HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY; OR, THE INCONVENIENCES OF STEALING.

[A Dialogue between Mr. James Brown, a business man, and Mr. Olaf Evans, a kind of artist and literary man; neighbours.]

PART II.

SCENE—A Room in Mr. Olaf Evans’s house, a good deal littered with odds and ends of art and literature; pipes and tobacco, and materials for graft on the table; in a conspicuous place a rather large bundle of MSS.

Brown. Well, you see I’ve come.

Evans. Yes, and thank you for coming. Do you know, this morning you were very nearly quarrelling with me. However, let us hope the Bruce will mend all that.

B. (hastily, and looking furtively at the MSS.) Oh yes, I was glad to come and have a talk with a neighbour.

E. Well, light up, and let me mix you a glass of grog before I begin.

B. (taking his eye from the MSS., and looking hard into a corner of the room.) Oh, thanks, thanks, presently; I’m not in a hurry.

[Lights his pipe and smokes briskly.]

E. How is business?

B. So-so; it’s the old story. I have got to do twice the business to make half as much as my father did.

E. How do you account for that?

B. Competition; things must be sold cheap or down you go.

E. A good thing for the country though, especially for the working-classes.

B. Well, I’m not so sure of that; to tell you the truth, taking them all round, I don’t think they are so much better off; if they get nominally higher wages they’ve got such constant employment, and some don’t get higher wages. They are the clerks now—do you call them part of the working-classes?

E. Well, yes, as things go. They certainly don’t belong to the proprietor, neither.

B. Well, I tell you that they are not as well off as they used to be, by a long way; I can get a steady going German who knows three languages thoroughly for 50s. a week or less. Some years ago there would have been a fight for such a youth at the price.

E. Still, to have things cheap ought to be a benefit.

B. Well, I don’t want them cheap. And look here, if things go on at this rate I shall have no choice but to sell my business at what it is worth, and live on what I can get. I have to do for ever ever slaving for 2½ per cent. and what I shall do shall other people will do, and are doing. Capital will be withdrawn from business’ wholesale, and then a nice mess our working-men will be in with nobody to employ them.

E. If—well now shall I mix you—and begin the business of the evening?

B. Oh, we needn’t be in a hurry, there’s plenty of time. Let us talk.

E. Very well, I agree; only I hope we shall quarrel.

B. I don’t think we shall. You are in a reasonable hurry now, I can see, and inclined to listen to people when they talk on subjects that they understand better than you.

E. But, there are many kinds of things I don’t understand. I’ll ask you a question or two presently.

B. Do; and one thing I can easily make clear to you, that an employer of labour doesn’t lie on a bed of roses in these days. Everything that’s done now must be for the benefit of the working-class as to the middle-classes, the real back-bone of the country, the real working-classes, mind you, they may take care of themselves.

E. Well, they can do that pretty well, I think.

B. How, I should like to know, with prices falling and wages rising on all hands?

E. But I thought you said you could get clerks (who are agreed are working-men) cheaper than you used to do.

B. Not in proportion to the profits I make.

E. Well, let that pass; for I want to raise your spirits by showing you that the middle-classes can take good care of themselves, and in fact do so. Only you must abandon your idea of either retiring from business, and all living on the interest of their savings.

B. Well, I warn you that trades’ unionists and Socialists may drive us to that if they don’t take cognisance of us.

E. If we could only drive you to trying it but it won’t go quite in that way, I fear. But I admit that many of you can retire without bringing the whole thing about your cars, and can so take care of yourselves; while the rest of you take care of yourselves by going down to their offices and looking at their clerks, and doing other laborious work for four hours a-day when they are not holiday-making.

B. Now, Evans, you are getting unreasonable again; talking about matters you don’t understand.

E. Excuse me, Brown, my questions, the answers to which are to enlighten my ignorance, are just going to begin. What you are going to do live on when you are retired will be, with 2½ per cent. profits, on what I imagine to be a higgledy turnover?

B. (rather crossly.) On my earnings.

E. On what you have made!

B. Yes, of course, on the money I have made.

E. Oh! I didn’t know you made money, I thought you made soap.

B. Yes, of course. I manufacture soap, but I make money.

E. Must you make money to make the gods damn soap? Is a cheapish article. What a lot of soap you must have handled with your hands to live on your earnings in the style in which you live! You must be one of the cleverest men alive; I am quite proud of your acquaintance.

