THE REWARD OF LABOUR.

A DIALOGUE.

PERSONS:—An Earnest Enquirer, an East-end Weaver, a West-end Landowner.

Scene:—Outside a philanthropical meeting on Social Science.

E. E. (continuing to L.) But I am a stranger in London, and will you believe it, don't know what the East-end of London is like; but I have heard of so much being done for the benefit of the East-end, People's Palaces, Mosaic pictures, and the like, that I suppose by now there is quite a pleasant quarter through there, and I can get some money. What is the state of this? Mr. Fox, in your opinion, can you get out of it at once into fresh air, pleasant gardens, roomy squares; and that it is well supplied with libraries, baths, and, in a word, all the benefits of civilization—the (co)de of that kind. If—Well, sir, you suppose a great deal. What's the use of building a People's Palace in Hell, or putting up a Mosaic picture on the walls of the devil's scullery? If the particulars are right about that job, and some of us do happen down there, we shall burst Old Scratch; for he will scarcely be able to make it so nasty that we shan't think we have got back again home. Excuse me, I told you that I was a bilious subject.

E. E. No excuse needed; I must get on, and indeed make an excuse to you for what I am going to say. Perhaps both I and this frock-coated, shiny-hatted gentleman here were after all wrong in thinking you intelligent; perhaps I and a few others don't so much understand as to cover that dangerous discontent of the inferior part of the lower orders, which is getting to be so prevalent; and ain't you perhaps wrong in your advice on trivial matters, to the great harm of your health, and to hurt your feelings, I am only speaking of you as a type of a large body of men.

Never mind my feelings, I shan't get in a rage; I am used to you now. Well, I'll answer as a type, and say I'm no stupider than other people, high as well as low; and at all events I am able to do my work—come.

E. E. (cooly.) Well, the secret of the compensation to the working classes for their inferior position does rather elude my grasp, certainly; like trying to hold an elven when one hasn't saddled one's hand. Well, let's try once more, and try the moral side of this thing. To the working man, what is the moral side of this? As I understand it, we are to consider the moral side of this. I wish you to take that for granted. I don't wish you to doubt your accuracy. I say "even if I understand them," because Mr. Fox writes that money not earned by producers—that is, the estimation of the highest possible price of labour—that is, that something not brought into existence should be reckoned as part of the income of someone who cannot be benefited by this large quantity. Mr. Fox may mean something by this. Will he kindly explain it.

10. I exceedingly doubt whether Mr. Fox is right in saying that in England "the break-up of the feudal states helped to consolidate the power of the Crown." And if he did not mean this to apply to England, it is irrelevant to the issue we are discussing. Nor is it true that the history of this country from the sixteenth century to the present time is "the history of the middle or trading classes in their efforts to free the individual from the fetters of feudalism and monarchy, to the end that on the one side there might be a body of free and landless labourers, and on the other a body of moneyeasers free to exploit them." In any case Mr. Bax cautions to show any connection between those alleged past sins of the English trading classes and the proposition he has entered on to affirm. 19. Mr. Bax says:—

"The means of the present exploitation of labour, the cause of the present horrid state of things, is monopoly. In modern economic literature the extraction of surplus-value from the labourer by capital is carried on not only by so much of the results of his labour as is necessary to keep him in bare subsistence. Remaining unappropriated, the hands of individuals, and are thrown away with the possibility of surplus-value."
veneration because you add so much to the wealth of the community and take so little from it.

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And if a child is disposed to play on the features of the Landowner, who has been listening a little lately.

W. Yes, I thought we should get to the chaff again, or else where have you been dug up from to ask such a question? A working-man honest, and as you say, anxious and eager; I mean without mere prevision, without being a dodger. But look here, as to the respect I'm held in, I don't want to be vague, so I ask you to take the trouble to notice the way in which a policeman (a public servant, mind you) speaks to an East-end and a West-end man, that will enlighten you as to the respect paid to me as a philosopher; and as to those of ancient days, 'tis hard to understand; and apart from it being, as the old woman said, "a long way off and a long way in," I am not understanding that some of those things are ours. Excuse me again, I am but a weaver, and therefore ill-bred.

E. E. Well, it comes to this, then, that you're skilful, industrious, useful, poor, and despised—one of the lower class?

W. Jumping to conclusions.

E. E. Why?

W. Why? Because I'm a working-man.

E. E. Well, well, can't we get any further than that with our reason?

W. No, not yet. However, here is this gentleman, an educated man, an M.P., who has of course considered this sort of thing. Begin upon him now. And since he has so much and listened to me, perhaps he won't object to my doing the same by him.

E. E. By all means stay, and if you can set him a-going when he sticks by a word in reason, I shan't grudge you. (To L.) Well, sir, may I ask you a question? A question of prospect of questioning you. You are barly and healthy looking; your step is firm, your eye bright, your features well cut. If it were still the old slave-times of the world, and our friend the weaver and you were by the fortune of war offered to mankind as a working-man representa-

E. E. Well, I ought not to do anything, and I hope you would keep on and postan work too, since they are yours. But is your statement quite accurate? Come now, on your honour, as an English gentleman.

