' the men; they in their turn 'boss' the apprentices, and the small boy at the haberdashery counter blows out his chest and 'bosses' the cellar lad."

Therefore, if I cannot at once enlist your full sympathy for the shop-assistant as an individual, I may perchance, in the meantime, excite your indignation at the insult which is offered to the community at large by the wholesale and contemptuous oppression of his class as a class. For whatever his shortcomings may be, he forms a considerable proportion of the active working population of the country, and anything that saps his character or undermines his health must end in the weakening of the national fibre.

To return to my typical provincial, whom we launched on the flood of a manufacturing town as

a full-fledged shop-assistant, and then left to his fate. If instead he is pitchforked into one of the big London drapery establishments, all the worst elements of shop life are thrust before him at once, without any attempt at concealment. Indeed, a printed book of rules and regulations with fines attached is provided, so that he may know exactly at what price his services and himself are rated. The bigger the establishment, the more barrack-like the life. But "barrack-like" is not a strong enough term. No soldier would put up with the conditions to which he must submit. Some writers have compared the institutions in which he lives and boards to "compounds," and some to workhouses. I have been through the sleeping-rooms and dining-rooms of the principal workhouses in all our large cities, and have sampled the food supplied there; but from what I have seen and heard of the shop-assistants' lot in some of the big London drapery houses, I can unhesitatingly affirm that in these respects our paupers are in many instances better fed and better housed. I will let a shop hand speak for himself on the subject of the dormitories.

"The sleeping apartments, with their bare walls, are little better than prison cells in the majority of West-end drapery houses. The sitting-rooms are supposed to be heated, with radiators that are capable of giving about the same quantity of heat as a candle light. I know of a large house in the West-end where hundreds

of young men and women 'live in,' and not a single bath is provided for them. Such a condition of things in a civilised country is nothing less than scandalous. When the poor assistant feels inclined to have a bath he has to take it before the public baths close at eight o'clock, and, as there is no fire in the sitting-room, he is obliged to go straight to bed to avoid catching cold on a cold winter's night after taking his bath."—*Daily News*.

When we come to the question of food, there is more rhyme and reason in the treatment they receive. The catering department is the best paying department in the house, and shows a handsome profit per head. By a specious evasion of the Truck Act, employers are supposed to "make a present" of board and lodging to their employees to the amount of £26 a year, whereas the actual cost of food and lodging in the ordinary run of big houses varies from 6d. to 9d. per day, and as much less in exceptional cases as an inhuman economy can effect.

Here is a letter, I quote again from the *Daily News*, on this subject:—

"Taking, for instance, one of the largest drapery and furnishing houses in Tottenham Court Road. The meals supplied are as follows:—Breakfast: bread and butter and tea of a kind. Dinner: meat, badly cooked and carved, and potatoes served up in a dirty tin, not peeled, often quite black; greens are served once a week, and pudding occasionally.

Tea : bread and butter, with stewed tea from an urn. Supper : bread and cheese and beer.

“The times allowed for meals are:—Breakfast, twenty minutes; dinner, thirty minutes; tea, fifteen minutes.

“Our sleeping quarters consist of from twenty to thirty wooden cubicles, on a landing badly lighted”

Another letter from the same source and on the same subject runs as follows:—

“In one of the West-end shops, for breakfast we have so-called tea, and very dry bread with a very poor substitute for butter. Dinner : four times in a week we have cold meat and very badly cooked potatoes, and stale bread. When we have pudding, which is very seldom, it is mostly rice cooked in water without milk or eggs, served with a little treacle. The only drink that is obtainable is a thick black beer, or water. We cannot get anything else, for we are kept in as prisoners. For tea, the same as breakfast. Supper : very dry bread, cheese, and black beer.”—*Daily News*.

I will give one more letter from the *Daily News* on this subject, this one containing a stronger statement than any of the preceding. It is from an assistant of twenty-five years' standing, whose experiences are drawn from the provinces, and the east, west, and north of London. He writes:—

“I venture to say that ninety-five per cent. of the assistants are badly fed, badly housed, and badly paid, and there is no one who can be better

termed a white slave than the draper's assistant. I make bold to say that if at least fifty per cent. of the assistants did not spend their earnings in buying food, they could not keep body and soul together. There are houses in the West-end to-day where the young ladies do not eat sixpenny-worth of meat in a week, but make their dinner off a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter, and very often their supper off the ordinary pennyworth of fish and taters."

I may further supplement this with an authoritative statement by Miss Margaret Bondfield, assistant secretary of the N.A.U.S.A.

"Dealing with the food first, a girl found on going down to breakfast in the morning that the menu was 'doorsteps and scrape.' This translated meant bread and butter, and tea, the latter of a 'sloshy' description. There was nothing stimulating in this, so the assistant was obliged to go out and buy an egg or a rasher of bacon.

"Then for dinner there were badly cooked vegetables and meat drowned in 'sloshy' gravy, and this was taken in a room which in itself induced a feeling of repulsion. For tea, bread and butter again turned up, probably the old friend from the breakfast table. Later on, a sumptuous supper of bread and butter and cheese was provided, with sometimes a glass of beer or a glass of milk.

"After that we go out and have a 'tuck in,'" said Miss Bondfield. "But it all depends on which

part of the month it is as to the menu. If at the beginning of the month, when we have just received the wages, we have a 'chop': if towards the end, we have to put up with fried fish and potatoes."

Incredible as all this must sound to anyone only superficially acquainted with the subject, it is only the beginning of the woes and grievances of the poor shop-assistant who "lives in," when you dip below the surface of his dumb endurance.

You imagine there must be compensations. He dresses the part so well; he is so smart and spruce. There is such a pervasive air of cordiality when you enter his prison house to make a purchase. But you are in a world of make-believe, where nothing is what it seems. The moment you are outside the door, and the shop is clear of customers, the jaws of a rigid discipline snap together; the shop-walker's smile vanishes, and all stand to attention as limp and nerveless as they dare to be—there is a fine for any noticeable excess of limpness and nervelessness. The forced affability of the shop-walker does not deceive *them*. These sad young gentlemen and anæmic young ladies know their own worth,—it is too cheap a commodity to presume on; the shop-walker knows his place and keeps it by a grim enforcement of the rules of the house.

There are rules for everything. No one ever
S.S. C

learns all the rules in force everywhere: no single employee ever exhausts the general fertility of employers to add to their number. It is enough that the assistant gets off by heart those for the infraction of which he will be summarily dismissed; the others will declare themselves in a round sum at the end of the month when they will be deducted from his premiums.

There are rules for getting up of a morning, and rules for going to bed at night. There are fines for talking above a certain pitch; there are fines for laughing out of season. There are rules to decide the exact angle at which you may look out of a bedroom window; there are rules to decide how much of yourself you may expose in looking out of the house door; rules for the clothes you wear, the cut of your coat, the length of your dress, the condition of your linen; rules for cutting your nails, and rules for cutting an acquaintance; rules for being ill in a prescribed and certificated way; fines for having photographs on the mantelpiece or anywhere about the room; fines for smoking, or reading, or sewing after hours except just where and when the employer wills; fines duly and circumstantially defined, for doing or not doing every conceivable thing My Lord Draper may have been pleased to place on his list of petty tortures, and last, but not least, discretionary fines to come into operation at any time for any misdemeanour or obliquity not yet scheduled in a formal manner. Here are a few selected at

random from various house-lists to suit everyone's purse and condition:—

“Every employee is expected in addressing the Members of the Firm *not to omit* altogether the *customary terms of respect*. The proper use of the word ‘Sir’ is in no sense derogatory to the self-respect of the person using it, as is proved by the usage of Parliament and the ordinary amenities of society. Anyone habitually disregarding this hint will not be allowed to remain in their employ.

“The house door is closed at 11 p.m.; on Saturdays, 12 p.m. The gas will be turned out fifteen minutes later. Anyone leaving a light after that time will be discharged. Assistants sleeping out without permission will be cautioned twice and discharged at the third offence.

“All bedrooms to be cleared at 8 a.m.

“On Sundays the bedrooms to be cleared at 10.20 a.m. and not entered again till 12.30 p.m.

“Unnecessary talking and noise in bedroom is strictly prohibited. *6d.*

“Sitting rooms to be cleared at 11 p.m.; Saturdays, 12 p.m.

“No matches or candles allowed in bedrooms.

“Any clothing, boots, etc., left about the bedrooms will be taken away. Servants not responsible for any loss. Each article, *3d.*

“Bedrooms must be left tidy. No pictures, photos, etc., allowed to disfigure the wall. Anyone so doing will be charged with the repairs.

“Assistants must not lean out of windows, or do

anything to attract the attention of persons outside.

“Any assistant making unnecessary noise or disturbance will be discharged.

“Young ladies leaving the establishment must remove their boxes the same day.

“Any young lady being unwell must give her name and department to the housekeeper before 9 a.m. and must in all cases see the House Doctor, who will be paid from the Medical Fund. Any objecting to this must leave the premises until recovered. No other doctor will be allowed to enter the House.

“For not turning the gas off in the bedroom at night, 1s.

“Any assistant leaving tradespeople or washer-woman in debt will have the same mentioned in their reference.

“Assistants must not loiter in the passages, on doorsteps or pavements near the House, or in . . . terrace, and on no account to bring strangers into the terrace.

“Strangers are not allowed to enter the House.

“Customers to be promptly attended to, 3*d*.

“No flowers to be put in water-glasses or bottles.

“No toilet business or nail cleaning, etc., to be done in the shops or showrooms, 6*d*.

“Young men must dress as respectably as when engaged—black coats and vests.

“Young ladies must wear black dresses, made to clear the ground (show room young ladies excepted),

white linen collars and cuffs, and the hair arranged in a neat and becoming manner.

“ For losing copy of rules, 3*d.*

“ For unbusinesslike conduct, 6*d.*

“ For using the West-end, City men, or porters for private purposes, 2*s.* 6*d.*

“ For using matches or lighting paper, 2*s.* 6*d.*

“ Second offence, dismissal.

“ For sleeping out without obtaining a signed docket, 2*s.* 6*d.*

“ Second offence, dismissal.

“ For not giving up the docket to the shop-walker before 9 the next morning, 2*s.* 6*d.*

“ Any assistant allowing a customer to go away unserved without first appealing to the buyer or a superintendent will be subject to instant dismissal.

“ If anything is done, or permitted to be done by an assistant, contrary to the interests of the firm, which is not specified in the foregoing rules, the offender will be subject to a fine not exceeding 2*s.* 6*d.* at the discretion of the firm or their representatives . . . In many of the foregoing rules the fines are not stated. The amount to be inflicted will be left to the discretion of the shop-walker and buyers according to the seriousness of the offence.”

In addition to these (the items on a single list often reach 200) there are “salutary” deductions inflicted on the young ladies and young gentlemen to keep them well, spick and span in their boot-wear, indifferently supplied with fiction, and prompt

with their subscriptions to the early closing association, such as the House Doctor deduction 1s. or 6*d.* a month; boot-blackening 1*s.* a month, library 1s. or 6*d.* a month, early closing from 2*d.* to 6*d.* a month, and so on.

If you wonder why the draper's assistant submits to these extortions all and sundry: wonder why as an Englishman he does not fly into a noble rage and break his yard-stick over the shop-walker's head, you must put yourself into the place of my convenient typical provincial just arrived at ——'s with his poor little tin box and the balance out of last month's "screw" after deducting his railway fare and the cost of the necessary additions to his wardrobe. What he finds is this. Here are 100, 200, 300 or 400 hands, as the case may be, all humbly and timidly doing, each in his place, whatever is expected of him, and he has just 5*s.* in the world, a pair of scissors, a cigarette case, a shilling pearl scarf pin, and a gun-metal watch.

When he left home, his relatives had great expectations of him; he was "going to make his fortune in the world," and he sees before him the petrifying example of 400 of his fellow beings on a treadmill all faultlessly dressed, many of them young men of refinement and good breeding, and young ladies of engaging manners and distinguished appearance. What would you? He is dazed and stupefied. But he is not without a little pardonable spirit. "After this month's money or next, yes, then . . . But this is life . . .

life . . . yes, life is like this ; 400 young persons of his own class . . . It is exactly like this at ——'s, and ——'s, and ——'s. Ah ! well you can't find out all about everything at once. . . ." So he settles down. All the rest have similarly settled down.

They are in the clutches of a heart-breaking system. The private reference is a very Sword of Damocles suspended over each head. "If you haven't paid for last month's laundry it will be mentioned in your reference." This particular threat scares no one, but it is what lurks behind it that is so infinitely menacing. What else may not be mentioned in your reference? I am told that they manage these things better in France. There the reference is a legal document stamped by the State and withheld at peril. Here any employer can close the doors of all other employers against you to-morrow.

So the typical assistant settles down in fear and trembling. He learns the various trivial offences for any one of which he may be instantly dismissed. He literally dare not call his soul his own. One word of protest from him and he would find himself in the street—the terms on which he was engaged, terms common to all drapers' assistants, being to pack up and go at a moment's notice. He has no closet to retire to : no dark room in which to develop his latent qualities, whatever they may be : no couch he can stretch his tired limbs on when the day's work is done ; no arm-chair he can



call his own. He is liable to be called down from his meals to serve a customer. If it is the rule of his room to sleep two in a bed, he cannot even choose his bed-fellow. If a friend calls to see him he must not ask him in : if he is a vegetarian, all there is left for him to eat is contract bread, generally stale, margarine, cheap cheese, an unaccountably mysterious pudding, something to drink called coffee, and villainous tea.

In all the devious avenues of intelligent and educated labour, he is the poorest slave that creeps and crawls for daily dole and nightly rest. His salary is ridiculously inadequate—the Labour Commissioners put it at 23s. 11d. per week for a fully qualified male assistant—and he is expected to dress as well as a man earning £300 or £400 a year, to wear a frock coat and a black tie, a clean collar every day, and a clean white shirt two or three times a week.

An almighty suspicion envelops him like a glove. His colleagues, in the following deliciously naïve item of his book of rules, are invited to peach on him behind his back. "In case of observing or being apprised of anything unusual or irregular on the part of any employee, *do nothing on your own responsibility*, but acquaint Mr. — at once."

The customers are invited to report him to the management by means of the private letter, and in some houses in extreme instances his person is liable to be searched, and his box.

Nor are matters any better in the big City warehouses. Though it is not generally known (and an assistant may be a year in the house without finding it out until it comes to be his turn), there is a custom for any one of them when called upon to "serve on the week," which, translated into polite language, means being posted at the door to spy on his colleagues as they leave the warehouse after closing, to see they take nothing of the firm's property out without proper passes.

As if all this were not enough to drive him to despair, he finds "the system" condemns him to celibacy for the rest of his life behind the counter. "From my point of view," writes a drapery manager in the *Economical Review*, "the greatest objection to this system (living-in) is the barrier it places in the way of matrimony. Even if any assistant is sufficiently successful to justify him in contemplating marriage, the masters would unhesitatingly refuse to make an allowance for discontinuing to supply food and lodging. Besides, masters strongly object to married men; few will engage them under any circumstances, and even those give single ones the preference."