B. Here come these sentimental paradoxes again! However, go on.

E. Paradoxes? Don’t you make the soap with your hands then?

B. Why, you know I don’t, an ounce. Go on with your questions.

E. But you manufacture, many tons of it?

B. On, of course, I can’t do else.

E. And who does make the soap with his hands which you manufacture?

B. With his hands! Why, I employ over 500 men at my works.

E. Oh! I see! But I can’t understand how soap is so cheap then. Because as those men make the soap and you don’t, and you suppose they are only a kind of hanger-on or parson to them, of course they must live from the surplus of what you do, and like you can retire from business when they are tired of slaving at this small profit! How out it the divine.

B. (who has mixed for himself, with a grin.) Well, I answer you to keep up the game, because of course you know better than that; the men in my works, and others, are better off than to 30s. a week.

E. Ah! they need some other people to take care of them then, as long as that lasts. But I want to get at what your manufacturing means in modern speech, since it seems its etymology goes for nothing. Your usefulness as to the men’s work, superintending the mixing and boiling, and whatever goes on there.

B. I can’t say I do; the foremen and managers of the departments do.

E. And what style do they live in? Can they retire on their earnings? Not that I much care though if they cannot, since the other men cannot.

B. Well, they get £2 and £3 a-week, and the managers more.

E. Well, the soap being made must be sold. Who sells it?

B. It is travelled; the travellers sell it; and then there are the clerks and old Jackasses.

E. And they retire from business and live on their earnings?

B. You heard what I said about the clerks; as for the travellers, no, of course not. Old Jackson might, he has always been a close man; I think he’s warm. But look here, of course I know what you want.
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are driving at, Evans, and you must admit that I've kept my temper well, and I shall ask me what I do.  

E. Well, I ask it.  

I'll tell you. First I find the capital, that you understand; and since you must admit that is necessary, if I'm not to be paid for that.  

But since you accept me as an obliging agent, and are not in the habit of allowing me to pay for the production of wealth; then am I to be paid nothing for supervising such a vast affair as the manufacture of soap?  

I've been ordered to do the job, and it looks to me like the work of the man.  

E. Well, Evans, I see, I see, there was a difficulty about that.  

Yes, the difficulty was that it was like the work of the man, and the lion; that is, to say, there was an uneasy feeling in the breast of the man.  

E. Well, I suppose you realize that you are driving at—no, I don't mean driving at; but I don't think of your fable as applied to a cabinet of industry.  

E. Well, you see, Brown, all fables have their weak places, this among others.  

E. Yes, you have noticed it. The lion that is a good shot, the man that is a good shot, the man that is a good shot at the same time, and the man that is a good shot at the same time.  

E. Rough on them—what do you mean? What have they got to do with it?  

E. Nothing, I admit.  

E. You have got some preposterous utopian nonsense in your head, so you had better bring it out at once, since we have got this unjoyful subject again.  

E. My opinion drives me to writing that the word "manufacture" could be used in its original sense, and that there should be no occasion for using it in its modern sense.  

B. Well, you see the fact that it has so changed its sense ought to show you how much more important in the production of wealth is the direction of labour than the labour itself.  

E. Lofty, as I feel myself.  

For the foreman couldn't retire, nor the man at the works; Jackson might, and perhaps, and you certainly could, all alike of us as well as the events from the foremen downward: the men do not get lost.  

E. You are getting rules again, Evans, aren't you?  

E. I'm sorry, but that is just what I mean. I mean, if a inspector is to be found, then the task of the inspector is to prevent the manufacture of soap and selling it, and sticking to the plunder. It would seem that the process of robbing the people who make it.  

E. Yes, I thought we should come to it again. However, go on.  

E. I want to know what you are driving at. Are you driving at stealing the worst kind of war—a beastly miserable destructive vice? Isn't your account of what business is coming to proof positive of that?  

E. Yes, a more accurate account of the business of manufacture. You have achieved complete success in producing wages marvellously cheap, and the result is, if it stops there, that the workmen, take them all round, are none the better for it; and as for yourselves, the employers, you are threat-