THE WORKER'S SHARE OF ART.

I can imagine some of our comrades smiling bitterly at the above title, and wondering what a Socialist journal can have to do with art; so I begin by saying that I understand only too thoroughly how "unpractical" the subject is, that is why I say it is the present situation in the working classes.

What, however, is art? whence does it spring? Art is man's embodied expression of interest in the life of man; it springs from man's pleasure in his life; pleasure we must call it, taking all the afflatus life together, however much it may be broken by the grief and trouble of individuals; and as it is the expression of pleasure in life generally, in the memory of the deeds of the past, and of hope of those of the future, so it is especially the expression of man's pleasure in the deeds of the present; in his work.

Yes, that may well seem strange to us at present! Men to-day may see the pleasure of unproductive energy—energy put for saving gas in gaited shoes;—what is a necessary living—energy in the task which must be finished before we can eat, the task which will begin again to-morrow, and many a to-morrow without change or end till we are ended—pleasure in that?

But I am taking the thoughts of a Socialist's pleasure in his daily necessary work, which expresses itself and is embodied in that work itself; nothing else can make the common surroundings of life beautiful, and whenever they are beautiful it is a sign that man's work has unproductive energy, it may take no work which has made our towns and habitations sordid and hideous, insults to the beauty of the earth which they disfigure, and all the accessories of life mean, trivial, ugly—in a word, selfish, and to some extent inhuman. Is there hope in it for the future; for surely it is but just that outward ugliness and disgrace should be the result of the slavery and misery of the people; and that slavery and misery once changed, it is but reasonable to expect that external ugliness will give place to beauty, the sign of free and happy work.

Meantime, be sure that nothing else will produce even a reasonable semblance of art; for, think of it! the workers, by means of whose hands the mass of art must be made, are forced by the unproductive energy of the system into places so squalid and hideous that no one could live in them and keep his sanity without losing all sense of beauty and enjoyment of life. The advance of the industrial army under its own chains of action and reaction. We may live without the advance of other armies, in the ruin of the peace and loneliness of earth's surface, and nature, who will have us live at any cost, compels us to get used to our degradation at the expense of life, and life for most of us is a thing to be endured in order to live less like men than ourselves. Men living amidst such ugliness cannot conceive of beauty, and, therefore, cannot express it.

It is only the workers who feel this misery (and I rejoice over that, at any rate). The higher or more intellectual arts suffer with the industrial ones. The artists, the aim of whose lives it is to produce beauty and interest, are deprived of the materials for their work in real life, since all around them is ugly and vulgar. They are driven from their materials in the imaginations of past ages, or into giving the lie to their own sense of beauty and knowledge of it by sentimentalising and falsifying the life which goes on around them; and so, in spite of all their talent, intellect and enthusiasm, produce little which is not contemptible when matched against the works of the non-commercial ages. Nor must we forget that whatever is produced is that worth anything is the work of men's hands, that are in the revenge of the to-day—rebellion sometimes open, sometimes veiled under cynicism, but by which in any case lives are wasted in a struggle, too often vain, against their fellow-men, which ought to be used for the exercise of special gifts for the benefit of the workers.

High and low, therefore, slaveholders and slaves, we lack beauty in our lives, or, in other words, man-like pleasure. This absence of pleasure is the second great evil to the world which the development of commercialism has added to its first gift of a propertyless proletariat. Nothing else but the grinding of this iron system could have reduced the civilised world to vulgarity. The theory that art is sick because people have turned their eyes from it to Wolffian philosophy can be defeated; it is true that science is allowed to live because profit can be made of it, and men, who must find some outlet for their energies, turn to her; since she exists, though only as the slave (but now the rebellious slave) of commerce, in whose name they live. The purest type of profit-grinding she dies, and leaves behind her but her phantom of shams art as the futile slave of the capitalist.

Strange as it may seem, therefore, to some people, it is as true as strange, that Socialism, which has been commonly supposed to be nothing but a move towards the perfectibility of the arts. It may be, indeed, that still the social revolution is fully accomplished, and perhaps for a little while afterwards, men's surroundings may go on getting pleasanter, grimmer, and barer. I say for a little while, for however much at a time we may shake off the habits of penny on the one hand and inane luxury on the other, which have been forced on them by commercialism. But even in that there is hope; for it is at least possible that all the old superstitions and conventions which keep the worker before art can be born again; that before that new birth we shall have to be bare faced of everything that has been called art; that we shall have nothing left
END-WEST WORKERS.—III.

In writing this article on "sweating," I speak with authority as a bona fide working tailor for eleven years, working in the sweater's den in the East-end of London. I have endeavoured to gather facts to lay them before the public. The community at large are in a great measure ignorant of the fact that there are places in London where fever deus, and it is the oppressed worker who alone knows his grievances; but unfortunately, for fear of being discharged from employment, he has to remain silent, and thus the evil of sweating is extensively carried on, which is nothing more nor less than slow murder. I know there are men and women ready and able to assist in advocating the people's cause. It is my duty as a Socialist to lay before the public their grievances and also to say why they are subjected.