Thus his only chance of sexual fulfilment (unless he marries by stealth, which means semi-starvation whilst it lasts, and dismissal when he is found out) is to have his "little fling." What his "little fling" means is better imagined than described in cold print and discreet phrase.

A keen observer of the inherent weakness of the

position sums up the situation in a few pregnant remarks : " The phase of the matter which so painfully impressed me when living in was the unnatural emphasis of sex in all the regulations, etc., which inevitably reacted on the minds of these young people and gave their intercourse with members of the opposite sex all the unwholesome excitement of an illicit act, so that they could not exchange the most ordinary courtesies of every-day life without the sense of sex being painfully obvious in *simper* or *giggle*. It is so difficult to convey just what harm this attitude of mind has upon the moral standard, owing to the impossibility of producing any kind of evidence. But any healthy-minded man or woman feels the degradation of such an atmosphere, and instinctively recoils from it. The dreadful thing is that young people do not understand, and before they reach the point of knowledge of life which might protect them, they have become soaked with the oversexed atmosphere."

As for the big warehouses, I know of several, and it may be common to all, where if boys and young men are not in on the stroke of 11, they are locked out to roam the streets of London till the morning.

With regard to the West-end houses, I know of one in the Tottenham Court Road, where if a girl in the cash desk is short twice running in her accounts, she must refund the amount out of her own pocket at once, or accept instant dismissal, no

matter whether her home is in Tottenham or Stromness. I was talking the other day to a girl who had this alternative thrust before her, and paid up, leaving the establishment of her own accord at the end of the week. She originally went up from the country three months before on the understanding that she was to enter the millinery department, but was told it was customary for newcomers to graduate from the cash desk. The deficit altogether amounted to less than a sovereign, and she had been singularly free from mistakes hitherto, although hundreds of pounds had passed through her hands in a day. "Do you know," she said, "there are some girls who, when they find themselves in this predicament, dare not go home? Probably they are without money and know no one, and rather than face what they feel to be the disgrace of explaining the situation to their friends, who would not understand, they disappear in London and are never heard of again."

It must be borne in mind that these big establishments are fed from the country with green hands attracted by the glamour of a great name which has become a household word, and abounds in something of the same fascination for the young shop-assistant that the footlights exercise over other temperaments. All the big houses know this, and drive a hard bargain accordingly with the sons and daughters of the country born and bred.

The next thing on the shop-assistant's list of grievances is the number of hours that make up his working day. Whatever the advertised hours may be in the majority of West-end houses, the hours actually worked per week average from about 67 in the winter months to 70 in the summer. Does *paterfamilias* exclaim, "What a comfort; he will have less time to go wrong in!" I have heard such things said. But Dr. Norman Kerr takes another view of the subject. "It is impossible," he says, "for me to find language strong enough to convey a hundredth part of the mischief which I have seen arise from the excessive hours of labour of shop-assistants who have been under my professional care. The great length of the hours at work I have seen break down strong constitutions, seriously aggravated as the evil has been by the dyspeptic misery and disease induced by the necessary bolting of food through the far too short period allowed for meals."

A yearly average of $68\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week leaves how much time per evening to our poor drapery assistant in the West-end? At least half an hour goes in washing and dressing from the time he leaves the shop till the time he is outside the house door. Then there is the tuck-shop, without which he would flag and fail utterly, and after that, if the funds admit, a run round to the music-hall, or a sociable hour over the billiard table. Perhaps the fine taste of the middle-class social reformer jibs at this? Would he have

him go and listen to a debate in the House of Commons, or attend a revival meeting at the local mission room? The shop-assistant cares nothing for politics. To him politics is a game of "give a poor boy his hat," which he played at school to torment a newcomer. The Liberal throws the hat to the Conservative over the poor man's head, and the Conservative throws it back to the Liberal, murmuring, "Give a poor man his hat," but the poor man never gets the hat unless he snatches it, or it falls to the ground. As for theology, he has seen to the bottom of many things, and regards the popular preacher much in the same way as a victim of the Spanish Inquisition looked on the officiating priest who cheered him on his way to the stake by whispering in his ear some spiritual counsel as to how he should comport himself at his own burning.

As an illustration of the way in which the female shop-assistant regards *her* lot, let me give a portion of a letter which appeared under the initials "E. M. P." in the correspondence columns of *To-day*, written by one who says she is twenty-one years old, and has been a shop girl for the last six years.

"Just imagine yourself me for a little while—a young girl working 12 hours a day, sometimes more—for mere existence; uncongenial work, too—and it is work all the time, I can assure you. I sometimes hate women. When I read of a woman being good and sympathetic, I want the

writer of that article to come and serve her with a bonnet. I wonder if it ever strikes a customer that we, too, are alive? Of course, after business is over we are usually too tired to think of pleasure, and if we were not, what pleasure is there for girls like us? With the exception of a few girls I have met at business, I know no one at all. How is the shop-girl likely to get to know anyone? There is only one way—girls in business term it 'going on the mash.' I daresay there sounds something very comical about that to you, but to me—well! I have met more tragedies than comedies in my life. And can you blame them? The majority of them don't think at all, they only feel, and then the fearful misery of a shop-girl's life! Can you wonder at the plunge which generally lands them out of the frying-pan into the fire? And those who do think, for them it is even worse. A girl just turned seventeen said to me the other day, 'The only comfort there is in life is that it cannot last. Can you consider anything more horrible than to have to live for ever?' There is surely something wrong when girls of seventeen look forward to death with pleasure. Sometimes I want to get over the houses and see something of Nature—the Nature that I read about—but we can only see the stars, and they look cold enough; everything else is to us cold, artificial, and unnatural. . . . I am not ambitious. I don't ask for fame or even money, only for useful work that would be congenial, and

just a little love and sympathy. If I am not to have them, if warmth and life is wrong for me, and if I'm to be nothing all my life but a machine, as I have seen other girls, and as they have told me, why did God make me—or having made me, why did He give me thought and feelings?"

To return to the City warehouses. If the warehousemen are a little better off in the matter of hours, they are perhaps in even a worse plight as regards food, and the matter of sleeping accommodation.

Listen to what two warehousemen have to say. I quote again from letters to the Editor of the *Daily News*.

The first is as follows:

"Within the hearing of the bells of St. Paul's Cathedral, the writer's own experience was to have to sleep in a room with beds so near one another that it was only possible to reach those at the end of the room by walking sideways. About forty men were lodged without any bathroom accommodation. Bread, butter, cheese, and water, formed the larger portion of the menu; the cheese was of a very inferior quality."

And the next:

"In a firm in which I was employed, our steward was paid according to his ability to cut down the cost of supplying the employees with food. Consequently, the food we were expected to eat would have been refused by savages—sour bread, watery tea, meat often rotten, an awful

kind of black beer, etc.; everything of the worst possible quality, and also vilely served and cooked. I know that most of the employees spent pounds a year buying what they had already paid for.

“Those who lived in were only allowed out after 11 o'clock at night once a week, and were not allowed to smoke on the premises. This alone drove most of them to the public-houses in the neighbourhood.

“In fact the sooner the living-in system in the City warehouses is made illegal, the better for the majority of the employees. It is really robbery of the employed by their employers.”

Whether it be robbery or not, the uninitiated may be pardoned a little astonishment at how the supply of raw material is kept up. The Commercial Travellers' School at Pinner, the Orphanage Asylums at Wanstead and elsewhere, are fertile fields to recruit from; Scotland sends shoals of her hardy sons into the huge marts of the Dry-goods business; and our own provincial drapery houses, big and small, that buy from them commit their sons to them as to a paternal institute. It is not so bad for the latter when they are destined to succeed their fathers in the home business, and can reckon on a liberal allowance of pocket-money, but it is unrelieved drudgery and semi-starvation when they have nothing but their own slender earnings to depend on.

I have been in only one of their dormitories,

but I believe in City warehouses the young men are more often than not boarded and housed over shops within the City area. The one I looked through was in Shoreditch. I was sub-editing a City trade paper at the time, and a new wing having been added to the house in question, I was invited to report on the opening ceremony. After the proceedings were over, I asked to be allowed to see one of the rooms where the young men slept, as I happened to know the parents of a lad who had just entered the firm. I shall never forget the room he occupied. It was a long, low, dingy room, with the windows all close shut on account of the fog outside, and in it there was a sickly smell of apples—of sweating apples, dry rot and old clothes. On the bare boards there were six or seven cheap narrow bedsteads, each covered with an old brown coverlet. I turned back one of the coverlets, and the sheets and pillow were soiled and grubby. There was nothing else in the room except a tin box to each bed, and a very cheap-looking wash-stand of the painted-maple pattern, ugly enough in its day, and its day long gone by. I cannot recall what the wallpaper was like (except that it was shabby), nor whether the plaster of the low ceiling was cracked and grimy—in the wan daylight it was a mere brown smudge—but the general impression which the room gave staggered me.

I contrasted in my mind the scene before me with the old farmhouse in East Anglia where the

lad I speak of had his home. I remembered in particular the room in which he slept, immediately beneath the thatch where the swallows built their nests in the spring; the spotless white dimity hangings at the latticed window, the old Queen Anne looking-glass, just seen, that gave it such a quaint look from the garden; the spotless white bed linen and white toilet-cover; the little kindly thoughtful adornments of wall and mantelpiece, and the well-carpeted floor. I remembered the warm-hearted hospitality his people extended to me on my visits there, the simple trustful life of its members, and, from the garden gate, the wide wonderful prospect common to that part of the country of cornfield, meadowland, and copse. When I met him again some time afterwards we did not speak of it—I believe we unconsciously avoided each other's eyes in company, as people do who have a disagreeable secret between them, and are afraid of giving each other away.

Up till now I have been dealing mainly with the problem of shop-assistants' life as it is presented in the West-end, and in the City; that is to say, I have been all the while, as far as London is concerned, on privileged ground. Imagination stops aghast at the problem as presented in north and south and east.

The hopelessness of their lot is grimly shadowed forth by the senior apprentice in Kipps, when he remarks to the newcomer, "I tell you we're in a blessed drainpipe, and we've got to crawl along it

till we die." Seventy-five, eighty-five, ninety hours a week; there is no limit to the hours you may work a shop-assistant.

Look down one of the shops in a late shopping thoroughfare, think of the glare, the vitiated atmosphere, the petty tyranny of one hand over another, provoked by the example of the master tyrant himself; the little jealousies and paltry rivalries, the mob of motley people crowding up to the counter, the hopelessness, the pallid faces, the heat. Or go in. You grow tired and dispirited merely waiting your turn to be served, but they have to endure for fourteen hours on end on a diet of "skilly and mock Irish stew" for nothing—for nothing but the permission to live, when death itself were preferable, if only they could make up their minds.

Caught in the meshes of this deadly system, whose web is designed with fiendish precision to break their spirits utterly and disaffect them with each other, the young and generous lad becomes in course of time soured and silent, the naturally coarse and ungentle, brutalised and vicious; whilst all are indiscriminately hustled and bustled from one master to another from one year's end to another, till at last, with all the sap of youth squeezed out of them, they limp away out of sight, good for nothing but to spend the remainder of their days at occasional odd jobs, and their nights heaven knows where. In Liverpool I was told some reappear at intervals as sale hands. They are paid 2s. 6d. a day and "spiffs,"¹ but remain only whilst

the sale lasts as they are generally "bad on their feet." My informant, a shop-walker, said it was not an uncommon thing to give them a small sum on account before they started, to get their frock coats or shirts out of pawn, and two whom he particularised as men very well known to him, and whom his firm employed, he said generally "retired" into the workhouse when the sales were all ended for the season.

You may think I have made the case of the draper's assistant a very black one. Why not? I am not writing for children who are frightened when the night comes on and it grows dark, but for men and women who some day shall strike the harder for knowing the worst.

So far, I have confined the subject of living-in almost entirely to the drapery trade. I will presently give my own personal impressions of life in the grocery trade (living-in and living-out), and if eight or nine years' experience as apprentice, assistant, and manager is any qualification to write upon the subject, I may presume to contribute some little information which, unless I was singularly unfortunate in my engagements, illustrates the average conditions behind the grocery counter in what I should describe as a good-class trade.

But before I begin to relate my own experiences I would like to quote from Mr. Roper's Presidential address of four years ago a few remarks on the condition of things in the multiple shops, as I had no experience at all of the multiple shop. In his address of 1907, Mr. Roper said

that men were working in the multiple shops from 60 to 90 hours a week for from 17s. to 28s. (He was of the opinion the average wage was much nearer 20s. than 28s.) In addition to the hours engaged in serving during the time the shop is open, the employees of the multiple shop are expected to work overtime from one to three hours without extra payment, every day of the week. They must clear shop, wash down counters, and get up parcels of groceries for next morning's delivery after the shop has been closed to the public. Though entitled to a half-holiday once a week, they frequently have to forfeit it owing to a system of monthly or bi-monthly stocktaking or a sudden instruction from the inspector, or from head office, to dress the window. "In addition to all this, many of the multiple firms demand that the manager shall make a weekly return of sales, stocks, etc., to reach the head office not later than the second post on Monday. The closing hour of the shop on Saturday being any time from 11 to 12 p.m., it is obvious that to carry out this order the staff must either work right on into Sunday morning, or go home at midnight and return to the shop on Sunday. What often happens is that the whole staff works on until the small hours of the Sabbath, and the manager returns on the Sunday forenoon for an hour or two to finish off his return."

Taking them one with another, private trade, limited company trade, and multiple shops, I should say the average wage of the grocer's

assistant works out about the same as that of the draper's assistant—23s. 11d. per week all told. The question of wages, however, is a very difficult one to determine, as it varies considerably with the class of trade. I received 1s., 2s., 3s., and 4s. a week respectively for my four years' apprenticeship, and 10s. a week for a few months afterwards until I got a berth away: there I was paid about 11s. a week, and lived in. In my next situation I received 26s., rising to 28s., and lived out, and in my last—after three months as probationer at head offices at 25s. a week—I made with a small commission about 35s. a week living in as branch manager in the tea trade. Out of the last-named sum I had to pay for rooms 6s. a week to the second hand, who was a married man renting the upper part of the house, and about 15s. to his wife for board and washing.

I cry "quits" as regards my apprenticeship. It is true that for about eight weeks each year of the last two years I worked from 5 in the morning till 7 at night—sometimes it was 8—but the supervision was not very strict, and as several of my co-apprentices were old schoolfellows, we had what we regarded as a "fairly good time."