L. Well, you understand; my lawyer does, and my steward, and my—

E. E. Yes, I see. Well, what else do you besides—not managing your estates?

L. Well, you understand; my lawyer does, and my steward, and my—

E. E. Yes, I know that. What does that mean as to the work of it? What do you do?

L. Do! Well—why—well, I manage my estates.

E. E. You? What, you manage estates?

L. Yes, I do, and I manage them better, as they are yours.

E. E. Well, I can't help it. (With a laugh) I mean, your work consists in managing your own, that's all.

L. Yes (sadly)—or boring myself.

E. E. What are you paid for it?

L. Eh, what's that?—paid for it?

E. E. Yes, paid for it: you can't feed and clothe yourself on the game you shoot; it wouldn't pay powder and shot, I doubt. Shall I put it in another way? Who keeps you?

L. Keeps me! I keep myself, of course. My father used to keep me when I was a boy; but my Government didn't.

E. E. Well, never mind your family history; we can guess at it. I must put my question another way, since you will be so obtuse. What do you get?

L. Oh, you mean my income! Well, my rent-roll is ten thousand a-year, but it doesn't come to much after all outings. First there's—

E. E. Excuse me; never mind those details, I am not a tax-gatherer. What's in your income—next—

L. (blurring it out). Six thousand a-year—there!

E. E. Well, and what do you think the reward for doing nothing ought to be?


E. E. Yes, but I didn't ask you. What do you say; Mr. Landower?

L. Nothing.

E. E. Well, well, this is sad. You get £6000 a-year for doing nothing, for which our friend here thinks you ought to have nothing, and you have nothing to say to it. Your position is a strange one.

L. From my own point of view, of course—

E. E. Where does that come from?

L. Come, come! you want to know too much. Suffice it, the property is mine, and that I came by it legally.

E. E. Well, I might press you on this point; but as I know that you are your father's son, as the saying goes, I had rather ask the questions I might ask you, as to where the property comes from, of a self-made man—that is, a man who has made money—which you must be, as you and your ancestors are a world apart, and answer me this: You live softly and comfortably, you can have everything you want, even to the point of the satisfaction of your every desired passion, and you do nothing useful.

E. E. (interposing). Does any one?

L. E. What, not the men who supply you with food? Well, perhaps they don't, if that's all they do.

E. E. Well, you tell me what I mean.

L. E. No, I'm damned if I do—unless 'tis 'nothing' once again. But you interrupted me with your meaningless pessimism. I say you do nothing, and for that you have and spend the livelihood of a hundred silk-weavers. You take a great deal out of the social system, and put nothing into it. As an inhabitant of another world, allow me to ask, don't people look down upon you, jeer at you for—

L. Certainly not: I am much respected, looked up to—liked even.

E. E. Why?

L. Well, I'm a good-natured sort of fellow among my own kind, and don't consider my easy life. But I wonder are you very clever? Perhaps a poet;—no, of course not; you would have me know that long ago—but are you very clever?

L. Certainly not a poet, not even an inarticulate one; and not specially elevated in sympathy, if I were, I shouldn't have respected any more: I am respected because of my property, my position.

E. E. Well, I haven't much else to ask you; but tell me this: If you were employing two workmen, and one did his day's work well and straightforwardly and ate workman's victuals, and the other you had to feed on venison and champagne, and his day's work come to nothing, would you respect the second workman more than the first—

L. As his employer, you know?

L. Of course not; but you see I'm not in the same position as the second workman. You see, my dear sir, the complexity of civilized society—in short, your question is quite wide of the mark.

W. Oh, oh!

E. E. I must put the case otherwise, then. Here is a man (pointing to W,) who works hard and usefully and is paid for it with £50 a-year and a conscience; and another man (pointing to L), who does nothing at all and is paid for it with £6000 a-year and respect. As an earnest enquirer, I ask if you can tell me why?

L. These inequalities are necessary for the maintenance of society.

E. E. But it seems to me that it is an injustice, a gross one. Don't you really think so? Come, try to throw away caste prejudices, and answer me like a man.

L. Well, perhaps it is the abstract.

E. E. Then injustice is necessary to the maintenance of society—why?

L. Because there must be rich and poor or there would be no society.

E. E. That is saying the same thing in other words. Again I ask, why?

L. I know it always will be so, that's all.

W. Then it's a look-out, that's all.

[While they have been talking, a small crowd has gathered about them, under the impression that an open-air meeting is going on. Enter to them a policeman, under the same impression, who pushes through the crowd, addressing the Weaver, to which he holds him and gives him through sheer, and says, "Come, you get out of this." Exit Weaver, hurriedly, glad to get off so lightly. Then policeman turns round to Landowner, who is very nicely dressed, touches his hat, and says, "Shall I get you a cab, sir?" Landowner nods and waves off to meet the cab, and the small crowd disperses. Earnest Enquirer walks off slowly, soliciting.]—W. E. I must try to find out why: for as the weaver said, 'tis a bad look-out. Socialism would never be brought forward organized in anywise; and somewhere there ought to be the gnomes of a society of which no one need ask the question, "Why does it exist?"

WILLIAM MORRIS.