Dealing with the miserable condition of the working tailoresses in East London, their wretched pay, their miserable meals, their captivity, approaching to slavery, in places the most dangerous and unhealthy, dimly reveals but one aspect of the misery of the poor women in East London, the natural outgrowth of the sweating system. Without entering at length into the course of the present article into the many details of the sweating system, it will be sufficient to indicate the growth of one of the most miserable conditions of things in the East-end of London, and some of the means to which it has given rise. "Sweaters," then, it may be well to mention at the outset, technical meaning, as applied to those engaged in the tailoring trade, a class of men who, receiving a certain amount of cloth from the large clothing establishments in the metropolis, for which security is given, are to work that cloth into garments, or parts of garments, for a certain price. This assertion, however, must be qualified to some extent, for a few of the sweaters, in their eagerness to receive the cloth direct from the establishment, are far from always doing it. A certain amount of small influence is necessary to obtain "orders" or contracts. A certain knowledge of this fact has given rise to a class of "middlemen," who, obtaining the cloth from the establishment, hand it on to the sweaters for a consideration. To these "middlemen" may, in some cases, be traced the existence of the evil of low prices and wrought workshops. The sweater, having to do the work at a less price because of the existence of these middlemen, and naturally desirous of putting as much of the work as possible into the hands of the people, screw their workpeople down to the lowest wages possible, and "condemn" as cheaply as they can. It may be mentioned, too, that the capital required to start a sweating shop is insignificant. The sweater, having received his orders, is immediately favoured with the attentions of an agent from a firm of sewing-machine manufacturers, who supply him with as many machines as he may require, at weekly payments of from one shilling to half-a-crown each, easily deducted from the profits he may pocket at the end of each week. His next move is to strike off a few bills or to advertise for "hands," who are usually forthcoming. With these he strikes a bargain for a daily wage, screwed down to the utmost farthing, and allowing the sweaters a miserable profit. A few gas-burners are knocked up; the two wretched rooms of which the dilapidated house can boast are furnished with a few deal tables and chairs; each room is filled with eight or ten persons, mostly girls, to whom, indeed, the sweater is rather partial, since they can do with less wages. The work is given out, the sewing-machine strikes up its rattling noise, and another sweating-shop is started somewhere in the streets right and left of Bethnal Green, Hackney Road and Whitechapel, in Princess Street, Church Street, Saint John's Wood, etc. But wherever the shop may be, the sanitary conditions are invariably bad. Starting with little or no capital, the sweater cannot afford to make the rooms fit for the use to which they have been put. Consequently eight or ten persons are crowded into a room barrel fit for three persons. The work being continued till late at night, three or four gas-jets may be seen flaming in one room, fire may be seen dimly burning in the wretched fireplace; sinks are untrapped, closets are without water, and altogether the main conditions are abominable. In this matter the inspectors under the Factory Acts are powerless, sanitation remaining exclusively under local authority, whose functions are limited. Moreover, the workpeople, being for the most part foreigners— Dutch, Polish, Russian—who migrating into this country have the weight of public and political opinions, the El Dorado of their hopes, uneducated, and ignorant of the simplest sanitary laws, do much by their own ignorance to complete the wreck and ruin of their own constitution, started by the sweaters, with the result that over 50 per cent. suffer in a short time from heart and lung disease.

LEWIS LYONS.

IRISH NOTES.

We have received the following notes from a friend in Ireland. They are interesting as dealing with the past treatment of her country by England. We look forward to a union of the two nations from the same source on the condition of events in Ireland at the present time.

English people, as a rule, will not read Irish newspapers, if the latter have the least National tendency; and we as Irish with the English nation to know some of the truths concerning the wrongs we have laboured under for centuries, we shall give a few facts—not theories, but the results of facts which can be proved from both the English Government side and the National side. *

In the last century, Dean Swift was a good friend to the suffering Irish. He always upheld the cause of the poor, and on one occasion said that the confiscated lands which were given by William III. of England, to his English followers, were given to highwhores; inasmuch as the Irish landlords who had been expelled and slain on Hounslow Heath on their way to Ireland, and the highwaymen came in their stead.

William III., when memorialised by the people of Bristol to stop the importation of Irish manufactures, replied: "I shall do my best to hinder and obstruct the woolen trade of Ireland, and to promote that of England." *

Shortly afterwards, Dean Swift at a public dinner was asked to drink the toast "Prosperity to Ireland." "No," replied the witty Dean, "I never drink memories." *

A quotation from a letter written by the Lord-Lieutenant, about the year 1607, will show the spirit in which the inhabitants of Ireland were governed by their English masters: "I am more than familiar with the old saying, 'famine that must consume the Irish, as our swords and other endeavours worked not that speedy effect which is expected'; hunger would be a better, cheaper, and a speedier, weapon to employ against them than the sword. . . . I burned all along the Lough [Neagh] within four miles of Dungannon, and killed 100 people, sparing none, of what quality, age, or sex soever, besides many burned to death. We killed, man, woman and child, horse, beast, dog, or whatever we could find." *

During the rebellion of 1798, the soldiers upon one occasion tied a man and his three sons to trees, and then before their eyes, violated the mother and four young sisters. E. OWENS BLACKBURNE.

* Unnecessary railways have been thrown into districts, while railroads have been too largely constructed in British ports. . . . America has large crops, is well supplied with all things necessary to its population at a range of prices unusually cheap, and yet it felt the depression of prices because of inability to sell its surplus produce abroad at profitable prices. . . . The railways are cutting each other's traffic, or rather dividends, in their frantic attempt to obtain traffic.