My first situation, after completing my apprenticeship, was in a firm not a hundred miles from Chatham, employing about a dozen hands. Most of us were young fellows under or about twenty-one years of age; two were under sixteen, and one, I believe, was under fifteen. We worked from 85 to 90 hours per week, and

were allowed about three-quarters of an hour per day for meals; that is, twenty-five minutes for dinner and twenty minutes for tea. Business commenced at 7 o'clock in the morning; breakfast previous to that at a quarter to 7. There was no stint of victuals, but the table was disorderly, and our bread and butter was cut up by the mistress of the house in bed, or so report said.

As we lived on the premises, our opportunities for getting fresh air were limited to about half an hour before bedtime, or an hour in the earliest part of the week. The room in which I slept was an attic with a lean-to ceiling, accommodating five beds. The youngest apprentice slept in this room. A part of the time—I stayed there three months only—two of our bedroom mates were suffering from —, and this, to say the least of it, was unsavoury, as there was no bath-room, and privacy was out of the question.

The trade was mixed better-class during the day, cheaper towards evening, very cheap at night. I think it must have been very cheap indeed at night, for if ever I have nightmare now I am back in — on a Saturday night trying my level best to lessen the number of coarse, clamouring people who swarm up to the counter. The hot boards of the floor blister my feet; the hot exhausted air makes me light-headed; but I cannot get rid of the customers fast enough; parcels will keep coming untied, string breaks, and the apprentice I sent downstairs for a pint of vinegar has gone to sleep in front of the cask

in a totally collapsed condition. In a similarly collapsed condition, a former assistant of this firm was caught down below uncorking a bottle of whisky (we sold wine and spirits) and drinking some of its contents, and for this he was sentenced to two months' imprisonment, though in the evidence it was clearly shown that he had not had any sleep to speak of for a week or ten days—it was during Christmas week—and had only taken the spirit as a stimulant to keep himself awake, no attempt at concealment having been made.

By special favour we had a smoking-room, but as the employer came in and out as he pleased, it was not private enough—unless he was known to be out of town—to suit our taste, and we smoked and dined and drank in the bedroom of a night and half the Sunday. From this admission a hostile reviewer of the original edition of this book proved me an intemperate fellow by my own showing, but there is not much in the contention, since with brighter circumstances and a return to a more athletic way of living, I became almost an abstainer and a vegetarian.

Before I left ——'s I induced the apprentice to run away. He was a well-bred boy whom we all liked, and we were genuinely sorry for him. For our own lot, we were reckless and desperate, and did not care very much what became of us.

When I broached the matter of his clearing out, it had a sobering effect on us all, and we discussed it solemnly for several nights, smoking our pipes. "No, but," he broke in several times, "you fellows

... we've been happy in a way, haven't we? ... I don't mind sticking it a bit longer. ... Can't we plan it so that we all leave together?"

But we had set our minds doggedly on his going, and after a letter had been written to his parents—we dictated it—he decamped of a sudden as arranged, timing his journey home so as to arrive a few hours after the post got in.

I shall not forget the loneliness of our room on the night following his departure. The unoccupied bed, with the blotch of smoke, which through many drowsy intervals of gossip had slowly painted itself upon the leaning wall above where his candle used to stand, was the sombre spokesman of us all. So miserable were we and so forsaken, we did not even put the lights out in our accustomed manner by throwing our boots at the tin candle-sticks, but crawled dejectedly into bed and smoked ourselves to sleep. "Say," called out someone, "why didn't we all chuck the show together?" Somebody else muttered "To-morrow." The next day we were to have got out at two. An Early Closing Association had taken a plebiscite of the shop-keepers, and an agreement had been arrived at. We duly closed, but as — turned the key in the door, he said "Now weigh up twopenny sugar and fill all the lockers." "And before you go," we called out, "take a month's notice from us all."

I must not forget to pay a passing tribute of affection to little D——, the one remaining poor sweet soul that chastened and humanised our surroundings. Little D—— was the errand boy,

a pathetic-looking, ludicrously clad creature of twelve or thirteen, who went in fear and trembling of the "Boss," but attached himself to us with a devotion that won the hearts of us all. Of a Saturday night he would smuggle beer into the shop for us for Sunday, stowing away a pint-and-a-half bottle up each of his capacious sleeves, immoderately proud of the feat, though I am afraid it would have meant dismissal if he had been caught. I recall him with his little forefinger bent—he had queer antic ways—and a wistful look on his face, as if he were hearkening to strange voices, as he went about his work, carrying heavy baskets of goods, never complaining, never acknowledging himself beaten, but childishly pleased at the slightest notice we took of him.

My next situation was as first hand in a high-class grocer's shop in Exeter. I had not very much to complain of there. We worked only about sixty-nine hours a week. I lived out; made several friends outside the shop, and had more time of a night for reading and study. But I got only 2s. rise in three and a-half years. I began with 26s. a week and ended with 28s., and it was necessary to try my luck elsewhere.

My last situation was in Liverpool. There I worked for a large firm of wholesale and retail tea merchants, employing upwards of forty hands. Of these hands I may say, without any exaggeration, that I have never since met any other body of men so utterly devoid of independence and force of character. Our hours were from 8 in

the morning till 7 at night; 10, Fridays; 11, Saturdays. We had half an hour in the middle of the day for dinner; tea after closing, except on the last two days of the week, when we were given bread and butter or bread and cheese on the premises in consideration of our working till nearly midnight, as, although the shop was closed at 11, we had to stay on till the cash was balanced. On the ordinary days it was generally 8 o'clock at night before I got my tea; this meant going without food for nine hours, as I was told off for dinner at 12—though it appears ridiculous to call that a dinner which was merely a seven or ten minutes' scramble at the nearest restaurant. It may suggest itself that I might have broken my fast on my way home, but this was not practicable: my means only just allowed of my renting, at a long distance from the shop, a small bedroom with the use of a cellar-kitchen, for which I paid 12s. 6d. per week, breakfast and tea inclusive.

The head of the firm in Liverpool was a hard task-master. I recall his attitude near the shop door, where he would stand facing us by the hour together, his head tilted slightly on one side, transfixing one man after another with an eye that boded mischief if the slightest bungling or inattention occurred. At his mere approach, the head counterman, a man of thirty-five, would turn now red now white, and fall into such a fit of trembling he could hardly speak articulately. The latter told me that he had consulted several

medical men, but was afraid that the nervousness induced by this too constant supervision had become incurable. As the tea trade by itself is not a wide calling, the only alternative was to change over to one of the other large companies, but as this was not often resorted to, I conclude the conditions were much the same in all of them. If a man wanted to increase his salary, he could do it by working another man out—that is to say, by doing the work of two he would receive the wages of one and a half, and his colleague would be told to go. I had entered into a six months' agreement with this firm, but before half the time was up my health was so shaken I was about to apply for a release, when I was transferred to a seaside branch as manager, and completed a year in their employ—my last year behind the counter.

Whether my experiences are, generally speaking, representative of the average lot of the grocer's assistant, I am after all not so sure. On second thoughts I am inclined to think I was somewhat favoured by fortune, as I was of that smaller number who, in sending in their applications, write themselves down "Tall, well-educated, and of good address." But if so, what of the middling-sized and short ones?

In this chapter I have not space, nor is it essential, to deal with each trade separately, since in effect every assistant will soon be a drapery salesman. In other words, the general trend—and nothing can withstand it—is towards concentration under one roof of all branches of the distributive

trade, as shown by co-operative societies on the one hand, and on the other by mammoth concerns like Harrods' Stores or Whiteley's. Grocers' assistants, hosiers', hatters', clothiers', ironmongers', confectioners', boot-makers' assistants, are all slipping down into the quagmire of the drapery assistant. Some may be at the moment better off and some even worse, but the levelling-down process is silently at work, for what one class of assistants will put up with to-day will ultimately form the standard for all, due allowance being made for differences of locality and class of trade.

Fortunately for me, my actual experience of living-in was a short one, but short as it was, I had abundantly brought before me the demoralising effects of the system. Did I contribute to them voluntarily and of my own free will? What free will has a man who works eighty-five to ninety hours a week? Subjected to such untoward conditions as I have described, the man is no longer the man he was; he grows slack and indifferent; he is not sure of himself; he distrusts what he hitherto regarded as his staying power; he becomes involved in the general levelling-down of character. The best I can say for myself is, that if I gave way at some points, at any rate I incited the hands I worked with in Kent to open rebellion. But we were only a small community of five—the other seven lived above the branch shops. If there had been a hundred and five, what then? Without a doubt, in the big drapery houses it is the example of wholesale submission which overawes the individual.

“O THE joy of a manly self-hood!

Personality—to be servile to none—to defer to
none—not to any tyrant, known or unknown.

To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and
elastic.

To look with calm gaze, or with flashing eye.

To speak with a full, sonorous voice, out of a broad
chest.

To confront with your personality all the other
personalities of the earth.”

WALT WHITMAN.

III

THE PROSPECTS OF CHANGE POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY CONSIDERED.

LOOKING at the shop-assistant as a unit, we have seen him, on the domestic side, fail everywhere to find even a moderate degree of home comfort. We will now introduce him on to a larger stage, and critically observe him filling in the picture of the evolution of a new industrial order. That he enters upon the scene somewhat dazed and ill at ease is of the very essence of his past traditions. He has never accustomed himself to think historically. A fatalist from the first, the conceit ever uppermost in his mind has been, "Things always were so, and they always will be." Hence the shop in which he happened to find himself has been to him his microcosm of the world. Once, so they say, it was brightened with a vision of marrying his master's daughter as a reward of his diligence, and later with the notion of somehow or other acquiring a similar shop of his own. Now both romance and modest ambition have vanished, and he makes his *début* as a man of no account whatever to the public and to himself. The living-in system and the frequency

48 SHOP SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

with which the big retail trading concerns shift their hands from town to town accentuate his helplessness by depriving him of all participation in the ballot.

Let us see what is happening over his head.

To-day one may run and read the rapid transformation of the private shop into the big limited company, with branches in all the large and small towns, and growing seaports, throughout England. This significant change has brought about the insolvency of tens of thousands of once flourishing businesses. Between the cross-fire of the limited companies and the co-operative stores the private traders are doomed, and the shop-assistant is the poor-paid mercenary with which the big combatants make a dead-set at the private trader and have at each other's throats. Here are a few of the great trading enterprises whose branches are posted from Land's End to John o' Groats:—

	Branches.
Boots, Cash Chemists	320
Hepworth & Sons, Ltd. (Clothing)	150
Bradley's Clothing Establishments	100
Maypole Dairy Co. (Grocery)	460
Lipton's, Ltd. (Grocery and Provisions)	360
Melia's Stores (Grocery)	180
Bell's Stores (Grocery)	180
Hunter's, Ltd. (Grocery)	280
Slater's, Ltd. (Grocery)	280
Peark's Stores (Grocery)	280
Home & Colonial Stores	540

	Branches.
Cash Clothing Co.	1,000
Cash Boot Co.	1,000
Freeman, Hardy & Willis (Boots)	400
Stead & Simpson, Ltd. (Boots)	230
Cash & Co. (Boots & Shoes)	220
Smart & Co. (Boots & Shoes)	220
Eastmans, Ltd. (Meat)	1,800
Nelson & Sons, Ltd. (Meat)	1,600

Arrayed against them are something like 1,500 co-operative distributing societies, with an annual turnover of nearly £70,000,000.

In the days of its non-age the co-operative movement advanced under the banners of great ideals. Its promoters had nothing more unusual in their minds than to eke out the weekly wage of the artisan class by distributing goods at cost, allowing for rent, buildings, and working expenses. But in an evil hour it knew its strength and faced about. Taking unfair cover under the provisions of the Friendly Societies Acts and paying no income-tax on their huge turnover, the shareholders of the co-operative societies presently became as solicitous of outside custom as the shareholders in any limited company, with the result, up to date, that in May, 1910, 1,500 co-operative societies declared dividends averaging 12½ per cent. on purchases, and £10,847,945 was divided in profits. The nett gain (or loss) to the artisan community was that about 2,500,000 of its members became lesser middle-class men, whom

the apologists of co-operation pointed to with pride, but they said nothing about the thousands of private traders who were rendered insolvent as a result of nearly £10,000,000 of co-operative money being available for dividends. Having infected over 2,500,000 plain men with the passion of part proprietorship, it could find it in its heart to pay many of its responsible managers 28s. a week. And to-day it feels so secure in its entire change of front that one of the Scottish Co-operative Societies recently put up big posters inviting new members on the announcement that it pays the highest dividends of any Scottish society; and a provincial Co-operative Society sees nothing anomalous in placing the following advertisement in the daily press:—"Grocery Sales—man wanted, to take charge of branch shop; security required; wages 25s."

If the private trader is to be killed, all the eloquence in the world will not save him, and it does not very much matter whether he is killed by the big limited companies or the big co-operative societies. Similarly with the salesman. His hours under the co-operative system are a *little better*, and his wages a *little worse*. The difference to him is merely the difference of the hand that holds the pincers. The ethics of the thing may be thus summed up. Just as the limited liability companies represent the organised selfishness of the upper middle-class, so the co-operative movement represents, amongst a certain section of the artisan

class, an identical tendency under the competitive system of trade, and the imposition of middle-class ideals, to make money at the expense of others somehow, but to make it.

I am not in the slightest degree interested in impugning co-operative societies. What I wish to make plain is that through their widespread organisation they are potent instruments in swelling the ranks of unemployed shop-assistants, who have to compete the more fiercely with each other for places in the service of one combatant or another, and that in this respect they have no greater claim on our consideration than the ordinary trusts and combines. Also the fight they both incessantly wage with the private trader has the direct result of forcing down wages amongst the assistants of the private firms.

In the great fight between the limited companies and the co-operative societies, and incidentally between both the former and the private firms, 800,000 shop-assistants are engaged, and an innumerable army of clerks. To reduce working expenses to a minimum by lowering the standard of living, over 200,000 women have been admitted into the ranks, and through the agency of free "education" a teeming supply of raw material is guaranteed for future use whenever it may be considered expedient to lower still further the standard of living.

Is not this picture enough to overwhelm you, my poor shop-assistant and my most unfortunate

clerk? For from the top of the commercial scale to the bottom the fortunes of the clerk are indissolubly bound up with the travail of the shop-assistant and warehouseman.

First, the banker's clerk, for whom I have always had a great admiration, as hitherto, through thick and thin, he has kept his head proudly up and aimed at a free estate, making good the claims of youth in sport and a dashing demeanour. How is *he* affected? Through the amalgamation of private banks with joint-stock undertakings the old personal relation between principal and staff has been cancelled, and promotion, which at one time went by seniority and special fitness, is now largely a matter of chance. The vexatious bearing of this is seen in the fact that most banking houses make it a stipulation that the clerks in their employ shall not marry till a certain minimum salary has been reached. As a youth entering a bank gets anything from £20 to £50 a year (seldom more) to start with, it takes a long time in the natural order of things before his income is big enough to marry on, but if the recognised yearly¹ increase is made fortuitous, his prospects are blank indeed. I know a bank clerk who, in defiance of this rule, secretly married the girl of his choice, anticipating (as he thought) his rise by just one year, but five years went by without the expected advance, and they were unable to make a home, each following

¹ Under the new system the annual increment of £5 or £10 to his salary is not so generally assured.

his and her occupation separately as bachelor and maid. Then, to put an end to his suspense, he placed himself at the mercy of his chief, was sternly censured, and after being bound to secrecy was made to wait another year by way of punishment.

From the bank clerk to the poor little invoice clerk of the wholesale warehouse it is a far cry. But what of him? I found in Glasgow that 33 per cent. of the corporation electric tramway conductors were drawn from the ranks of discharged clerks and luckless shop-assistants, and that of the applicants for a position of light porter quite 50 per cent. were young discharged clerks of twenty-one and twenty-two. These latter as boys go direct from school into the desk, are kept to invoice-making, and as soon as they are old enough to expect a living wage are got rid of to make room for other boys at several shillings a week less.

Nor is the large employment of boy-labour less menacing behind the counter. It was the custom once for premiums to be paid with apprentices, but at all times the remuneration they received was merely nominal, the idea being that when they were out of their apprenticeship they would be qualified to make their living at the business they had learned. But with the advent of the board-school boy, all this was changed. Apprenticeship remained in name only. With a teeming supply of intelligent boys drawn from a lower class of the community, it was possible to employ boy-labour on a more extended scale and with an utter

unconcern as to what became of the new recruits afterwards.

By these insidious methods, viz., by the wholesale admission of women at a low wage behind the counter, and by the provision of an abundant supply of board-school-educated boys, which the poorer class of shopkeepers have been forced to equip, in their own despite, the adult male shop-assistant is being edged nearer and nearer to the precipice.

I do not mean this derogatorily of the Council school-boy. I merely wish to point out what is happening. It may be just as well that we should go. It *is* just as well if we cannot realise ourselves in a fighting capacity. *We* are all living at second hand. *We* are by our upbringing pampered, spoiled creatures, who have snatched a confused idea of gentility from the classes over our heads, and from our own threadbare expectations of something soft and screened away from contact with actual things, whereas the boys that are coming into the distributive trade from a lower social level have been up against the brutal forces of life for as long as they can remember, an experience which has developed in them, to an astonishing degree, great hardihood and a loyal sense of standing by each other through thick and thin.

Does not all the foregoing reveal a truly alarming state of things ?

But look a little closer. This mighty fabric of distribution is all built up on your labour, you

shop-assistants, warehousemen, and clerks, and exists by reason of *your acquiescence*, and will so exist with all its attendant evils just so long as you slavishly subscribe to it; no longer. Bring this well home to your minds, that it is entirely at your own option to have done with this intolerable servitude. You have the weapons at your own right hand: use them. Let those who have reduced you to such sore straits continue to do their worst: do yours.

The weapons to which I refer at this stage are the various unions, four of which are now federated in the "National Federation of Shop Workers and Clerks." They comprise the National Amalgamated Union of Shop-Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, the Co-operative Employees, the National Union of Clerks, and last, but not least, the "Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association." The first and largest of these, the N.A.U.S.A., with a membership approaching 25,000, has nearly 500 branches throughout the United Kingdom, an annual income of nearly £30,000, and accumulated funds upwards of £25,000. The co-operative employees, according to the last report, has upwards of 18,000 members, and accumulated funds to the amount of £25,000. The Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association has 3,500 members, and about £7,000 accumulated funds, and the National Union of Clerks has about 1,000 members.

Make yourselves masters of these well-fatted

unions, or create new ones of your own if these fail you, and nearly a million of men will oppose the further depredations of the New Industrial Order.

The immediate objects, varying with the varying requirements of each union, are :—

To abolish the living-in system.

To reduce the hours of labour.

To compel an employer to sign a true reference.

To do away with the radius agreement.

To secure fair payment for services rendered.

To provide legal aid for members.

To assist members when ill or unemployed, and

To adopt a minimum wage and enforce the principle of it by Trade Union methods.

True, this is but a bread-and-butter programme, but it is worth fighting for and you can add to it at your pleasure.

I cannot believe you will long refrain. In the meantime take an object-lesson from Ireland. When, after the big fire at the huge drapery establishment of Messrs. ———, of ——— (in which some 160 assistants miraculously escaped a terrible death by burning), the work of rebuilding the premises was under consideration, the executive of the Irish Employees' Association wrote to the directors of Messrs. ——— that, as one of the main objects of their association was the abolition of the living-in system, they ventured to hope, on behalf of the assistants employed by this firm, that arrangements would be made by means of which

the assistants might continue to sleep off the premises. The communication was duly acknowledged, but inspired articles which subsequently appeared in the Press showed that the wishes of the employees had been ignored, as the public was naïvely assured that the living-in accommodation the firm was providing would be equal to that of some first-class hotels.

Immediately, *The Drapers' Assistant*, the official organ of the Irish Drapers' Association, came out with a very strong leader, and when everything was ready for the return of the assistants, united action was taken. Messrs. ——— were given until 9 o'clock of the following morning to reconsider the situation, with the result that before the night was over, at a conference specially convened to discuss matters with the executive of the association, and representatives of the staff, the directors "graciously conceded the abolition of the sleeping-in system, and a continuance of the living-out allowance."

Then there is the case of the conflict between another Irish firm and its assistants, which had its origin in an attempt of the firm to ruin a young man's character by alleging that he deliberately falsified figures in stocktaking. The young man being dismissed, the employees of Messrs. ——— called an indignation meeting, expressing unshaken confidence in their comrade, and twenty-one assistants and six apprentices left on the refusal of the firm to reinstate him. A monster demon-

stration in public support of their spirited action was immediately held, in which 2,500 drapery assistants and thousands of assistants in other callings rallied to the cause of "Fair play." The fight was waged vigorously for seven months, the Employers' Federation coming to the assistance of the employer affected. Finally, the young man, together with the twenty-one assistants and six apprentices who had made such a fine protest on his behalf, were all provided with positions by the Employees' Association—positions as good, and in many cases better, than those they had previously held.

If a mere handful of assistants, backed by their local union, can accomplish as much as this, and dare thus far, what may not be dared and done when the shop-assistants, warehousemen, and clerks of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales all stand shoulder to shoulder? Combined, nothing can withstand you, even though at first you only limp to the "present arms."

The first big breach to be made is the abolition of the living-in system. The *modus operandi* is to force the Government to include shop-assistants in the Truck Act, making it illegal for an employer to pay his hands in anything but the current coin of the realm. If the Government does not consent to being forced on this point Manhood Suffrage will soon give you your opportunity.

But will the abolition of the living-in system be an unmixed blessing? Many say "No." Let

us thresh it out. I make light of those puling detractors, who object to it on the theory that the young shop-assistant is not to be safely entrusted with his or her liberty. The real difficulty in the way of its realisation lies in the finding of suitable lodgings. If you put the minimum allowance for living-out at 10s. per week (£25 to £26 a year is what it is called when you do not get it), and add on to that a minimum of 2s. 6d. a week saved from not having to go to the tuck shop, it gives you 12s. 6d.—allow 2s. 6d. for 'bus or tram fares, and you have 10s. left intact.

Within a penny or twopenny ride of the West-end there are still many houses where you can get a bedroom for 4s. a week, and come to an arrangement for breakfast and tea to be supplied to you at a charge of sixpence a meal. Breakfast would include tea and bread and butter, with bacon or eggs or fish; the same for tea, or for a penny more a chop or steak. If two friends share a bedroom, it is possible to cut down the cost of rent to 3s. each. For expediency's sake, I take it, the midday meal would still be served in the house, say at a charge of 5d. or 6d. per head. This apparently shows 2s. or 3s. to the bad, but on a vastly improved diet. But I put the saving of the tuck shop at a minimum of 2s. 6d. a week, which is only 5d. a day: it is far more likely to be double this amount.

There is, however, an incomparably better way than this—viz., social living on a large scale. As



an example, I call to mind the experiment made in Edinburgh by Professor Geddes, who inaugurated a system of residence in common, to obviate the disadvantages under which graduates and students laboured in isolated lodgings. The enterprise proved eminently successful, and to-day embraces four or more large houses occupying central positions in Edinburgh. Old houses were selected in a neighbourhood where rents have fallen. These houses, self-governing and self-supporting, are managed by a committee of residents, who have the expenses—which include the keep of the servants and the cost of fire and light—entirely under their control. The buying-in is done by the house-keeper, who presents the bills every fortnight, when an equal share of the total sum is contributed by each resident. A sliding scale is fixed for rent, according to the study bedrooms chosen; but there are spacious common rooms where the students foregather for meals and recreation. Breakfast is provided from 8 to 10; lunch is on the table from 12 to 2; afternoon tea is placed in the common room about 4; dinner is served at 6.30; supper is on the table at 9, and not removed until bed-time. According to the room selected, all these advantages may be had *for the sum of one guinea a week inclusive.*

This splendid experiment, to my mind, solves the problem raised by the prospective abolition of the living-in system by demonstrating the practicability of living-out congenially on 12s. 6d. or

15s. 6d. a week, as in the case of shop-assistants only half the number of meals would be required.

I see no reason why the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants should not put it to the test, and I make the suggestion for whatever it is worth. It has a reserve fund, I believe, of something like £30,000, and to experiment with there are plenty of suitable old houses in London to be found in decayed squares and forsaken streets which were once the haunts of fashion.

The experiment, if embarked upon, should be made with, I think, not more than twenty-four residents at first, which, with a sliding scale of charges for bedrooms, could be made to yield, say, £18 or £20 a week, or more.

Whenever the living-in system is abolished, however, private enterprise will probably solve the problem. Already I have heard talk of establishing private hostels for male shop-assistants. One speculator has gone so far as to confide to me a detailed plan of accommodation for housing as many as 200 in a suitable neighbourhood. Should it ever be realised I would recommend bed-sitting rooms in place of bedrooms. There should, of course, be a large dining-room, reading-room, and smoking-room, and I would urge a fully-equipped gymnasium, convertible on occasion into a ball-room or theatre.

The question of providing suitable accommodation for female shop-assistants is perhaps more difficult. Similar hostels, however, should

certainly be provided for them. As a model from which to work I would recommend the Brabazon² Homes originated by the Countess of Meath.

But I think the ideal would be a mixed dwelling (limited, say, to forty boarders) conducted by a committee of residents of both sexes. Get the right class of men and the right class of women together, and given an able and tactful housekeeper—a lady housekeeper is essential—a highly interesting form of social life might be entered upon which would go far towards redeeming the loneliness and homelessness of both sexes in our large industrial centres.

One of the happiest results of mixed social residence that has come under my observation—and I have lived in over 500 different sets of rooms, boarding-houses, hotels, and hydros—I witnessed in a Midland manufacturing town, where I found what I might describe as a crowd of girls, youths, young men and young women, with a leavening of middle-aged and elderly people, living congenially under one roof in a big old house, formerly, I believe, the mansion house of that city. The permanent boarders consisted of apprentices, sempstresses, school teachers, shop-assistants, clerks, journalists, but there was a steady if a shallow stream of casuals, such as the poorer sort of commercial travellers, theatrical agents, and the nondescript of both sexes, passing continually through the house. Who could have predicted of such an amalgam an unusually high level of the

social amenities? But there it was, and such was its ample foundation it varied very little from year to year. You could not ascribe it to this or that person, though the presiding genius of the house was a woman of an uncommonly strong character, who would have commanded respect anywhere. It was a matter of public sentiment as expressed in the common feeling of the house. I believe it had as much to do with the mixing of ages as with the mixing of sexes, and, above all, with the absence of pretentiousness on the part of any of its members.

The abolition of the living-in system an accomplished fact, another aspect of the question, and one which should strongly appeal to the N.A.U.S.A., is the unique opportunity such coteries would afford for the spread of Trade Unionist propaganda, and for the creation of a fighting comradeship. I have the utmost belief in the shop-assistants' latent predisposition to comradeship. We have seen only one side of the medal hitherto, with crossed swords uppermost, but on the other side, depend upon it, there are clasped hands and good faith, and animating it a fighting spirit which only waits for the word of command.

Supposing membership in these social residences to be dependent on the ballot, as at University Hall, Edinburgh, you at once have the opportunity of choosing your own companions. With this as the governing principle, anything might be predicted. I can imagine what would occur under

such fraternal relations if one of the household were denied a true reference by his employer, or rather, we may infer it from what happened in Ireland.

Again, from the increased sociability which would arise from residence in common, there would grow up quite naturally a demand for more play-time and *ergo* shorter working hours. An increased rate of wages would follow such a reduction as a natural, and indeed a calculable, corollary. The next step should be the forcing up of women's wages until they were equal for equal services to the wages paid to men, for

“The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
Together, dwarfed or Godlike, bond or free.”

Look for a moment below the surface of the changes which have led up to your present situation.

Do you think the precise and effective organisation that your employers wield with such alarming certainty of means to ends has come about by accident? Nothing that persists and gains ground has come about by accident. The upper middle-class or moneyed class, however you like to describe it, wanted a proletariat of its own, a highly intelligent and completely subordinated proletariat. It created you. The like has been done before, lower down in the social scale. Professor Thorold Rogers, in “Six Centuries of Work and Wages,” shows how “The pauperism and degradation of the English labourer were the

result of a series of Acts of Parliament and acts of Government which were designed or adopted with the express purpose of compelling the labourer to work at the lowest rate of wages possible, and which succeeded at last in effecting that purpose."

The upper middle-class, or moneyed class, was under no necessity to appeal to Parliament to effect *its* purpose. Far more deadly than Acts of Parliament were the economic strategies it had recourse to. It policed your ranks with spies and slave-drivers drawn from amongst yourselves. Frock-coated and clothed in fine linen, they become at once your envy and your scourge. The management sowed the seed of disaffection amongst you. The secrecy insisted on with regard to salaries paid was only an artful ruse to flatter you into thinking you were receiving more than your fellows. The radius agreement debarred you from setting-up for yourself. The institution of the private reference filched your character away. The living-in system disfranchised you. The higher standard of dress imposed on you fooled you into a feeling of superiority over the more independent and refractory labourer. And finally, when it saw it was within the bounds of possibility that you might kick over the traces, it gave free education to the masses, and thus ensured its reversion to a new estate.

But its masterstroke of oppression is the institution of celibacy within the shop, by means of which it is enabled to keep you "without encumbrances," a mere truck and wage slave under its roof.

This is that same upper-middle, moneyed, manufacturing or merchant class, which, by the wholesale practice of pre-natal murder in its own select ranks, and the example it has set therein to the middle and lower-middle classes, has lowered the physical standard of the race and threatens us with a succession of riff-raff and hooligans.

And it is the governing representatives of this same upper-middle, manufacturing, and merchant class, who, having condemned to live apart those who were created male and female, have left the streets unclean, with results appalling to dwell upon, and lift up hands of pious horror at the mere suggestion of the re-imposition of the Contagious Diseases Act. For there are facts which sooner or later must be faced, however deftly we draw the veil of false delicacy over them, facts which now only find fugitive expression in booklets distributed after dark, but which have a tragic bearing upon mortality.

“But,” I hear you ask, “who are they that have done this thing?” They invented the limited company, that is proverbially recognised as having neither a body to be kicked nor a soul to be damned.

But who are they, and what is their genesis? They invented the limited company, and out of their amazing shamelessness, fashioned a new philosophy of ultra-egotism and vulgarity the most brutalising and corrupt the world has ever seen.

Having thrown away every restraint, and discovered the line of least resistance, they so applied their new invention that every man with a few pounds to spare became a tradesman, and your master! Behind this invisible army of investors, they thrive and speculate in security, cornering raw material and combining one industry after another.

It is true they have given you some great figure-heads whose names have been in everybody's mouth.

But have they given you any great men worthy the name—men of fine parts and fine manners you would go to the ends of the earth with? Have they even given you any great and dazzling pageant, any memorable spectacle that, having seen and having contributed to by your lifelong sacrifice, you could lay your hand to your heart and say, "It has been worth it: humanity has thus achieved a new and memorable experience." I have seen the Lord Mayor's Show, the Coronation march-past, Henley Regatta, and Barnum and Bailey's procession, but I cannot remember any other pageants of note in my time except processions of the unemployed and suffragette processions. No, the pageant they have given you is a negative one: it is a procession, the saddest and grimmest in all history. In its ranks . . . but in the proper place we will summon before us all the forlorn ones that go that way, introducing here only the bankrupt private trader and the

broken shop-assistant, who file in slow procession to their last stand on the kerbstone with a tray of buttons or matches suspended from the neck, or wind slowly and dismally down to the docks.

True, there is nothing heroic about the middle classes. I have said it, and I know beforehand the general reader will have none of it. I know how impatiently he will scamp this passage, and I do not blame him. The tragedy of the private trader—the tragedy of your grocer, your hatter, or your hosier. Is it not absurd? Perhaps it is, but it is not half so rife with cant and hypocrisy as is the maudlin moralising of a chairman of a co-operative society, who, on the eve of declaring the half-yearly dividend, drivels about the saving they have effected *for the poor working man* after having smashed half the small struggling and self-respecting private traders in their own locality, and jumped on their chests when they were down; nor is it half so nauseous and misleading as all the wicked nonsense that is written and spoken by your distributive great men when they appeal to their constituents to return them to Parliament “to right the wrongs of labour, and preserve the independence of the subject.”

These are your masters, these and the hundred thousand and one they have drawn into their toils and bribe with dividends; but who are you that have submitted to it? Who are you that do not know each other except by twos and threes, and that even deny that things are as bad as they are?

You are they who have stood on a false pride as danger threatened, and even now at the eleventh hour are hesitating about making common cause with each other. You have forgotten that he who is best educated amongst you should set his mind to the thinking out of a fearless campaign: that he who has a bold temper should be captain of his corps.

You have all the possibilities in you for a militant union. You have all the crying necessity in your ranks for creating a new class—the class of Comrades. You have the education and the intelligence to see things as they are, and when you so will it the power to order them as they should be.

For what do you still wait?

You have borne with oppression long enough to prove your spirit.

I remember of old your loyalty to your employers. I remember always the number of fine young fellows I have met behind the counter. I remember your readiness; your smartness, your cheerfulness, the ungrudging gift of your time after closing for no reward or recompense, your steady refusal to complain, your constant good humour under all manner of provocation.

What has come of it all? For the example you set your employers, what example have they set you? For the sacrifices you made, how have they requited you?

Turn back to the beginning of this book, and

look at the pretty piece of moralising that faces Chapter I. Yet Ruskin was right, though right so long ago it reads almost like a joke, things have so changed, and changed for the worse.

Nevertheless, employers *have* their obligations, and when they fail to perform them, and fail on a large scale, so much the worse in the day of reckoning for the nation that bore them and the class to which they belong.

You went into their service as boys, and they were to have acted towards you as fathers. You were 800,000 in number, a very large slice of the young manhood of the nation. You are the best judges of their kindness and tender concern.

You may excuse them on the plea that they acted according to the spirit of the age. So much the worse for the age that prefers to sacrifice human flesh and blood and human aspiration to save the difference between 5 and 6 per cent.

But if *they* were no worse and no better than common slave-drivers, what have their *sons* done for you—their sons who were sent to the Universities out of the dividends you earned for their fathers, to the Universities that originally in olden times were endowed not alone for a privileged few, but for all alike, that education and enlightenment might be diffused throughout the land? Have they ever met you as familiars? Have they ever championed your cause? Was there ever any sense of comradeship between you when you were young men and they were young men together?

They came back fresh from their colleges and froze themselves to their desks, falling with eagerness into the system that practically beggared you. You became "our young men," mere items on their wage-sheets out of which they made so much per head to create the half-yearly dividends, whilst you grew yearly poorer in all that makes life worth living, weaker in health and more forlorn, drifting nearer and nearer to that dead-level of mediocrity that threatens to engulf you all.

It is time you made a stand. Without freedom there is no strength or charm of character. Without charm of character there is desolation. A point is reached where there is nothing left but to work and eat and sleep and die. Nothing matters; nobody is of any importance any longer.

Other forces in the community have joined hands and forged ahead. Of yourselves what? You cannot afford to blink the question, still you do not make a move.

I know what gives you pause. I have heard it said a hundred times in almost these identical words, "What am I going to do if I chuck up my job?" But what are you going to do if your job "chucks" you? Where are the grey-headed grocers' assistants? Where are the grey-headed drapers' assistants: where are the grey-headed behind the counter at all? If you cannot hold your own now when you are young, how are you going to hold your own when you are middle aged? You are where you are because you are afraid to

speak up for yourselves. You dare not ask the reason why. You dare not answer back, and so you are taken exactly at your own valuation.

Let us be candid with each other. Are your employers really such bad fellows after all? Are they not after all only merely human? They see you give way to them at every point; they see you prostrate yourselves before them; they see you dumb and speechless, why should they not treat you as though you were in reality what you seem to them to be?

Here is my own experience. I threw up, without a reference, almost every situation that I held behind the counter, but when, some years afterwards, I was nominated for a post in the Commercial Intelligence Department of the Board of Trade, and it was necessary for me to furnish testimonials from every place I had held since leaving school, I wrote round to the various employers I had worked for as a shop-assistant, and they all of them without exception gave me splendid references. Two of them wrote me personal letters, in which they said they always felt that I should "get on," and that in their opinion I deserved to get on (this, too, when in leaving one of them I said to his face, misquoting from a former letter of his when he engaged me by post: "In future I would look out for an employer who did not look after the Christian welfare of all his young men," and to the other "I would not trouble him for a reference, as I

considered a character coming from such a place as his might damage my prospects behind the counter"). Indeed, the very employer I have singled out in Chapter II. as a monster wrote me a long and cordial letter, in which he hoped that I should call upon him at his private house if ever I went that way.

Now it seemed to me then, and it has so seemed to me since, that these men were perhaps not such bad fellows after all. They acted towards me *as their assistant* only as they had been accustomed to act towards all their other assistants, because all their other assistants acquiesced in this treatment, and when I rebelled against them they did not bring it up against me long afterwards, but, on the contrary, kept me in remembrance as a man of spirit, and if I may believe their written words, liked me none the worse for standing up for myself.

No. It is not a question of a good or a bad employer—ten good employers⁸ would damn your cause in any city. It is the question of a fight. Have you the pluck to fight? If so, "the better state of things" will be evolved from the fight. It is out of the fight that the changed relations between employer and employee will come.

“WHAT then! do you think the old practice that ‘they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can,’ is less iniquitous when the power has become power of brains instead of fist? And that, though we might not take advantage of a child’s or a woman’s weakness, we may of a man’s foolishness? ‘Nay; but, finally, work must be done, and someone must be at the top, someone at the bottom.’ Granted, my friend. Work must always be, and captains of work must always be. . . .

“But I beg you to observe that there is a wide difference between being captains or governors of work and taking the profits of it. It does not follow because you are general of an army that you are to take all the treasure, or land, it wins (if it fight for treasure or land); neither, because you are a king of a nation, that you are to consume all the profits of the nation’s work.”—RUSKIN’S “*Crown of Wild Olive.*”

IV

THE SHOP: PAST AND PRESENT

BEFORE we proceed any further let us consider whether "things always were so," and whether necessarily "they will always remain the same." First we will deal with the shop itself as we find it to-day.

To-day the modern shop represents the gathering together of the various productions of the labouring and manufacturing classes, in places where they may be conveniently displayed to tempt the confessedly idle classes into the gratification, amongst other things, of their luxury, vanity, and vice; where all other men and women, whatever their calling, may see and buy whatever they have a mind to if they possess the means; and where the aforesaid labouring and manufacturing classes, when in receipt of wages, are enabled to buy back at double or treble the cost of production, a few of the cheapest and most indispensable necessities of life.

Throughout its various manifestations as retail shop, auction mart, broker's office, bank, &c., the ethics of all is the same. The owner or originator of each business, profession, or agency

is bent upon one sole object—viz.: to intercept a portion of what his less intellectually endowed brethren have laboriously provided, as it or its monetary equivalent passes through his hands on the way to the consumer.

It was not always thus. In primitive times the shop was a place where articles were made and exchanged for other articles. Where it was simply a matter of exchange, those of less robust physique applied themselves to this work: where, in addition to the exchange of articles, some one or more articles were made, it would still be in many cases the weaklier ones and those otherwise unfitted for outdoor pursuits who gave up the chase or the tilling of the soil, to follow indoor occupations. Such occupations formed a component part of the communal life, and those engaged in them did not benefit unduly thereby, but shared and shared alike in the general prosperity of the community. A well-defined idea animated each of the members—viz.: the good of all.

With the introduction of money, exchange assumed a new aspect, but the habits of the people remained simple, and it was centuries before moneymaking became a direct incentive to trading, and a merchant class of any pretension arose.

When such a class did arise, far from immediately supplanting the communal instincts of the earlier society, it became, as it were, the repository of those very instincts, and gave them a new impulse and direction. Merchant guilds were

formed, and as soon as all the members of each trade were enrolled, the various guilds united in a common body to secure the municipal independence of the towns which their industry had created.

Through the resourcefulness engendered by this corporate spirit, most of the larger towns in England gained complete control of their own internal affairs by the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century.

In the meantime, new trades had sprung up by the subdivision of labour, brought about by the tendency of the wealthy burgher class to employ their capital in the bigger ventures of buying and selling, whilst they abandoned to the poorer sort of townsmen some portion of the manual labour required in their several callings. These latter now formed craft guilds, which grew rapidly in public favour, and by slow degrees worked nothing short of a great civic revolution. In London, the struggle between the craft guilds and merchant guilds was waged with singular bitterness, because there, in a greater degree than elsewhere, the wealthy burghers had so far forgotten the communal spirit which originally called their guilds into existence as seriously to imperil the liberty of the individual and constitute a grave menace to all sober and sweet living.

In Leicester, Nottingham, Bristol, similar charges of corruption might possibly be preferred against the rich merchant guilds, but in our small Cathedral cities and old-world towns, life was

modelled on a less ambitious plan, and the rise and development of the craft guilds and their gradual absorption of the merchant guilds marked a widening circle of that quiet, orderly principle of citizenship, which grafted on a strong sense of brotherhood, made the merchant and shopkeeper everywhere respected for their neighbourliness and hospitality.

Within our own memory even, as recently that is as twenty-five or thirty years ago, we still had amongst us the legitimate representatives of this dignified old order of tradesmen.

I remember very well what a fine finished piece of humanity was the leading grocer in the little old-world town where I was born. He was mayor for the third time in the first year of my apprenticeship, and, as it was the rule for the apprentices in his business house to pass the first twelve months of their time with him in his private office, I was thrown much into his company just when his business activities were doubled by his duties as chief magistrate. Yet I never saw him in an impatient mood, nor too much taken up with his work to give an audience to anyone who called. If it was an old beggar woman who came to solicit an alms, he removed his silk skull cap and inclined his head deferentially to her years or to her poverty whilst she told her tale. Out of the hundreds that interrupted him in this way I never knew him to refuse a single one, nor did he ever cross-examine any.

Once when an arrant impostor, or so he seemed to me, presented himself, and I caught the old gentleman's eye to dissuade him by my greater penetration, he laid his hand on my arm and said gently, "Tut, tut"; then gave more liberally than usual.

He pensioned off his old hands when they had grown too old to work, and he was as unaffected in his public charities as in his private ones. I know this because I was frequently in his room when his brother aldermen called and discussed such things with him and with each other. They were all alike in this: they seemed to be in a conspiracy to encourage each other to give away their worldly substance to the deserving or to the undeserving on the slightest provocation. That anyone was in want appeared to them to be quite a sufficient claim upon their good nature. I thought them kings amongst men, and I have since seen no reason to change my opinion. In their own persons they supplied to the whole township models of dignified demeanour and good fellowship. That they were abroad meant that good cheer and kindness were abroad and unfailing good temper. No one ever felt humiliated in working for them in whatever capacity he was employed; no one considered that he demeaned himself in any way by raising his hat to them as they passed by. They have left no successors. They came to maturity on the spot like the fine old port wine in their cellars that had been years

in the mellowing, and we shall not see their like again.

I can imagine though, much as they overawed me in those days, that for all the brave appearance these old worthies made in the streets on their way to and from the council chamber, they already felt a levelling blow dealt at them from afar, and spoke ominous words to each other as the makers of hand-made goods, such, for instance, as the hosier and the boot-maker, retired further and further into the background. A new factor had arisen in trade with the rise of the manufacturing towns of the north, a factor which at first perplexed and still continued to puzzle the old-world style of tradesmen. The manufactured article had come into vogue, and the advantage of miscellaneous trading being seen and appreciated by the few who were clever enough to avail themselves of it for their own private ends, it was presently copied on a large scale. With its advent came in the keener devices of competition, and the idea of the "good of all" disappeared as an informing principle, soon to be entirely supplanted by the motto of "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

Almost contemporaneous with the rise of the big general store was the disconcerting appearance of the branch shop. Not content with a single place of business, the retail adventurer established outposts in the near neighbourhood wherever likely sites offered a good investment for his capital. The immediate effect on the distributive trade was

seen in the rapid dismantling of the handsome old timbered fronts of the business houses which had done duty for several centuries. Nothing was sacred to the despoiler: his one idea was "go-aheadness," and the new name "middleman," by which henceforth the retailer became known, is indicative of the slighting regard in which he was held by the more outspoken critics of the changed relations in trade.

To-day, wherever we find the middleman, from the small chandler in a back street to the big limited company dominating "the high," he severally illustrates the various phases distribution has passed through to reach its present magnitude. Transformed into the big limited company, with multiple branches all over the kingdom, his directing faculty—I still speak of him as the middleman—is seen in extension. He is not one man merely, but as many branches as many men. He sees with the eyes of a battalion of lieutenants; he sums up in himself all the ruthless methods of successful retail trading. The public exists for him. He has absorbed the merchant. The manufacturer is his base. But you cannot track him to his desk, and point the finger of scorn at him as he rakes in his money. With a hey, presto! he has disappeared. The pranks and antics of Capital were never more elusive. The real offender, or rather offenders, are not in the shops at all. They are outside at large, enjoying themselves. They have become grocery and drapery fine

ladies and gentlemen. I have spoken of them elsewhere as the New Industrial Order; they are the middlemen in extension. They are the idle people, your new masters. These are their shops. This big drapery store is theirs. There it stands, the most considerable building in every town, thronged by day and thronged by night, the modern temple and Mecca of all middle-class women, sly, insinuating, incomparably seductive.

Go and see one of its "crushes" when a sale is taking place, and a mob of well, or rather expensively, dressed women lie and steal and chaffer and nearly tear the clothes off each other's backs to snatch up cheap lines.

In such a scene, the other day, I asked the son of a big draper what he thought of it all. "Think of it," he repeated with unconcealed disgust; "when I think of what women nowadays will do for a new hat or a new costume, women too who call themselves ladies, I feel hard put to it not to blush when I look my own mother and sisters in the face."

This is the draper's shop. If its front doors are flung wide open to vanity, from its back doors goes forth oppression. Among its most helpless victims are the very poorest dwellers in the slums: women prematurely aged, and girls that have never had any youth, sewing from day-break to midnight blouses, furs, children's frocks, ladies' undergarments, stockings, beaded shoes, and skirts, sewing not for a living—there is not

a living to be made at it—but so as to be long a-dying. Equally its victims too, though less apparently so at the time, are the errand boys who fetch and carry for it. You see them for a little while in page-boy's dress carrying boxes nearly as big as themselves or tearing about the streets on top-heavy tricycles. It is their little hour. In London they brighten the streets by day with their raillery and laughter, or of a night-time you find them in their clubs as jolly little chaps as you would wish to meet; but tragedy is at their heels, they are being fitted for nothing. They have been served up—young and succulent—as sacrificial offerings to the draper's shop. At eighteen or thereabouts they are all replaced by younger boys, and their only chance of being employed again is to put back their age a year or two until their faces belie them, and even that pathetic ruse avails no more.

Below them, again, there is a poorer class still, who do not wear any livery but rags, and whose still briefer day is over almost before it has begun.

Could one of the early guild members come back for an hour and see what callous methods have taken the place of the excellent rules and regulations he formed for protecting the interests of his order, how he would rub his eyes in astonishment at the reactionary influence of Capital!

In his day a boy found an ordered world awaiting him, in which the most elaborate

measures were taken to apprentice him to a trade by which he could afterwards get his living.

In our day ?

Go down to the Serpentine any evening in July or August, and see in their thousands a sample of the boys that under the present industrial *régime* are being bred up in the London slums for our future citizens. They are not from the worst of the slums either, and they are the pick of the boys in them, since it is only the adventurous that take to the water. The sight is enough to make you weep "at what man has made of man." Their skins are discoloured, their chests fall in, their shoulders droop miserably, they have the rickets, they are knock-kneed, or grotesquely undersized, or hunched in the back, or they are mere crazy frameworks of bones. Whichever way you turn your eyes beholding them, an awful depression comes over you. Go also to any of the big London railway stations and look on the tens of thousands of little clerks, who every morning are emptied into the City, to scamper off to their respective offices like mice, and tot up figures all day long under little torturing electric lights, which dry up their brains and eyes and bleach all the colour out of their cheeks.

However, lest it seem irrelevant in a chapter devoted to the shop to run atilt at the big drapery store over a side-issue, when much might be said in defence of its imposing frontage on the streets, and the undeniable services

it renders to the community, we will pass to other things.

I certainly am not one that remains indifferent to a fine show, and my spirits never rise higher, in town at any rate, than when I come up with a noble row of shops in a fine thoroughfare. They amaze me. Almost everything you can want is seemingly there: if not, invention will supply it on the morrow. With a fine impatience man has sketched in his possibilities. Demand of him whatever you will, he shall prove equal to it. If you want the millennium, you may have it for the asking. If you want an Industrial Despotism, you have got it. We are in an enchanted land. We move about between walls of glass. Our inheritance is only half an inch away from us. Somebody, something has cast an evil spell over us.

The other day, at an old farmhouse in Cheshire, I watched a humble-bee buzz up and down my window-pane. The window was closed. Outside was an old-world garden full of fragrant flowers, and beyond an unbounded vista of green fields and trees. The bee could make nothing of it. He had come in at the open door, and flown straight at what he took to be a thoroughfare to the garden and fields beyond. But something hard and unyielding that he could not see and could make nothing of balked him. In a very few minutes he grew angry and flustered. He cast himself headlong at the pane of glass, flew up and down to no purpose, and tried another pane with the

same result. Presently I rose and opened the window, and all his troubles were at an end. We want someone to rise and open a window for us. We are seemingly in sight of all we want to make ourselves happy as far as material happiness is concerned. We want an inspired watcher to point the way and put us in possession. Our business is with that hard, unyielding something that we cannot see, and which the bee could not see. It has got between our hearts and the hearts of our fellow men.

Can it be that there is nothing to follow, that all our united efforts are to end in a rout? Has Industry blundered? Are we following blindly some blind impulse, or having attained to a certain measure of success, are we retrograding because we no longer understand what we want?

So great originally was the individual spur to find food and shelter, wearing apparel, articles of domestic use, and later a moderate amount of luxury, that it may well be an overwhelming natural instinct gathering force in the centuries is whirling us along to our present undoing and ultimate complete confusion.

So long as we were ignorant, it was well enough; so long as we were unfed we had distractions enough to keep us alive; but now we know the sum total of it all, is it worth while living, worth while propagating the species to live cheaply amongst cheap men, in a cheap century,

with cheap thoughts, and cheap pleasures and cheap friends?

But if it be not all? If it be that the abundance of inventions and the ready means to gratify every whim have temporarily turned the heads of the New Industrial Order, what then?

“AT every cross-way on the road that leads to the future, it (humanity) has placed, against each of us, ten thousand men to guard the past; let us therefore have no fear lest the fairest towers of former days be insufficiently defended. We are only too naturally inclined to temporize, to shed tears over inevitable ruins: this is the greatest of our trespasses. The least that the most timid among us can do—and already they are very near committing treachery—is not to add to the immense deadweight which nature drags along. But let the others follow blindly the inmost impulse of the power that urges them along. Even if their reason were to approve none of the extreme measures in which they take part, let them act and hope beyond their reason; for in all things, because of the call of the earth, we must aim higher than the object which we aspire to attain.” — MAURICE MAETERLINCK (“*Our Social Duty*”).

V

THE POSITION OF THE LABOUR PARTY REVIEWED FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE SHOP-ASSISTANT

THE note on which I closed in the last Chapter brings me to the most fascinating side of my subject, on account of the undoubted forces which are at work to identify distribution with the cause of labour. Of these forces the first is seen in the large number of working-class boys who are coming behind the counter to qualify as shop-assistants ; and the second in the still larger number from the same class who as errand-boys, employed for a little time about shops and warehouses, presently fall out of their employment as boys, and failing to find employment as men, intensify the difficulties of the Labour Party in dealing with the unskilled worker.

I say fascinating because so much depends upon the solution of these questions: Will the shop-assistant materially strengthen the hands of the Labour Party, or will the Labour Party force down the shop-assistant in the social scale by demanding too little for him as a man who has been more liberally educated than the working-class man proper ; or is there another course open to the

shop-assistant acting independently of the Labour Party though not independently of the people ?

With the last question is bound up the larger one: Does the Labour Party really represent the people as a whole, or does it merely represent that small section of the working-class which may be regarded as belonging to the lesser middle-class ?

In what follows I shall keep these several questions in mind, but I wish it to be understood from the first, that when I speak of the Labour Leaders, I am not necessarily speaking of the people, nor of their leaders outside the House, but of their party in Parliament. That party originally came into being as the direct result of a federation of Trade Unions, Trade Councils, Socialist Societies, and Co-operative Societies which in 1901 met and formed the Labour Representation Committee. To-day with forty-two representatives in Parliament the Labour Party stands before the country nominally in the interest of the Trade Unions, but with a Socialist brief in its hands.

Trade Unionism we know and approve, but what is Socialism ? In answering this question, and in the application of the answer, we shall begin to understand what the present Labour Party really stands for.

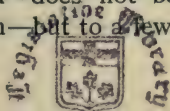
The Social Democratic Federation defines Socialism in this way: " Socialism means that the land, the railways, the shipping, the mines, the factories, and all such things as are necessary for the production of the necessaries

and comforts of life, should be public property, just as our public roads, our public parks, and our public libraries are public property to-day, so that all these things should be used by the whole people to produce the goods that the whole people require."

The Fabian Society defines Socialism as, "The re-organisation of society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit." It proceeds: "In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the people. The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in land, and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantage of superior soils and sites.

"The Society, further, works for the transfer to the community of the administration of such Industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially. For, owing to the monopoly of the means of production in the past, industrial inventions and the transformation of surplus income into Capital have mainly enriched the proprietary class, the worker being now dependent on that class for leave to earn a living."

Most concise and illuminating of all is this definition by Robert Blatchford: "At present, the land, that is, England—does not belong to the people—to the English—but to a few rich men.



“Therefore the land, the factories, the railways, ships, and machinery are not used for the general good of the people, but are used to make wealth for the few rich men who own them.

“Socialists say that this arrangement is unjust and unwise, that it entails waste as well as misery, and that it would be better for all, even for the rich, that the land and other instruments of production should become the property of the State, just as the post-office and the telegraphs have become the property of the State.”

So flattering to our expectations of the future is the idea embodied in each of these definitions, that one is almost put off the track of inquiry, and inclined, in the first flush of enthusiasm, to write oneself down a socialist and have done with controversy.

And up to a point *I* am a socialist, but for my taste it must be that sort of socialism under which free men would voluntarily choose to live. To-day, the overwhelming majority of men are not in any sense of the word free. They have been so accustomed to government that they have lost the fine flavour of independence almost as much as domesticated animals have lost it. Hence it is not surprising to find, even in the advanced body politic, such an inversion of creative vigour that the most original thought of which it is capable, is that of consolidating the State as a police executive with a trading charter, and administer-

ing the whole of the commonwealth on a model of glorified vestryism.

It is politics, always politics ! The fiery element in man, the spark that made him divine, has succumbed to politics. Nowhere is there any honest attempt to look fearlessly into the causes which have led the nation by the nose into a wild-goose chase.

Yet the circumstances are not so brand-new as to be of yesterday.

We are abundantly aware that the present state of things is the result of a departure from time-honoured traditions of self-restraint, in consequence of which the most greedy and hard-headed have got to the fore and monopolised, not only what are customarily regarded as the good things of life, but the very necessities of life itself.

Now to compromise matters, it is proposed to put the fruits of this departure into the hands of the whole nation collectively. But if freedom is the object, Governments cannot confer freedom. The individual must first win it for himself. Where a community has been robbed of freedom for a long time, and in devious ways, its separate units are neither virtually nor demonstrably more free by collectively possessing and collectively manipulating the instruments that have enslaved them. On the contrary, they are more enslaved than ever they were before, because whereas their rulers were formerly a minority,

they now constitute a majority, and it is quite conceivable that the last state of such a community will be worse than the first.

Before we go any further, therefore, it is worth while to examine a little more minutely the exact nature of that departure, from the then approved ideals, which led to a wholesale defection of the wealthy classes, and such as were growing rich by more rapid strides than had hitherto been deemed commendable under the old *régime*.

This much we may be sure of. As the elemental passions of human nature alter very little from age to age, whether a man sought to perfect himself, sought, that is, after a more beautiful personality, or sought only to enlarge himself on the material side, that is to multiply his possessions, the determining impulse in both cases, whatever the means employed, was the pursuit of happiness.

So the blunder was a blunder after happiness. And the blunder was on a colossal scale. A large and powerful manufacturing class suddenly set up new standards of living for itself, and started the cult of wealth, the cult of luxury, the cult of oppression. So dazzling was its immediate success, it presently won over the press, the pulpit, and the laity, wherever the laity had anything to gain. It asserted itself in politics, it justified itself in a specious philanthropy. With the politician, the priest and the journalist on its side, it diverted education from its proper channels of ennobling individual character, by making it a

passport to places of preferment : it degraded the name of friend to financier ; and begot a hybrid species, whose sentiments, morals, religion, and affections were and are commercial only, or at any rate primarily commercial.

As far as real happiness is concerned, the whole thing has proved a vicious and empty cheat ; but as regards the superficialities and counterfeits of happiness, comforts, luxuries, leisure, power, it has multiplied illusion on illusion till it becomes ever more difficult to know in what it will all end.

So we see we were quite wrong in Chapter IV., when we thought "we were seemingly in sight of all that we wanted to make ourselves happy as far as material happiness is concerned." As a matter of fact we were never more remote from anything of the kind. More than half the people of the nation are making nothing but rubbish for the other half, who are making nothing but rubbish in return. Is it possible, therefore, that by taking over any or all of these things, together with the factories where they are made and the carrying companies that remove them from one place to another, the State can add in any way to our present happiness ? I know the answer to this question is that this is a transitional age, but every age has had in it the elements of transition, and of a certainty everyone who is alive now will be dead and buried long before this transitional age is over.

No ; personally I am inclined to the opinion that

the individual must first be made happy in himself before any externals whatsoever can add to his real advancement. And to be happy he must be free ; so if my reasoning is correct, our immediate objective should be not a large community of small men in equal parts, but small communities of free men of equal courage and nobility of character.

In other words, it is of the first importance that the builders of the Socialist state should be competent from the first to lay the foundations of a noble edifice pre-eminently suitable for a free people to realise themselves in. There must be no scamping, no jerry-building, no snatching at old and discredited material, no reliance on slave labour for the heavy portion of the work, no temporising, no opportunising, no coquetting with convention for its cheap and rapid advancement. The originators and designers and day labourers must be all free men, working joyfully from within, to reproduce, in every-day life, a monumental expression of whatever is most inspiring in their vision of a new community of men, of a confident, cheerful, upright nature, brave, beautiful and unafraid.

Is this the attitude of mind in which the Labour Socialist approaches the problem of the reconstruction of society? I think not. He lacks the first essential : he distrusts the people. He does not address himself to a race of heroes, but to a race of hucksters. And not only does he distrust the people, he is afraid of himself, afraid lest he be

led away by his feelings and go too far. He sees the people stripped to the last shred of their possessions, existing only from week to week, and at the mercy of forces which have grown out of hand, and all he dare say to them is: Take up the weapons with which your masters have beaten you and beat yourselves, but do nothing unconstitutionally. It is true your masters robbed you, but do not rob them in return. Give them a bill for all their possessions, however wrongfully they came by them, and start afresh in a National Compound all your own.

Putting aside all other questions for the moment, can we *wait* for this Socialist state? Can the man of thirty-five, who is too old at forty, wait? Can the poor little sempstress wait, the errand-boy, the destitute lame person? Can the shop-girl, whose dream of love and motherhood is damned so completely and made nothing of—can she wait? Can the countless thousands of workers, into whose dull and dreary homes a ray of serene sunshine never enters, and seemingly never will enter, can they wait?

If they can wait, then I have nothing more to say; but if they cannot wait, does it not seem that, in the very process of becoming members of Parliament and Socialists, the Labour Representatives have ceased to be in some very important particulars the spiritual kindred of the men they represent?

Earlier in this chapter I indicated the distinction I choose to make between the people as

a whole and their party in Parliament. Indisputably the Labour members represent so many thousands of votes, or they would not be where they are ; but not so indisputably can it be shown that they represent so many thousands of men in the entirety of their feelings and in the unanimity of their spirit.

For it is feelings, not facts, that have stirred the masses into self-consciousness. In the notable departure, to which I have referred again and again, the feelings and affections of the people were never taken into consideration, or if they were reckoned with at all, it was only to laugh them out of court. But their feelings and affections were the real things to them: the things alone that mattered. They saw them openly outraged, and because they were pious and simple, they fancied punishment would overtake their oppressors. But their oppressors waxed fat and more and more tyrannical, whereas they (the people) went about their drudgery more and more dazed and shamefaced to be so put upon. They were, comparatively speaking, only small communities then, without a voice beyond their parish, or in it only such as found halting expression in little groups over their work or after it at night in their clubs and alehouses. Even now they are scarcely articulate: what they want is so new and strange they will probably never ask for it in so many words, but will wait till the spirit moves them suddenly to take possession.

Let us go in a single step to the roots of the

matter. On the one hand, our amazing productive activity has created a wealth of material beyond the dreams of avarice; on the other hand, the rural districts have been depopulated, our big towns are hopelessly congested, and we are burning up the people as fast as we can to add to our wealth, as we once burnt up hive bees to get their honey. When we come to look upon the spoils, there is small cause for blaming any one of only average intelligence who supposes the secret of the future is locked up in the equitable distribution of the wealth that has been amassed. Guarantee this equitable distribution under the collective ownership of the means of production and the Labour Socialist argues that all will be well.

But what have the *people themselves* to say about it? Not the few who have capitulated to the middle-class, but that vast number who live from hand to mouth, and form the majority of the workers upon whom our whole commercial prosperity depends. Nothing.

They are not to be tempted out of their prisons by the first plausible invitation: they do not want a change of prisons. Bad as their condition is, it is (to them at least) preferable in many respects to the condition of the class immediately above them.

The class immediately above them has graduated upwards, through clearly defined limitations—limitations of emotion, limitations of outlook,

limitations of thought—they have been concerned with a number of little things—the people possessing nothing at all have looked to possess the world.

If there are any people different from this in this country, I do not know where they are to be found, and, for my enlightenment, I have lived with the people, as one of themselves, in almost every town, city, village, and watering-place of the United Kingdom. They have given me of their food to eat when I had no money to buy food with, and I have given them of mine when I had food and to spare. Always I have loved them, and if to-morrow I found my luck was gone, I should slip down into a slum and be quite content to be one amongst them again.

This is what the people everywhere are like. All the people of this country are still Christians, except of course when they are Nonconformists—Nonconformists are all lesser middle-class men. They are Christians without knowing anything about the Church and without caring anything about Christianity, as such. The teaching of the one book that their forefathers tried to understand, and the Church clergy dinned into their ears from a thousand pulpits, has sunk into their hearts, and at last, when they no longer believe in anything else, they believe in what of all that teaching they have made their own, and made their own because of their quickened sympathies with each other, and because of the desperation that has grown out of their lot. “Take no thought for the morrow”:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” :
“Give to him that asketh thee” : there you have
the very essence of the improvidence of the people
and the very letter of their practice.

Lay firm hold of this dissimilarity of outlook,
and you will see what a wide and widening abyss
there is between the middle-class and the people.
Indeed there is more in common between the
aristocracy and the people than between the
middle-class and the people.⁴ The middle-class
stands for capital : capital stands for exploitation,
and exploitation is abhorred of the masses. They
will have none of it in their dreams of the future.
They feel that the clergy sold them when it suited
their purpose to sell them, and they suspect, and
I think rightly so, that this Socialism, which the
Labour members would have them regard almost
with awe as the gospel of a new economic millen-
nium, is, in this country at any rate, only a new
device of the middle-class to betray them, and
particularly of the lesser middle-class.

Now this lesser middle-class has about
£60,000,000 invested in co-operative societies,
and over £200,000,000 insured under industrial
policies by weekly premiums collected from
door to door. Thus not only are we at the
mercy of the New Industrial Order, but a con-
siderable number of working-men who have
been corrupted by middle-class ideals are actively
interested in supporting the system from which
there seems to be no escape.

And it is to this number that the Labour Socialists belong.

Looked at as a small party in the composition of the country, such a class is admirable for marking time with; but when out of an excess of its mediocre qualities it would have the bulk of the people of the nation made after a model of itself, it presents itself in a very dangerous light, as its idea of good government would necessarily be, not what is most worth encouraging to develop the more daring side of the national character, but what ameliorative measures are best calculated to give to the people *not freedom*, but something that shall superficially resemble freedom, so that when the people have completely surrendered their independence under the sounding title of "the collective ownership of the means of production," there shall be no apparent reason why anyone should complain any more.

I know there are one or two notable exceptions in the Labour Party to whom these remarks do not apply, but what are one or two out of forty-two? The rest are all of the type that I have bracketed together under the title of "Lesser Middle-class Men." They are men who have come up from the trade unions as quondam officials, they are routine men; they are men who are no longer actually in touch with the people; they have begun to moralize; they think that everything will come right in the end. But the people care for nothing but the present. They believe

that more good would come from a general strike than from twenty years of Socialist propaganda, for by this means they might all at once achieve their freedom, if only for the moment; might actually be "born again": have this one priceless memory as a new base to start from. That is what I had in mind when I said, earlier in this chapter "that the individual must first be made happy in himself before any externals whatsoever can add to his real advancement, and that to be happy he must be free."

"But," you say, "where is the relevancy of all this to the case of the shop-assistant?"

I am coming to that. If the foregoing is a fair and adequate account of the position of the Labour Party, and if this is all that the Labour Party means to the people, what should be our attitude towards the Labour Party, or towards individuals of that Party, who according to the fashion of the moment are making overtures to *us*? I think it should be an attitude of extreme caution and extreme candour. We should invite an interchange of views: we should canvass all the issues at present before the public and see where they—the Labour Party—would lead us. We do not want a cheap solution of our difficulties. We shall do better to go direct to the people themselves. The people, like ourselves, care nothing for politics. They feel that in the recent labour crises they have been betrayed by their own party, and they know that whether the Conservative Party

or the Liberal Party is in power, both Parties will be composed largely of the Manufacturing and Merchant Class, and that between them there is nothing to choose.

And we know, or we should know, that the things for which the people really do care, and by which they live, are the things also which alone can make *us* whole and sound—their astounding loyalty to each other, their passionate comradeship, their instant readiness to help each other in misfortune, their essential sanity and cleanliness of mind, their love of justice, and their hatred of all authority that does not grow naturally out of the needs of the moment.

I think this defines pretty clearly the position of the people, and the position of ourselves, and the potentialities with which the situation is rife, with regard to our coming to a common understanding. We are a class apart. Born of the middle-class, but of them only in name, it is for us to look for some new means by which both shop-assistant and producer can be brought together and persuaded to make an immediate dispatch of some of the trifles that stand between them. We have in the strike and the Union a common weapon, and a common organisation. Identity of action, therefore, is not far to seek, if we remember that the shop-assistant as distributor is equally essential to the carrying on of trade as the producer, and that as one man they must be prepared to fight and risk everything. There must be no

mincing matters. The real struggle will begin when *all employers* are federated against labour, when the gauntlet is thrown down and the masks laid aside. Then Labour will want the best brains it can command, the nimblest intellects, the shrewdest and most far-seeing organisers. It will want the shop-assistant.⁵

But the shop-assistant must not wait till he is wanted. It is for us to make overtures to the people. And by the people I mean every kind of working man with whom you may come into contact in the course of business. Perhaps this may shock you at first. "What, make friends with your carman⁶ and your packer? What next?" A mutual understanding and a better opinion of each other. We cannot afford to underrate the fighting value of a single soul. Either such a one is on our side or against us; either we are on his side or against him. And already we are heavily involved. With capital we fight against our own interests; with the people we fight for our own hand. It is with the people, therefore, we must decide to take our chance, not with condescension, not with any sickly superior notion that we are going "to do good" to anyone, but that good may result equally to all, and to all equally the luck of the day.

THOUGH in the following chapter I have spoken of the friend everywhere in the masculine, I mean equally comradeship between woman and woman, and between woman and man.—THE AUTHOR.

VI

THE WAY OUT

IN conclusion. To summarise everything that has gone before, and to show where we may become at one with the passions of the people as well as at one with their interests, I propose in this chapter to address only the *young* shop-assistant, and to address him with the utmost unreserve. For the young shop-assistant, then, *there is nothing but the reckless love of comrades*, and the development through it of a new note of desperation.

By the reckless love of comrades I mean love, of a defensive or of an offensive kind, as it may exist between two young men of equal age, who, in the first warm generous feelings of youth, are prepared to act with a fine disregard of consequences in standing loyally by each other; and love, of a protective kind, as it may exist between a man and a youth, where the younger sees in the older a model of all the manly virtues he aspires to imitate, and the older sees in the younger a freshly written manuscript of his own youth, into which he may read all his earlier dreams and come to realise them in the person of another.

Of the former kind I had much experience in the business houses in which I lived in my younger days ; and of the latter kind I write with conviction, for once at a critical moment there came to me such a friend. I was, figuratively speaking, old and broken by the distributive trade ; he was several years younger and of gentle birth. We were strangers to each other except by sight, when one morning, returning from the sea where we had been bathing in company with others, he came up to me and offered me his friendship. Why he should have done so I cannot tell, except that he was a creature of impulse ; but the essence of the whole story is that I believed at this time that my life was over and done with. There was nothing I wanted so much as to be left alone. Everything had failed me, and failed me with the completeness which can only happen to a very young man. For the space of two years we spent all our spare time together, and it seemed to me quite well that all of life should go on just like that, when one day we awoke from our long dream. We had seen everything and known everything as in a trance, but the great love we had for each other had depopulated for us the land that once we knew, and there was no one else awake and ready to possess himself of the land we had discovered with it, so we parted *because there was to be no revolution.*

Up to a point we had made of our friendship a perfect thing : to have added anything else to it

would have spoilt it : to have shared it with others would have enlarged it, but that we did not know then. To put a period to friendship at some distant date, when it was at its zenith, that had been my theory or his, I forget who first thought of it, or whether, as was usual with us, it came to both minds at once, but it was on this theory that we acted.

In practice it made my friend my enemy, and my enemy my best friend. I still think he is doubly fortunate whose best friend is also his best enemy. Few friendships go so far as that, but he is most fortunate of all whose friendship constantly renews itself by being the cause of innumerable friendships in others. That was what we had not learnt together : we have learnt it apart.

To-day in a similar situation there is no reason why we should turn our backs on each other, lest we should forget. We can make common cause with thousands as we elect ourselves in advance Members of a New Aristocracy of Comradeship, and take upon ourselves all the responsibilities of those who go forward first in a campaign.

We have a clearly defined aim. With us it is a question of establishing a new ideal of personal relationship, and inspiring the whole of the youth of the nation with the same spirit.

The means are everywhere at hand for capturing the young. If you wish to set about it in a private way, you cannot do better than begin with the first impressionable boy or youth that you come

across in your own class as apprentice or improver. You must attract him, not by propaganda of any kind, which would be futile, but by example. You must teach him to live dangerously, encourage him to take part in every sport that offers a risk to life and limb. You must make him feel that he is in touch with some mysterious force he cannot account for, and you can do that only by carrying your own life in the hollow of your hand. It is the elevation you yourself live on which will convince him. Put yourself entirely at his service, but as if you had set some great enterprise aside to afford him your company. He must feel that it is a noble enterprise, something that it would be a joy for him to know more about. Always you have to be prepared to lay down your life for him at any moment, or for anyone else in his presence, so that your own example shall convince him.

If you would set about it in a public manner, there are the Scouts and the Territorials, or failing these, make a dead-set for working-class boys' clubs attached to churches, chapels, philanthropic institutions, and the like.

Such clubs are more often than not perfunctorily administered and do not amount to very much, but they will give you an opportunity of meeting working-class boys on a familiar footing.

You must meet them everywhere as little gentlemen whom it is your special privilege to know intimately. You will be equally friendly with all.

If on occasion you make any difference, the difference must be obvious to everyone, as, for instance, if a boy meets with an accident, or is ill, you must see that he is properly attended to at home and lacks nothing; if he is out of work and without resources, you must see what can immediately be done for him.

You will, of course, disguise your hand so carefully that no one in authority will suspect your motive. You must appear to have no motive; and, indeed, there is no reason why you should come into collision with anyone. You will introduce wrestling, boxing, swimming; you will see that provision is made for gymnastic exercises and all outdoor games that are practicable; then, when you have established for yourselves hostels⁷ for social residence (*chummeries* I believe they are called in America), such as I have suggested in Chapter III., with a large room in each building set aside for athletic purposes, you must do all in your power to get the picked youths and young men of all classes to meet and mix together with you on equal terms.

In such representative assemblages of the young is the hope of the future.

No doubt I could suggest something more seemingly practical, but I do not believe in anything else.

Our downfall as a class has been that as boys we suffered in silence, and that as men we have stood aside and have seen others suffer in silence.

Now we, as the "class of comrades," would alter all that by creating out of the shop-assistant class, out of the class of workmen, out of the class of gentlemen, a new aristocracy which shall put youth in the very forefront of itself, and test everything by entirely new standards of its own.

There are two distinct types to which we may appeal for recruits. First, there is the intellectual type, which I might fitly describe as holding to that small class which Nietzsche alludes to in his fine apostrophe: "Ye lonely ones of to-day, ye who stand apart, ye shall one day be a people; from you who have chosen yourselves a chosen people shall arise, and from it beyond man." Then there is the rank and file, who, as things are, will never be able to marry and never have homes of their own.

In these two types we have plenty of fine and plenty of rough material with which to make a beginning. Later on, as we resolve ourselves into shape, we shall have to rely on picked men: the picked men will be the men of the new aristocracy. That is how it was at school—the ablest boy led the rest: that is how it will have to be again if we are to pull ourselves together: that is largely how it was with the *old* aristocracy. We know that the leaders of this old aristocracy were often high-minded and overbearing, but they were brave to a man. Whatever they asked the people to do they were ready to take the field and do themselves. They set personal honour and personal heroism before everything else.

We have to set before everything else loyalty to comrades. We will have it understood by the directorate of a firm that if it does an injustice to one of the least of its employees, his friend shall enlist the sympathy of the whole staff and see it redressed. That is the business of the friend in relation to the distributive trade. The friend shall not cease from his crusade till everyone is won over to his side. If an offence of any kind is committed against any employee, his friend shall lay the case before his room, his department, and finally before the whole house. If the matter is not put right, the whole house shall come out within a day's notice. That is the way to assert the dignity of the friend in the same relation.

The Union can come in with far-reaching effect in the wider field of the multiple firm with branches all over the country. A single branch should have it in its power, after due application to the Union, to stop for a day or a given number of hours the whole of the branches of that firm for any unjust or tyrannical act set in motion by the head office. The representation should be made in the first instance by the friend of the party aggrieved, or by someone acting for him. I would have it regarded as obligatory on everyone to take up a case on the representation of a friend. The appeal of a friend, even to a stranger, should be binding.

In the case of a whole trade the Union could carry matters one stage further by threatening to close on a single day all the shops in that trade

throughout the country if the conditions had become intolerable.

But it is not only or primarily a matter of the conditions of one particular class: the friend is out to do bigger things than merely safeguard his own interests.

The thing against which we have to array ourselves is a tremendous conspiracy of all the selfishness of the last 150 years,⁸ the concrete expression of all the false ideals of a century and a half. Law and order is on its side: all the leagued interests of capital are with it, *but for all that it does not stand for race efficiency*: it stands only for the glorification of itself: it exists only for the perpetuation of itself; *and already it has overreached itself and begun to fail.*

For these many and powerful reasons we are for indoctrinating the young with an entirely new belief, a belief in each other, *a belief in the power of the heart to beget some great overmastering idea that shall bring us into line with each other.*

That idea we seek in "the friend."

My friend is my God. I know no other God. He is not one and indivisible, but one and a million times divisible. I find him everywhere, because once I found him in one single soul. He gave me my clue. He is the little apprentice who looks a momentary greeting to me across the counter, as I speak to him kindly over some trifling purchase: he is the little ink-stained clerk who moves nearer to me on the seat of the omnibus, he does not know

why: he is the young undergraduate whose eyes meet mine with a serene shyness as we pass in the street: he is the young engine-driver who stops work for a moment with his hand full of cotton-waste, and wonders where we met before: he is the eager-faced young factory hand with stooping shoulders who bends forward and gives me a light in the train: again, he is something far back in my soul answering to something far back in the souls of others out of the thousand lives and the thousand dreams we have lived and dreamed before. For this is of the nature of the friend: all the secrets I have yet to learn are his to impart. He alone can bring me deliverance; only I can deliver him. It is for him to say, "Come with me and I will show you a way out of the *impasse* we are in." It is for me to choose him as of old the knight errants chose their pages. It does not matter to me where I find him. He may be an errand-boy, a newspaper-runner. I stand him up there as a test case between us: whoever injures him injures me; whoever makes an enemy of him makes an enemy of me. There are no lengths I will not go to defend him if he engages me deeply on his side. All that I have belongs to him for a purpose that when *the moment arrives* he may by example become a revolutionary, an upholder of the New Aristocracy. There is the bond we would have between the shop-assistant and his friend. If his friend asked him to avenge him on the New Industrial Order.

he should have the power to-morrow to call the whole of the country to his aid, and the pivot of that power should be in ten thousand friendships planted over the whole length and breadth of the land. Prudence of every kind we would have him fling to the winds.⁹ It is the fear of poverty that keeps you so poor in experience that in the end you live inside a chalked ring, and think that to pass over it would be the end of everything. Pass over it one day in a body, and assemble 50,000 strong in Trafalgar Square: then go down Northumberland Avenue and march along the Embankment. You will feel the ground beneath your feet shake as you walk, and you will discover—your own possibilities.

In early days when we first began to associate together we had nothing so heroic as this in view. We asked for little things only: an early closing day once a week (it was 5 o'clock Thursday afternoons in my own town), that we might write a few long overdue letters to our relatives. We never dreamed of being able to lead real lives again, of having time enough to play; but now we are in a different temper. We are for working 44 hours a week and no more—that is, eight hours a day, and a half-holiday once a week. We want time to swim and box and wrestle, time to walk and run, and time to learn to ride a horse and handle a gun. How else are we to know each other's mettle? How else are we to prove ourselves to each other in a hundred different ways?

We have nothing left but each other. We cannot marry : we cannot have homes of our own : we cannot know the love of children. To give ourselves up to the sort of love that is bought and sold at street corners would be the last iniquity of the buying and selling of anything, and free love as we understand it is largely a counsel of perfection, therefore either we must be chaste without a cause or chaste with one. But chastity of itself and for itself is a denial of life. It is as if a plant said I will bear no flower, or a flower said I will bear no fruit ; but chastity persevered in as a means to an end may be a noble thing. Chastity in order to get beyond the necessity of chastity is conceivable and might take shape in a generation of men that determined to be chaste in order that some great flower of friendship might burgeon and blossom amongst them something tenderer and stronger than the world has ever before seen, that should make their convictions clearer and their arms more strong to end the suicidal conditions that have brought the nation to so grave a pass.

I am not thinking here of the plain homespun friendships that are for ordinary every-day wear, and last a lifetime, but of the friendships that make and mould a man in white-hot moments of intensity as the glowing iron is beaten out and shaped on the anvil.

But the comradeship I urge must be a spiritual one. It is for those alone who are complete masters of themselves, who have subjugated all their other

passions in the one consuming desire to make friendship the motive force of a great national awakening. There must be no dallying with friendship by those who are weak in self-control.¹⁰ Let them step down at once, and beware of it as of something that will poison all their intercourse with each other and ruin their lives irretrievably. Our joy in each other's society must be the joy of the morning of battle. We are friends to make friendship possible. We are more than friends for an example. We have no mean to decline upon. I will thank my friend of yesterday (my enemy of to-morrow) that, no matter what the cause, if he hear my folly has been my undoing, he will keep out of my way: that if I meet him in the street, himself disgraced, he will avert his head: that if he sees me defeated, and still alive, he will pass by on the other side. I shall know by the manner of his going that he remembers me. It is not for him to turn aside to *help* me; he can help me now only by his hate. His hate for me is the pruner's knife, that shall keep the strong tree of our past friendship safe from running into trivial growths.

That is where we have to take our stand. Hitherto "the friend" has been a fleeting vision only, that men have mocked at when the light of recognition failed from their eyes. We must steady the vision for them. It is the characteristic of the friend that no man has ever seen him for what he is, or rather never so seen him for long

at a time. We have to believe in him for a sign that he is welcome to take up his abode amongst us.

We know that once before in an earlier civilisation, when the wreath of bay or laurel as an emblem of victory was prized more than is gold or silver to-day, the friend came down to earth and made his beautiful home in the hearts of men, and stayed a long time amidst them until they forgot his divine origin; and some there were to whom custom had so staled his presence that they tried to rationalise him and harness him to daily drudgery, or, more perverse still, laid the gross hand of the senses on him, like as a drunken parent who should strain his child to his breast in intemperate affection, and crush the life out of him in the act.

But long previous to that there were those who properly understood him and received him everywhere with martial honours. They graved an image of him on their shields and carried an image of him always in their hearts. His was the rallying standard in every fight, and death became an honour at his side.

This is the spirit we wish to engraft on Comradeship; that is the temper in which we throw down the gauntlet to the New Industrial Order.¹¹

NOTES

Note 1, page 35. "Spiffs." Spiff is a premium on an article carrying a larger profit than is usual, or on an article that for any reason is considered unsaleable except by special effort.

Note 2, page 62. "Brabazon Homes." The Brabazon House Co., Ltd., which was formed in 1900 (to carry on the work begun by Lady Brabazon) owns Brabazon House in Moreton Street and Hopkinson House in Vauxhall Bridge Road. The two houses cater between them for 205 guests. The personal accommodation consists of cubicles varying in rent from 5s. to 7s. a week, and of single bedrooms from 6s. 6d. to 11s. 6d. a week, with a small number of extra large rooms by arrangement. Each cubicle and room has its own window and electric light, and contains a bed, chair, washstand, dressing-chest of drawers, and a hanging cupboard or curtained hanging rail. There are hot and cold bathrooms for the use of all free. Each house has a bicycle room and a drying closet, and at Hopkinson House there is also a small laundry and a dark room for the use of the residents. The sitting-room accommodation consists in each house of dining-room, drawing-room, library, and silent room, besides small rooms for visitors—the rents paid for cubicles or bedrooms includes the use of all these rooms together with piano, newspapers, etc. The houses are fire-proof, are lighted by electricity, and heated with hot water, and have, in addition, open fires in the sitting-rooms. Full board, *i.e.*, breakfast, lunch, tea, and late dinner, costs 10s. 6d. a week, and partial-board, consisting of breakfast and late dinner on week-days and full board on Sundays

costs 8s. 6d. a week. Board and lodging need not therefore exceed 15s. 6d. a week, and where fewer dinners are taken may fall as low as 12s. 6d. per week. With these prices, after making proper provision for sinking fund and maintenance, and fair progress towards building up a reserve fund, it has been found possible to pay dividends of from 3½ to 4 per cent. per annum. Brabazon House and Hopkinson House are not mere boarding-houses, they are refined and delightful homes thoroughly appreciated by those who make use of them, such as artists, teachers, students, secretaries, clerks, and typists. In both Brabazon House and Hopkinson House there is in all the rooms a note of distinction. That is the point—to get as far away as possible from the ordinary boarding-house, and to create something new and peculiar to the altered conditions of life and the *camaraderie* which should be characteristic of these altered conditions.

Note 3, page 73. "Ten good employers would damn your cause in any city." It is the good employer that throws dirt into the eyes of the public. "See," he says, "the provision I have made for the comfort of the young men and young women in my employ." Then he invites a newspaper representative to take the views of the assistants themselves. They all with one accord say how much happier they are inside the house than they would be outside. A tame rabbit would say the same of its hutch. But has the employer the right to tame men and women to this extent?

Note 4, page 101. "More in common between the aristocracy and the people than between the middle-class and the people." I am not thinking of that aristocracy which, in making a disgraceful pact with the New Industrial Order, has stultified itself and made itself ridiculous, but rather of the survivors of that old and noble aristocracy who stand aloof from all this and feel nothing but mortification at the lapses within their ranks.

Note 5, page 105. "It will want the shop-assistant." By the shop-assistant, in this instance, I mean that large

disaffected class of educated men, other than employers, that provides brains for the carrying on of trade, as distinct from the class that provides money and the class that provides muscles. As such we are all shop-assistants, all of us, accountants' clerks, bank clerks, store clerks, journalists—news is only a department of a general store which circulates from hand to hand to sell beer, and tobacco, and *bric-à-brac*, soap, and hair-lotion, and pills.

Note 6, page 105. "What, make friends with your carman and your packer?" Many years ago, when a printer and publisher for whom I was making a County Directory came to grief, it was a young carter, also in his employ, who offered to teach me a new occupation. "Come back with me to the hills," he said, "I'll teach you how to keep sheep. You can live with my old people. We'll be as happy as the day is long." We did not go to the hills, but I can still hear him singing, in true Mark Tapley fashion, to an infant on his knee in the kitchen we afterwards shared together in the rough time that followed:

"Comrades, comrades, ever since we were boys,"

ostensibly singing to amuse the child, but really singing to me to keep up my spirits as his whole class could sing to our class to put more humanity into us and more feeling.

Note 7, page 111. "Hostels for social residence for men." In similar hostels for women there should be arranged once a week a dance and social evening with the men of the neighbouring hostel, and every now and again the girls of the gymnasium should invite the girls of the nearest working-girls' club to compete with them in a gymnastic display. The society of such high-spirited, warm-hearted girls as you may find among factory girls would awaken in the shop girl a new spirit of independence. It would also awaken love by engendering the instinct of protection, but the factory girl would be more often than not the protector. She knows so much more of life, she is so much braver, so much more a part of the living world. In many of the manufacturing towns of the Midlands and North she would be a champion

worth having ; indeed, if the factory girls, say, of Nottingham or Leicester took the shop girls of these towns under their protection, the local drapers would be forced forthwith to grant to their assistants whatever conditions they demanded.

Note 8, page 114. "A tremendous conspiracy of all the selfishness of the last one hundred and fifty years." I shall be told that it began more than one hundred and fifty years ago. I might go back to the confiscation of the monasteries as the beginning of that hostile movement that has ended in the utter destruction of the providence of the people. It suits my argument better to go back only one hundred and fifty years. One hundred and fifty years ago industry was still capable of producing beautiful things. It was the age of Chippendale, Sheraton, Heppelwhite, Ince and Adam ; but of a sudden, with the discovery of steam and the substitution of machine for hand-loom weaving, the New Industrial Order began, at first unwittingly and heedlessly, and later on consciously and methodically, that diabolical policy of human exploitation that has belittled everything that made for art and beautiful living, and thrown the whole of society out of gear.

Note 9, page 116. "Prudence of every kind we would have him fling to the winds." Humanity advances further in its periods of madness than in its periods of sanity. Such an advance was the Dionysian madness which came upon the Greeks when life amongst them had become too conventional to permit of further growth, and such an advance was the Nazarene madness which came upon the Jews when the oppression of the poor by the rich had reached amongst them almost as acute a stage as it has reached amongst us to-day.

Note 10, page 118. "There must be no dallying with friendship by those who are weak in self-control." I may assure all who are acquainted with the secret horrors of the living-in system that I do not write without full knowledge on this point ; but it must be remembered that I am for totally abolishing the living-in system, thereby abolishing

once and for all the unnatural and unwholesome state of things to which it has given rise. But not only am I for abolishing this unnatural and pernicious division of the sexes in one walk of life ; I am for abolishing, in all circumstances and conditions of life, the absurd and monkish superstition on which it is based. Believing the innate power of the sexes to purify each other is all-sufficient as a means towards physical righteousness, I would have boys and girls brought up together from their earliest years, so that when they arrived at maturity they would have as food for reflection long and varied associations of the completest kind, in which the gradual unfolding of sex instincts had chastened their minds and characters, and left no room for the hazardous indulgences which too often result in perverted sexuality.

Note II, page 119. "That is the temper in which we throw down the gauntlet to the New Industrial Order," viz., a religious temper. Is there not already indicated the beginning of a great religious ideal of comradeship when men stand silently together in the crowded market-place and allow themselves to be shot down with ball cartridges rather than give up what they have regarded hitherto as their sacred right to stand by each other in an emergency ?

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With an Introduction by

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- INDEX.

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